

Brethren gather to discern a global alliance

Meeting in Kwarhi, Nigeria, representatives from Church of the Brethren bodies around the world gathered Dec. 2-5, 2019, to discuss the vision of becoming a global church body. Representatives came from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the United States, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Spain, and Nigeria, with Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) as host.

The 23 people—18 men and 5 women—included the EYN president, vice president, and general secretary. Jay

Wittmeyer, Global Mission and Service executive, and Jeff Boshart, director of the Global Food Initiative, attended from the US. Representatives from Brazil, India, and Venezuela were unable to attend either due to difficulties in procuring visas or for other political reasons. Carol Waggy from the US also was unable to get a visa.

The conference tested the US proposal that autonomous Brethren groups should develop a global structure for the Church of the Brethren. Unanimously, representatives affirmed their hopes for establishment of a global body and shared how such a structure might positively affect their communities and the broader church witness. Many expressed the need to magnify the Brethren voice for peace and hoped such a structure might reaffirm Brethren beliefs and practices, give a deep sense of Brethren identity, and be a vehicle to develop shared mission programming.

Participants also discussed concerns about a lack of resources, difficulty in procuring visas to travel, fears of discrimination and prejudice, and concerns that the body could identify and agree to adhere to shared biblical principles.

The group recommended that a temporary board be established to work toward a constitution, develop guiding principles, and define points for sharing resources and programming. The Nigerian Brethren suggested Global Brethren Communion be used as a temporary name.



Brethren Service Europe office closes

The Brethren Service Europe office has been closed. It was hosted at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Switzerland, and had served as the center of Church of the Brethren presence in Europe for some 72 years.

Most recently the office centered on placement and supervision of Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) workers in Europe. For more than three decades it was staffed by Kristin Flory, who has retired.

Factors in the decision to close the office included cutbacks in the denominational budget, fewer BVSers serving in Europe, and difficulty in acquiring visas for BVSers to work in European countries. BVS project sites in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are expected to continue.

The office was first established in February 1947 by the Brethren Service Commission (BSC), the group responsible for Church of the Brethren relief and rehabilitation work after World War II.

In 1968-69 the work of the BSC was merged with the mission work of the denomination, including BVS. Over several decades, those who staffed the office continued a tradition of engaging with places suffering from war and violence including Northern Ireland and the Balkans. The staff served as Church of the Brethren representatives participating in historic peace church consultations, engaging with ecumenical leadership at the WCC, and at times with world leaders at the United Nations in Geneva.



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Delegation visits Kurdistan

During fall 2019, **Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy**, traveled to Iraqi Kurdistan with Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), and Erik Apelgårdh of the



World Council of Churches. Hosler is chair of the board of CMEP, where the Church of the Brethren is one of nearly 30 member communions.

The group met with church leaders, humanitarian organizations, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Church leaders spoke of the displacement and severe decrease of their members in recent years. Their numbers have dropped from 1.5 million Christians before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, to some 200,000 at present.

Among other activities the delegation also visited with the Christian Peacemaker Team near the Turkish border and heard of CPT's accompaniment and human rights documentation of cross-border bombing by Turkey.

Brethren Disaster Ministries changes sites

Brethren Disaster Ministries made changes in its rebuilding project sites as 2019 closed out and the new year began.

In the Carolinas, ongoing work will focus on Robeson County, N.C.

In Puerto Rico, a project rebuilding homes affected by hurricane damage has been extended to May 2020, with Carrie Miller continuing as site leader.

In Florida, Brethren Disaster Ministries is working on recovery from 2017's Hurricane Irma. A short-term site in Jacksonville that started in September 2019 closed around Christmas. Tampa is the new site for spring 2020.

Annual Conference preachers announced

The names of those preaching for daily worship services at Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Mich., July 1-5 have been announced. The Conference will devote significant time to a compelling vision for the Church of the Brethren. Though other business will be entertained, no polity/structural changes will be considered in 2020.

Moderator **Paul Munday** speaks on the opening evening, July 1.

Richard Zapata, a pastor of Santa Ana (Calif.) Principe de Paz Church of the Brethren, preaches on July 2.

Sister-and-brother team **Chelsea Goss and Tyler Goss** of Virginia bring the message July 3.

Beth Sollenberger, executive minister for South Central Indiana District, preaches July 4.

Patrick Starkey, chair of the Mission and Ministry Board, leads the Sunday morning service on July 5.

Personnel notes

Jay Wittmeyer has resigned as executive director of Global Mission and Service, effective Jan. 13. He has spent 11 years in the position, since Jan. 5, 2009. He has supervised Brethren Disaster Ministries and Material Resources, Brethren Volunteer Service, the Global Food Initiative, and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, as well as holding primary responsibility for the mission work of the denomination. During his tenure, new and emerging church groups have been nurtured in Haiti, Spain, the Great Lakes region of central Africa, and Venezuela. South Sudan also has been a priority. He has strengthened relationships with Church of the Brethren denominations in Brazil, Dominican Republic, India, and Nigeria, where he worked with leaders of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria during the most extreme violence of the Boko

Haram insurgency. A culminating accomplishment was "Vision for a Global Church," adopted by Annual Conference in 2018 and opening the possibility for an international conference on a global structure for the Church of the Brethren held in December. His career also included two years with Brethren Benefit Trust, where he was director of the Brethren Pension Plan and employee financial services.

Kristin Flory has retired as Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) staff at the Brethren Service Europe office in Geneva, Switzerland. She served in the position for almost 33 years, since 1987. Her work included supervision of more than 300 BVS volunteers in many different countries, maintaining working relationships with each project site and organizing annual retreats for the volunteers. Under her leadership, BVSers served at projects

focused on peace and reconciliation—sometimes in war and conflict zones, worked with children and families, lived in community with people with disabilities, worked with refugees and homeless people, and more. She also continued relations with European ecumenical organizations. In addition to her work with BVSers, Flory was the denomination's Europe representative and served in that capacity at annual meetings of ecumenical and peace organizations and at European church events and conferences.

Roxane Hill concluded her position as coordinator of the Nigeria Crisis Response at the end of 2019. Her work with Nigeria-related efforts of Global Mission and Service has totaled five years. The Nigeria Crisis Response is not ending, but programming is being reduced. The response is expected to continue through 2021.