

## Annual Conference will not be held this summer

**A**nual Conference will not be held this summer, as decided by the Standing Committee of district delegates, acting on a recommendation from the Leadership Team and Program and Arrangements Committee. The Conference was scheduled for July 1-5 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

It had become apparent that COVID-19 would prevent the denomination from safely holding a large gathering in July. This will be the first time in 233 years of recorded annual meetings that the Brethren do not meet in person.

The decision deferred the 2020 theme, program, leadership, business agenda, and bal-

lot to next year's Conference scheduled for Greensboro, N.C., on June 30-July 4, 2021. The host facilities in Grand Rapids waived more than a half million dollars in cancellation penalties in return for Annual Conference agreeing to return to Grand Rapids in 2024.

The Nominating Committee is contacting those on the ballot to request their permission to be considered in 2021. People in elected positions with terms expiring in 2020 are asked to extend an additional year until the 2021 election.

The Conference Office is offering full refunds to registrants, with an option to donate fees back to the Conference fund.



## EDF announces COVID-19 pandemic grants

**C**hurch of the Brethren congregations and districts may apply for grants from the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) to respond to humanitarian needs in their communities caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The program was created by Brethren Disaster Ministries with an initial EDF grant of \$60,000.

Congregations may apply for up to \$5,000. Districts may apply for up to \$25,000. Grants may be used to provide food, shelter, emotional and spiritual care, care of church leaders, support for children, and more. Grants are available only to Church of the Brethren congregations and districts in the US and Puerto Rico. See [www.brethren.org/covid19](http://www.brethren.org/covid19).

### Additional EDF grants

- \$35,000 supports **Eglise des Freres d' Haiti** (the Church of the Brethren in Haiti) to provide 800 of the most vulnerable families in its congregations and communities with three months of food, face masks, soap, and cleaning supplies.
- \$20,000 supports the **Shalom Ministries' flood relief efforts** in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where heavy rainfall on April 16-17 caused significant flooding that affected many Church of the Brethren members including pastor Ron Lubungo. Shalom Ministries is providing supplies to 500 households including mattresses, cooking pot, plates, cups, silverware, and a tarp provided by the United Nations refugee agency.
- \$14,000 supports **Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria** (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) for two months of pandemic response. EYN requested \$7,000 per month to help widows and students stranded at Kulp Theological Seminary by travel restrictions and lock-down orders.
- \$14,000 is helping **Iglesia de los Hermanos—Una Luz En Las Naciones** (the Church of the Brethren in Spain) care for members who are single parents, in single-income homes, or unable to work. Being recent immigrants or temporary workers, some are not eligible for unemployment or COVID-19 relief.
- \$6,000 supports a program of **Fundacion Brethren y Unida** (FBU) in Ecuador to increase production of organic fruits, vegetables, and grains to address food needs; provide emergency food assistance for four months to 40 families; and provide a training program for proper cleaning and disinfection of foods.

*A COVID-19 poster in Nigeria features EYN staff liaison Markus Gamache*

## Workcamps and NYAC go virtual

**The Workcamp Ministry has canceled** all workcamps this summer, and instead will offer weekly times of online connection and fellowship from the end of June to the beginning of August. Participants have the choice of a refund or making a donation back to the Workcamp Ministry.

Similarly, the National Young Adult Conference (NYAC) took place online this year, with an in-person conference planned for May 28-31, 2021. The Young Adult Steering Committee offered several free, virtual connecting points for young adults in late May.



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## Brethren homes receive large grant for COVID-19

**A** half-million dollars has been distributed from the Health Education and Research Fund to church-related retirement communities through the Fellowship of Brethren Homes, a network of 21 retirement and assisted-living communities with connections to the denomination. The \$500,000 grant will be shared among the 21 communities in amounts relative to the dues they contribute to the fellowship.

Retirement communities have been especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Fellowship leaders reported that costs have risen significantly, for example to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, and for increases in wages.

The Church of the Brethren has managed the Health Education and Research Fund since 2009. Total fund value as of the beginning of April was \$2.3 million.

In related news, **Brethren Village in Lititz, Pa., suffered an outbreak of COVID-19** in April and early May. On May 7, the community reported the final death in an outbreak that claimed seven lives among residents in skilled nursing memory support. A total of 13 residents and 11 staff contracted the disease. As of May 7, the community had “zero COVID-19 positive residents on our campus and all team members who have tested positive have recovered from the virus and returned to work,” according to an online statement that also expressed sympathy to families who lost loved ones.



**Children's Disaster Services (CDS)** in a shift from hands-on to distant support has developed an individual Kit of Comfort for children affected by disasters. It is a “mini version” of the Kit of Comfort that teams of CDS volunteers take to disaster sites. The individual kit will provide activities and resources to children when no communal play spaces are allowed and families are housed in hotel rooms, not shelters.

## Brethren Faith in Action changes help churches and camps

**COVID-19 has created financial stress** for camps as well as congregations. In response, the Mission and Ministry Board has made amendments to the Brethren Faith in Action Fund guidelines.

Through Dec. 31, camps are now eligible for a one-time grant up to \$5,000. The matching requirement of 50 percent remains in place. A camp may apply for a waiver of the matching fund requirement.

Congregations continue to be eligible for grants of up to \$5,000. Now they also may apply for a waiver of the matching fund requirements. See [www.brethren.org/faith-in-action](http://www.brethren.org/faith-in-action).

## Personnel notes

**Shawn Flory Replogle** started April 13 as interim director of organizational resources for the Church of the Brethren, working collaboratively with the treasurer in the Finance Department. He is working remotely from his home in Kansas. He is a graduate of Bridgewater (Va.) College and Bethany Seminary and holds a master of science in organizational development from Friends University. His leadership positions with the denomination include a term as Annual

Conference moderator in 2010.

Michigan District has appointed a district executive team as of May 15: **Dan Rossman** of New Haven Church of the Brethren is part-time volunteer director of pastoral and congregational support. **Beth Sollenberger**, district executive minister for South/Central Indiana District, is interim district executive consultant for pastoral placement and credentialing. **Wanda Joseph**, chair of the district leadership team, represents the district on the

Council of District Executives.

**Matt and Betsy Kuecker** have begun as directors of Camp Pine Lake in Northern Plains District. Matt Kuecker has served as property manager for more than 10 years. The couple were camp managers 2009-2013.

Camp Eder in Fairfield, Pa., has announced new leaders: **Dennis Turner** as co-director and maintenance manager, **Mike Kovacs** as co-director and program director, and **Thaddeus Smith** as hospitality supervisor.