

Mission and Ministry Board approves 2021 budget

The Mission and Ministry Board held fall meetings via Zoom Oct. 16-18. Three sessions were open to the public via a published link. The main item of business was the 2021 budget.

Board chair Patrick Starkey led the meetings from the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., where he was joined by general secretary David Steele and a few staff. The rest of the board joined via Zoom from across the country. Over the course of the weekend 37 people attended via the public link, including denominational staff.

“We meet because the gospel goes on, the pandemic cannot prevent resurrection, the grace of God is sufficient at all times, and the work of the church goes on at this time,” said Starkey.

Budget and finances

The board approved a total budget for all denominational ministries of \$8,112,100 income and \$8,068,750 expense, representing an anticipated net income of \$43,350 for 2021. The decision included budgets for the Church of the Brethren’s Core Ministries as well as “self-funding” budgets for Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Conference Office, Global Food Initiative (GFI), and Material Resources.

The Core Ministries budget of \$4,934,000 (income and expense) is close to the amount of the 2020 budget of \$4,969,000 approved by the board last October, but about \$300,000 more than the budget revision of \$4,629,150 made by the board in July in response to the pandemic.

Treasurer Ed Woolf reported factors that went

into the budget for Core Ministries including estimated giving from congregations and individuals; draws from the Bequest Quasi-Endowment and other funds; ministry enablement contributions to Core Ministries from the Emergency Disaster Fund, GFI, and other restricted funds; Brethren Press gross sales contributions to Core Ministries; transfer of \$140,000 to Core Ministries from designated funds; and a 2 percent reduction in most departmental budgets. The budget includes no cost-of-living increase for employees but does continue employer contributions to health savings accounts and a smaller-than-expected increase in medical insurance premiums.

In 2020 financial results as of September, Woolf noted that giving to Core Ministries was ahead of the revised budget and staff have done a good job of managing expenses. It is in restricted giving to funds like the Emergency Disaster Fund where a serious drop is seen. The pandemic also has caused major losses for the self-funding ministries, especially Brethren Press and Material Resources.

Woolf reported that investment balances were in a good position as of September and net assets were up over 2019.

An update on Brethren Press was given by Steele. The financial situation of Brethren Press was the subject of discussion by the board in July. Since then, sales figures have worsened. Steele reported some interventions for 2020 that will give time to work on a systematic plan for the publishing house. Brethren Press also is doing fundraising.

Healing racism training

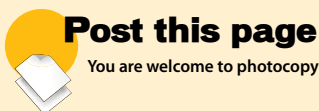
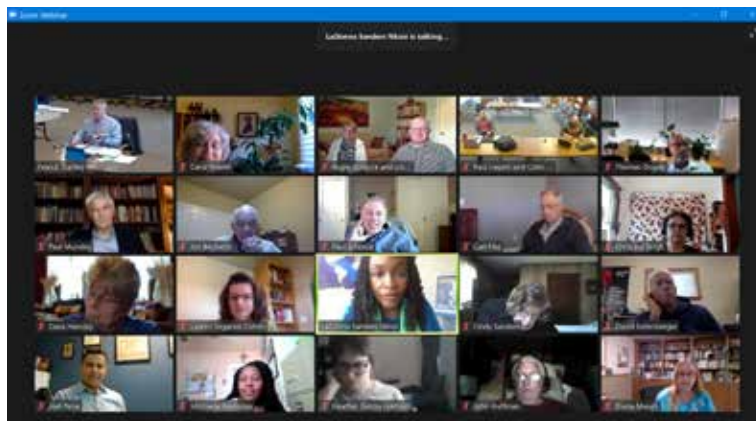
A training on “Healing Racism and the Ministry of Jesus in This Time” was led by Intercultural Ministries director LaDonna Nkosi. Miami (Fla.) First Church of the Brethren pastor Michaela Alphonse reviewed “Separate No More,” a paper adopted by Annual Conference in 2007. “Wherever this plan got lost we have to pick it up again,” Alphonse said, adding that, if the paper’s recommendations had been taken seriously, the church would have been prepared for the events of 2020. “We would have been powerful, Spirit-filled, colorful witnesses in this season.”

In other business

The board called David Steele to a second five-year contract as general secretary.

Board member Colin Scott was chosen as chair-elect, to begin after the 2021 Annual Conference. After serving two years as chair-elect, he will serve two years as board chair.

Work to shape the new strategic plan was reported by task teams of board and staff. The plan is designed to align with the compelling vision that will come to the 2021 Annual Conference.



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Calling for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh

A statement issued in early October by general secretary David Steele and Nathan Hosler of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy expressed Church of the Brethren concern about escalation of warfare in Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed region between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“As a peace church, we lament the violence of war and work to end conflict globally,” the statement said, in part. “In Nagorno-Karabakh, we are concerned about the deaths and displacement of civilians, the presence of proxy conflicts involving Turkey and fighters from Syria, and the unfettered arms sales into the region.”

The statement reaffirmed support for the Armenian people, which dates to 1917 when Brethren began responding to the needs of survivors and refugees of the Armenian genocide. “That aid effort has particular significance for us, marking the start of our denomination’s focus on Christian service and disaster relief that continues to this day,” the statement said.

The statement referenced a 2015 Annual Conference paper committing the Church of the Brethren “to stand with targeted minority groups across the world and call not only for increased awareness of their persecution, but for renewed efforts by the church and the international community to build solidarity and protect minority religious groups who are under threat.”

Brethren Volunteer Service units are placed

Brethren Volunteer Service summer and fall units have been placed at project sites, having received orientation online, in a virtual process.

Unit 325

Top row, from left: **Emily Tyler**, staff. **Hannah Shultz**, staff. **Michael Brewer Berres** of Luxemburg, Wis., serving at Quaker Cottage, Belfast, Northern Ireland. **Amelia Gunn** of Easton Church of the Brethren, also serving at Quaker Cottage.

Second row: **Daniel Wright** of Pryor, Okla., serving at Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren. **Eric Joloka** of Philadelphia, Pa., Harrisburg First Church. **Evan Ulrich** of Homer, N.Y., serving with Brethren Disaster Ministries. **Kara Miller**, staff.

Third row: **Chad Whitzel** of Easton (Md.) Church of the Brethren, serving with the Workcamp Ministry of the Church of the Brethren. **Rose Harvey** of Oak Grove Church of the Brethren, serving at SnowCap Food Pantry, Portland, Ore. **Alton Higgs** of Bridgewater (Va.)

Church of the Brethren, serving with the Workcamp Ministry. **Kylie Mountain** of Ambler (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, serving at Lancaster (Pa.) Habitat for Humanity.

Bottom row: **Pauline Liu**, staff. **Alexa Henry** of the Bronx, N.Y., serving at Bernardo Kohler Center, Austin, Texas. **Naomi Yilma** of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, serving at the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy.



BVS-BRF Unit 326

Bryce Ocker (left) and **Aubrey Copenhaver**, both from Pennsylvania, serving at the Root Cellar in Lewiston, Maine.

Unit 327

Top: **Claire and Rusty Orner** of Brookville, Pa., will serve at the Asian Rural Institute, Japan, traveling in 2021.

Deb Wilson of Louisville, Ky., serving at Project PLASE, Baltimore, Md.

Bottom: **Kinny Paw** of Lititz, Pa., serving at SnowCap Food Pantry. **Saudah Nassanga** of Kampala, Uganda, serving at L’Arche Belfast, Northern Ireland, pending a visa.



Planning continues for 2021 Annual Conference

Although uncertainty remains due to the pandemic, the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee is planning for the 2021 Conference to be held June 30-July 4 in Greensboro, N.C.

“We hope that by then we may all gather in person, but if CDC and/or state social distancing guidelines limit the number of people who can meet in the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, we are making contingency plans for a hybrid event,” said the committee.

The 2021 theme remains the same as for the Conference that was canceled this year: “God’s Adventurous Future.” Leadership continues from 2020, as do the items of business and registration fees.