

Board meeting focuses on strategic plan, finances

The Mission and Ministry Board held meetings via Zoom on March 12-14, focused on a new strategic plan and year-end financial outcomes for 2020.

The strategic plan is intended to guide a reshaping of denominational ministries. Two new initiatives were approved: “On the Road to Jericho (Plan for Defining Neighborhoods)” to create a resource for congregations to discover and define their “neighborhood” for missional focus; and “Each in Our Own Language (Plan for Recognizing Injustice)” to create a curriculum to help congregations identify racial injustice in their own settings.

The board also approved the Brethren Faith in Action Fund to extend through 2021 the eligibility of church camps to receive grants, as well as the option for camps and congregations to request a waiver of a matching funds requirement.

Drew G. I. Hart and LaDonna Sanders Nkosi led a two-hour “Healing Racism” training. Nkosi is director of Intercultural Ministries. Hart, a member of Harrisburg (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren, is assistant professor of theology at Messiah University and author of *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*.

The resignation of board member Paul Liepelt was received.

Financial outcomes for 2020

A year-end report for 2020 was presented by treasurer Ed Woolf, covering the Core Ministries Fund; the “self-funded” ministries including Conference Office, Brethren Press, and Material Resources; and special-purpose funds including the Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF, which supports Brethren Disaster Ministries), Global Food Initiative (GFI), and Emerging Global Mission Fund.

Core Ministries ended 2020 with a surplus of \$127,500, almost \$235,000



Nancy Miner

Leaders of the Mission and Ministry Board met in person at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., accompanied by a few staff, while most board members joined in by Zoom.

ahead of a budget that had been revised mid-year to make adjustments for the pandemic’s effects. Cancellation of staff travel and some large events, moving other events online, and decreased use of office space and utilities—as most staff worked from home—helped account for the surplus. The amount of \$200,000 was set aside for future budget shortfalls and \$50,000 for costs of implementing the strategic plan.

Brethren Press received more than \$117,000 in donations through a special fundraising campaign, making it possible to end the year with a small deficit of just over \$4,600 despite gross sales falling by more than \$150,000 from 2019.

In 2021, Brethren Press will receive a one-time special distribution of \$100,000 from the Gahagen Trust. The money will pay for Brethren Press expenses related to production of the Christian education curriculum Shine.

The GFI and EDF experienced decreased donations in 2020. For the EDF, the decrease related in part to cancellations of disaster auctions that often raise more than \$500,000 each year. In total, donations to the EDF decreased more than \$860,000 from 2019.

Material Resources ended the year with a deficit of almost \$122,000, experiencing many difficulties during the pan-

demie, including the need to close warehouse facilities for a time, cancellation of volunteer groups, and a slowdown of activity by partner organizations.

The Conference Office ended the year with a deficit of \$116,000, after having had to cancel the 2020 Annual Conference because of the pandemic. More than \$70,000 in donations helped to offset a loss of income from registrations.

Combined giving from congregations and individuals to the Core Ministries finished ahead of the 2020 revised budget but total giving to all denominational ministries decreased. The number of congregations giving to the denomination also decreased, with only 528 of the 900 congregations financially supporting the Core Ministries in 2020. However, there was an increase in giving from individuals to Core Ministries, and the number of people who donated increased. The 1,500-plus number of individual donors to Core Ministries was well above the 2019 total.

The net asset balance—the denomination’s total value including all funds and capital assets—grew again in 2020, continuing a positive trend seen over four of the past five years. The Church of the Brethren’s current net asset value is \$42.3 million.



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Funds to South Sudan aid trauma recovery

A plan to expand agriculture and trauma recovery programing in South Sudan is receiving support from Brethren Disaster Ministries and the Global Food Initiative (GFI). A joint allocation gives \$29,500 including \$24,500 from the Emergency Disaster Fund and \$5,000 from the GFI.

The plan was developed by a group of staff and volunteers including mission staff Athanasus Ungang. The trauma recovery and resiliency work will be done through a partnership with Reconcile, an independent NGO with roots in the ministry of former Brethren mission workers.

Healing workshop held for Nigerian teachers

The peace program of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) held a Trauma Healing Workshop on Feb. 21-24 for 42 Sunday school teachers from 15 church districts. The training used the Healing Hearts curriculum from Children's Disaster Services.

The training encouraged teachers to become advocates for traumatized parents and children in their communities. Participants learned about trauma and how it affects the brain and human behavior, with an emphasis on children, and how to handle complex situations to avoid creating more trauma. The curriculum uses selected Bible passages and storytelling that speak of peace, comfort, and love.



Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 328 completes winter orientation online.

Top, from left: Pauline Liu, coordinator of volunteers for BVS; Emily Tyler, director of BVS; Kara Miller, orientation assistant. *Middle row:* Claire Horrell of Jackson, Mo., assigned to El Centro Arte Para la Paz in Suchitoto, El Salvador; Sam Zientek of Wyomissing (Pa.) Church of the Brethren, assigned to L'Arche Chicago, Ill.; Matthew Bateman of Seattle, Wash., assigned to the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima, Japan. *Bottom:* Ronah Kavumba of Kampala, Uganda, awaiting project placement.

Grant programs are extended

Intercultural Ministries has extended the deadline to apply for a **Healing Racism mini-grant**. Applications will be received through June 30. Congregations and communities officially affiliated with the Church of the Brethren in the United States are encouraged to apply. See www.brethren.org/intercultural.

Brethren Benefit Trust is extending **COVID-19 Emergency Grants for church workers**. The first round of grants became available March 20, 2020. Since then, the program has been extended three times, in four-month blocks. The new round of grants runs through the end of July. See www.cobbt.org.

Grants awarded: Traditional vs COVID emergency grants

2020	Traditional Church Workers' Grants	COVID-19 Emergency Grants
Dollars distributed in 2020	\$290,057.66	\$215,571.26
Number of recipients	45	73

2021 YTD	Traditional Church Workers' Grants	COVID-19 Emergency Grants
Dollars distributed year-to-date	\$67,540.75	\$64,111.59
Number of recipients	32	21

Letters oppose 'bloated Pentagon,' support refugees

The general secretary and the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy have signed letters opposing excessive military spending and supporting refugees.

A letter to Congress from 31 faith-based organizations urged cuts to "the bloated Pentagon budget." Said the letter: "Instead of spending money on

weapons and war, we need to be investing in things that address the urgency of climate change and build resilient communities. . . . We also need reductions in the Pentagon budget in order to invest in public health—an especially essential investment in this time of pandemic."

Letters sent to the president called for increased refugee admissions and refu-

gee allocation numbers. An interfaith letter organized by Church World Service also expressed concern over cancellation of flights into the US that were to carry refugees seeking asylum. A letter organized by the Refugee Council USA and signed by more than 200 organizations urged a refugee admissions goal of 62,500 for fiscal year 2021.