

Priorities set for denominational ministries

The Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board met June 26-27 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., with a handful of board members attending via Zoom. The board continued working to align denominational ministries with its new strategic plan. Other agenda included a 2022 budget parameter for Core Ministries, recommendations from a team re-imagining Brethren Press, and the calling of a new Executive Committee.

This was the last meeting of Patrick Starkey's term as chair. Assisting him was chair-elect Carl Fike and general secretary David Steele.

New priorities for ministry

The Executive Committee and the general secretary reported on their assessment of how current program and resources align or do not align with the strategic plan. The board adopted the following declaration of priorities:

"Develop a prominent, comprehensive, sustained framework for equipping evangelism."

"Develop a program about healing and

reconciling relationships within the church and transforming conflict, including the intentional construction of a network of members who understand the dynamics of conflict and who are called to serve in a ministry bringing healing to our brokenness."

"Develop, in consultation with the Council of District Executives, a pilot program to help provide additional resources needed for effective ministry placement."

"Develop IT staff both to help other staff navigate the changing landscape of technology and to consult with and resource the wider church."

"Realign stewardship emphasis to go with the next version of Mission Advancement."

"Realign care of pastors programs to go with the next version of the Office of Ministry."

The board approved creation of a new Stewardship of Properties task team to consider both the General Offices and Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., and to assess the Material Resources program.

The board approved a "game plan" to help congregations define their neighborhoods with the goal of meeting and sharing "Jesus in the neighborhood," through promotion of existing resources and cohorts of congregations located in similarly defined neighborhoods.

A team creating a "road map to seek God's racial justice" recommended the board "begin this work within its own house." The board adopted a four-step process within the board and staff to: 1. identify "whiteness and racialized hierarchy" in order to allow leadership "to see barriers that previously were invisible"; 2. critique the information gathered; 3. confess and repent, using a formal, spiritual process; and 4. dismantle "the barriers and structures that inhibit and harm."

Reimagining Brethren Press

The board affirmed the intent of recommendations from a Brethren Press Reimagining Team that was convened by the board chair and general secretary and consisted of church members from across the denomination: Don Fitzkee, Jess Hoffert, Todd Marcum, Russ Matteson, Belita Mitchell, and Carol Scheppard. The team was to recommend a proposal for sustainable operation addressing financial concerns about Brethren Press, which worsened during the pandemic. Staff will explore the financial implications prior to the board taking final action in October.

The group recommended that Brethren Press be moved into Core Ministries and be considered the "in-house publishing partner" working with other departments to expand their reach into the denomination. The press's focus would shift to "facilitating and fostering the mission of the Mission and Ministry Board and its strategic plan."



The Mission and Ministry Board uses a consensus-style decision-making process, shown here displaying green cards to signify agreement with a proposal.



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Book publishing would be redefined in consultation with the general secretary or designee, who would approve all significant book projects. All publishing projects would be “held to a litmus test of ‘does this publication capture a unique aspect of our faith or strongly forward our ideas?’” Some traditional projects or “marginal” projects might not be carried forward. Also included are expectations for growing the Brethren Press customer base and generating positive revenue over expense.

Budget parameter

A balanced, break-even budget parameter of \$4,983,000 for the Core Ministries in 2022 was approved. A revised parameter will be brought to the board in October if needed as a result of the Brethren Press reimaging recommendations. Rationale included, among other factors:

—A projection of \$1,611,000 in congregational giving was based on a downward 10-year trend of approximately 4 percent per year. A projection of \$582,000 in individual giving was based on an upward 10-year trend of close to 1.5 percent per year.

—Use of up to \$233,000 from designated funds. No draw percentage changes in the annual transfers from the savings, endowment, bequest quasi-endowment, and Brethren Service Center quasi-endowment funds.

—Distribution of \$148,000 from the Zella Gahagen Trust for youth and young adult programming.

—A 2 percent cost-of-living increase in employee salary and benefits and a projected 8 percent increase in the cost of medical insurance benefits.

In other business

A new communications policy was adopted, replacing one dating back more than 30 years. It was created by the Executive Committee to clarify authority and responsibility for denominational communications, improve standards and marketing efforts to increase the visibility of ministries, and decrease miscommunication and “mixed messages.” A statement that no department or staff other than the general secretary is authorized to release or issue statements was amended to read: “Statements by departments and staff need the approval of the general secretary.”

Updates were made to the financial policies, most for clarity or consistency with current practice.

A capital expenditure of up to \$270,000 was approved to upgrade the General Offices air conditioning.

Tim Binkley, archivist at Berea College, was appointed to the Brethren Historical Committee.

Called to the Executive Committee were Dava Hensley, Roger Schrock, and Lauren Seganos Cohen, with incoming chair Carl Fike and chair-elect Colin Scott.

Board members completing their terms were recognized: chair Patrick Starkey, Marty Barlow, Thomas Dowdy, Lois Grove, and Diane Mason.

BBT screens for defense contracts

Brethren Benefit Trust has long screened out weapons and weapons systems, firearms, and Department of Defense (DOD) contracts from its investments of Brethren Pension Plan funds and money management clients, consistent with Annual Conference statements.

Each year, BBT updates two lists of companies that earn significant revenue from US military operations. One identifies the top 25 publicly traded defense contractors based on the size of contracts awarded by the DOD. The other includes all publicly traded companies that generate 10 percent or more of their revenue from DOD contracts. See www.cobbt.org/investment-options.



Courtesy of Erin Sliwa

CDS completed a short response in Surfside, Fla., for the building collapse of June 24. A local CDS team was activated by the Red Cross on June 27, followed by a Critical Response Childcare team specially trained for mass casualty events.

CDS resumes volunteer training

Children’s Disaster Services has announced its first volunteer training workshops since pandemic restrictions started last year:

- Sept. 24-25 at York Center Church of the Brethren, Lombard, Ill.
- Oct. 22-23 at Friendship Christian Reformed Church, Byron Center, Mich.
- Nov. 5-6 at First Church of the Brethren, Roaring Spring, Pa.

Brethren Academy celebrates graduates

Four students have graduated from the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. Completing the Training in Ministry program were **Rita Carter**, pastor of visitation at Mechanic Grove Church of the Brethren, Quarryville, Pa.; **Jamie Nace**, pastor of child and elder ministries at Lancaster (Pa.) Church of the Brethren; and **David Scott**, associate pastor at Woodbury (Pa.) Church of the Brethren. **Leonor Ochoa**, pastor of Iglesia de los Hermanos Ebenezer in Lancaster, Pa., graduated from Seminario Bíblico Anabautista Hispano de la Iglesia de Los Hermanos (SeBAH-COB).