Delegates handle full business agenda

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference returned in-person in 2022, with an online option for nondelegates. The Conference also returned to a busy business schedule after focusing on the compelling vision in 2021.

Proposal to update polity for agencies: Delegates adopted “Update to Polity Regarding Annual Conference Agencies” as proposed by the Leadership Team (the Conference officers, general secretary, district executive representative, and the Conference director ex-officio).

This item originated in 2017 in response to a recommendation from On Earth Peace—one of three Conference agencies along with Bethany Seminary and Eder Financial (formerly Brethren Benefit Trust). A lengthy discussion brought up a variety of concerns but, in the end, delegates approved the proposal with a two-thirds majority.

At its heart are new roles and responsibilities assigned to the Standing Committee of district delegates:

• creating and maintaining a covenant of agreement with each agency,
• handling requests to become agencies,
• receiving annual reports from agencies,
• developing a process for maintaining good relationships with agencies and to address concerns in agency relationships, and
• recommending to the Conference when agency status should be discontinued.

Standing Committee is expected to create the covenants and processes in the next two years, with finalized polity to take effect after the 2024 Annual Conference.

Query sets in motion study/action process: Delegates accepted the concerns of a query from Southern Ohio and Kentucky District asking how the church “can stand with People of Color to offer sanctuary from violence and dismantle systems of oppression and racial inequity in our congregations, neighborhoods, and throughout the nation?”

The following response was adopted along with implementation through a two-year study/action process led by the district and On Earth Peace. (continued on p. 2)
New documents guide pastors’ salaries and benefits: A new “Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement and Revised Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries and Benefits” and a “Revised Minimum Cash Salary Table for Pastors” were adopted as presented by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee. The committee has worked since 2018 to review compensation practices and create a fairer and easier framework for calculating pastors’ pay and benefits, especially at a time when 77 percent of Church of the Brethren pastors are less than full time or less than fully compensated. With help from Eder Financial, the committee also developed a compensation calculator as an online tool for congregations and pastors.

Committee to study accessibility: The Conference adopted “Query: Breaking Down Barriers—Increasing Access to Denominational Events” and elected a three-person study committee: Jeanne Davies, Brandon Grady, and Daniel Poole.

Amendments to “Ethics in Ministry Relations” polity: Amended was a section about appeals that involve termination of a ministerial license or ordination by a district. Amendments were proposed by Standing Committee, in order to facilitate the process.

Revisions to the bylaws: The revisions were adopted. Brought by the Mission and Ministry Board, they make a variety of nonsubstantial changes.

Standing Committee actions: Nominating Committee recommendations were approved for a new process for nominations from the floor, to become an item of business for 2023, and a request for a study committee on calling denominational leadership.

Four wide-ranging recommendations from a task team holding conversations with On Earth Peace were approved. They call for action to address expectations and processes regarding agencies, how Conference decisions and statements are received and implemented, a review of the structure of the Church of the Brethren to address “deep dysfunction,” and a time for confession and repentance of how “theological differences around human sexuality have too often been manifested in bullying, violence, and a general sense of dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters,” citing James 5:16.