

Mission and Ministry Board approves statement on Doctrine of Discovery, reviews financial picture

The Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board, meeting March 10-12 in Elgin, Ill., approved a statement lamenting the Doctrine of Discovery and recommended its adoption by Annual Conference. The meeting was led by chair Carl Fike, working with chair-elect Colin Scott and general secretary David Steele.

Titled “With Actions and in Truth: A Lament of the Doctrine of Discovery,” the statement “names the injustices of the church’s history with Indigenous peoples, invites the members of the denomination to study and understand the complex relationship between the church and Native nations, and equips the Church of the Brethren with a foundation for future action.”

In recent years many Christian denominations have issued statements repudiating this doctrine, which originated in the Catholic church and was then adopted by the majority of Christian groups. The Doctrine of Discovery has been used to justify genocide and enslavement of Native peoples. The Church of the Brethren statement grew out of years of background work by the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy and Discipleship Ministries.

In other business, the board:

- Reviewed the organization’s financial position, which remains strong accord-



Kathy Mack

ing to treasurer Ed Woolf. Expenses for Core Ministries finished the 2022 year with a surplus and did not have to make use of a transfer from designated funds that had been budgeted. Congregational giving to Core Ministries continued to decline, but individual giving rose. Giving to the Emergency Disaster Fund and Global Food Initiative Fund increased dramatically.

- Made decisions on two initiatives of the board’s strategic plan: a plan for On Earth Peace to provide board members and staff with training in Kingian Nonviolence, and next steps for a committee working on racial justice.

- Approved a position description for a new Facilities Stewardship Committee that will be a standing committee of the board. This committee will assess the church’s physical properties in relationship to the strategic plan, the current

needs of the denomination, and economic considerations.

- Approved the minutes of an email action appointing the Rev. Ganeshkumar Gamanlal Patel and Sanjaykumar Dhirajilal Bhagat as trustees to the Church of the Brethren General Board Trust in India.

- Approved a Global Food Initiative grant of \$25,000 for a soybean project in Nigeria, along with the minutes of several actions previously handled by email—including a capital expenditure of up to \$63,000 for a truck for Brethren Disaster Ministries.

- In a time for professional development, heard from Bob Smietana, national reporter for Religion News Service.

- Took part in worship led by students from Bethany Theological Seminary, who attended the meetings as part of their ministry formation class.

On Earth Peace launches gun violence prevention team

A new Church of the Brethren Gun Violence Prevention Action Team launched in January 2023 and has already met several times. On Earth Peace is convening this action team as part of a broader campaign to activate advocates for gun violence prevention. Its work draws on a 1978 Annual Conference statement, “Violence and the Use of Firearms.”

As an initial step, the team is planning a Public Witness for

Gun Violence Prevention event during Annual Conference in July, in partnership with local groups working on these issues. The purpose of the witness is to pray, to support those touched by gun violence, and to be inspired to take action after Conference. The team hopes this event can support and strengthen the work of gun violence prevention groups in Ohio and build a network of Church of the Brethren gun violence prevention advocates.



Author Sheila Wise Rowe will address Ministers' Association

Author and spiritual director Sheila Wise Rowe will be the featured presenter for the Church of the Brethren Ministers' Association pre-Annual Conference continuing education event, July 3-4 in Cincinnati.

Rowe describes herself on her website as "a truth-teller who is passionate about matters of faith and Christ-centered



emotional healing" and "advocates for the dignity, rights, and healing of abuse and racial trauma survivors, and racial conciliation." She spent a decade in South Africa ministering to

unhoused and abused women and now lives in Massachusetts. Rowe has a master's degree in counseling psychology and more than 28 years of experience as a Christian counselor, spiritual director, educator, writer, and speaker.

Her award-winning book, *Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience*, will be the focus of this pre-Conference event. Find flyers in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole, as well as registration links on the Office of Ministry pages at www.brethren.org.

Standing Committee moves forward with time of silent reflection and confession

In an unprecedented fourth meeting between Annual Conference gatherings, the Church of the Brethren Standing Committee met March 7 via Zoom to make a decision about a proposed time of confession and repentance at Annual Conference 2023 and to receive reports from four additional subcommittees. The meeting opened and closed with prayer.

A previous meeting on Feb. 28 had led to three options for following up on a recommendation adopted by Standing Committee at the July 2022 Annual Conference:

- Proceed with the service developed by the original subcommittee tasked with planning the proposed service of confession and repentance, a service intentionally designed to allow an opportunity for personal confession around our failure in our relationships with one another.

- Admit that we are not ready for a service of confession and repentance in relation to the exclusion experienced by our LGBTQIA brothers and sisters and failure in our relationships with one another.

- Read the recommendation adopted by the 2022 Standing Committee and provide for a time of silent personal reflection and confession.

Following discussion, the committee voted to adopt the third option, which passed with 19 out of 28 in favor. An additional motion that this action be the start of a multi-year process was voted down.

Annual Conference moderator Tim McElwee, who led the meeting, expressed gratitude for the work of the committee members, noting that it is unusual for Standing Committee to meet one time between conferences, much less four times.

General secretary signs on to letter for study on reparations

Church of the Brethren general secretary David Steele has joined other American faith leaders in signing a letter to President Biden, urging the president to "issue an executive order to establish a Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans."

The letter goes on to say, in part: "The order should be based on the framework proposed in legislation including

H.R. 40 and S. 40, which in the 117th Congress garnered 196 and 22 cosponsors, respectively. We encourage you to act quickly to establish the commission by Juneteenth, June 19, 2023, so that their work can be completed, and a report issued before the end of your first term."

The letter was co-sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and Faith for Black Lives. More than 200 faith leaders had signed the letter as of March.



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