

Decision to close Material Resources program, Israel and Palestine violence top board agenda

A decision to close Material Resources—a Church of the Brethren program that collects, processes, warehouses, and ships relief aid—and a statement on “Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine” topped the agenda of the Mission and Ministry Board at its fall meeting Oct. 20-22.

This was the first meeting presided over by Colin Scott, who began as chair in July, assisted by chair-elect Kathy Mack and general secretary David Steele.

■ **Material Resources:** The program of Material Resources, based at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, Md., will wind down over a period of up to 30 months. Employees who stay through the end of the program will receive severance packages. Loretta Wolf, who has been director of Material Resources for almost 40 years, since 1984, is among the 9 full- and part-time employees affected.

Not affected by the decision are the other ministries based at the Brethren Service Center including Brethren Disaster Ministries, Children’s Disaster Services, and the warehousing operation of SERRV.

The decision was not entered into lightly, said Scott when he announced the consensus decision reached during the closed session. He named that the decision was difficult and there was prayerful discernment. He shared the board’s appreciation for staff who have worked at the program, and of the congregations that have contributed many resources toward this ministry over the years.

A legacy program of the Church of the Brethren, Material Resources has a long and significant history dating back to World War II. Collections of relief clothing that church members and congregations began in 1939 planted the seed for the program. In 1944 a processing center for relief goods was established in New Windsor, under the auspices of the Brethren Service Committee.

■ **Israel and Palestine:** The board statement cited scripture as it expressed grief and compassion for all who have lost loved ones in the violence in Israel and Palestine that began with the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7. “While the Church of the Brethren has consistently opposed war, we

are particularly concerned about the targeting of civilians,” the statement said, in part. “We feel anguish for the Israeli people and those of Jewish heritage around the world. . . . We feel anguish for Palestinians and people of Arab descent. . . . We call on Church of the Brethren members to join in prayer for all the Israelis and Palestinians who are affected by this terrible situation, and for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples worldwide.” The statement called for a ceasefire, release of all hostages, and increased humanitarian measures for Gaza, among other actions.

■ **2024 budget:** The board approved a total budget for denominational ministries of \$8,720,960 of income and \$8,789,640 of expense, representing an anticipated net expense of \$68,680. The decision included a Core Ministries budget of \$5,507,000 of income and \$5,546,120 of expense, representing an anticipated net expense of \$39,120, which will be covered by the Core Ministries net asset balance. The board heard that a financial “pinch point” is coming soon, and the executive committee will begin processing how to prioritize denominational ministries.

■ **Pastoral Housing Fund:** The board approved changes recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee, to be proposed to the 2024 Annual Conference. The fund helps pastors living in parsonages to purchase their own homes once they leave the parsonage, with financial contributions from their congregation. The changes create a way for contributions to be held in the Eder Retirement Plan instead of mutual funds, to alleviate the tax burden for the pastors who participate.

■ **Global Church of the Brethren Communion Bylaws:** The bylaws were affirmed by the board and are expected to



Cheryl Brumbaugh-Coyford

A group photo of the elected board members with general secretary David Steele.



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be finalized by the communion in coming months. The communion is an organization of the national Church of the Brethren denominations around the world.

■ **Intercultural listening:** In a session held via Zoom at the request of a group of Church of the Brethren ministers, the board listened to questions and concerns from nine people from Hispanic, Latin American, Haitian American, and African American communities. Also speaking was Bob Kettering, a white retired minister in Atlantic Northeast District.

Several told of painful experiences of racism in church settings. Their concerns included a list of questions and topics including print resources and ministerial training in Spanish and Kreyol, accuracy of Spanish interpretation at Annual Conference, delay in hiring intercultural ministries staff, lack of intentional engagement with the intercultural community by denominational leaders, and fears that the Church of the Brethren is becoming “open and affirming”—which they characterized as antithetical to Hispanic and Haitian cultures.

The MMB agenda also included worship and prayer, reports, small group sharing by board and staff, training on Kingian Nonviolence, and a chance to greet the Young Adult Steering Committee.

Pastoral letter sent to Armenian community

General secretary David Steele sent a pastoral letter to the Armenian community following the Azerbaijan attack against Artsakh



Benjamin Hoffmann

Brethren Volunteer Service Unit 334 completed orientation Sept. 26–Oct. 4. *Front, from left:* **Pauline Schick**, Bad Oeynhausen, Germany, to Ferncliff Camp and Conference Center, Little Rock, Ark.; **Ken Chiu**, Vancouver, Canada, to Asian Rural Institute, Japan; **Virginia Rendler**, BVS volunteer coordinator; **Chelsea Goss Skillen**, BVS director; **Justice Westlake**, Woodland Church of the Brethren, Astoria, Ill., placement pending. *Back:* **Paul-Joa Durt**, Lübeck, Germany, to SnowCap Food Pantry, Portland, Ore.; **Lisa Lauterbach**, Nuremberg, Germany, to WATER, Washington, D.C.; **Anou Sethi**, Leipzig, Germany, to Camp Stevens, Julian, Calif.; **Jasper Neddermeyer**, Herford, Germany, to La Puente Home, Alamosa, Colo.; **Seth Spire**, Sangerville Church of the Brethren, Bridgewater, Va., also to SnowCap; **Anton Ellehnson**, Offenburg, Germany, also to SnowCap.

(Nagorno-Karabakh), which forced the Armenian population to flee. Addressed to Archbishop Vicken Aykazian on behalf of the Armenian community worldwide, the letter also gave particular attention to Armenian members and attendees in the Church of the Brethren. It said, in part: “Please know that the Church of the Brethren continues to stand with the Armenian people now as we have for more than 100 years since 1917, when our church first began providing aid to survivors and refugees of the Armenian Genocide.”

CDS critical response team works in Lewiston

On Oct. 28, Children’s Disaster Services deployed a team of five Critical Response Childcare volunteers to Lewiston, Maine, in partnership with the Red Cross. This deployment was made in response to the mass shootings at two locations in Lewiston in which 18 people were killed and 13 others were injured. The critical response teams are certified CDS volunteers who have received additional specialized training for mass casualty events.

Personnel

José Calleja Otero has resigned as executive minister for Puerto Rico District. He has been the district’s first executive since July 12, 2015, when Puerto Rico became the Church of the Brethren’s 24th district. Among previous roles,

he was team pastor at the congregation in Morovis.

Shannon Kahler is retiring from Inspiration Hills, a camp and retreat center in Northern Ohio District. **Andrew Kauffman** has been appointed interim executive director,

beginning Dec. 1. He has worked at Camp Mack in Indiana for multiple years, and also worked in the school system in Arizona.

Allison Snyder began Oct. 10 as interim manager of the Brethren Historical Library

and Archives in Elgin, Ill., where she previously served two years as archival intern.

Kay Weaver retired Oct. 15 as director of stewardship for Atlantic Northeast District. She had served in the position since 2003.