Mission and Ministry Board extends general secretary's term

The Mission and Ministry Board held its fall meeting Oct. 17-19 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., led by chair Kathy Mack with chair-elect Josiah Ludwick and general secretary David Steele.

Out of several hours of closed sessions, the chair announced that the term of David Steele as general secretary of the Church of the Brethren is extended two additional years. As of August 2026, he will have served two five-year terms for a total of 10 years as general secretary. With the extension, he will serve through August 2028.

The open sessions, among other business, included approval of a 2026 budget parameter for the denomination's Core Ministries, a statement renewing the call to prevent gun violence, a query on immigration from Atlantic Southeast District, and recognition of the Material Resources program that is being phased out at year's end.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Material Resources

The seven remaining employees in the Material Resources program were present on screen and recognized for their years of service. The program is closing at the end of this year, a decision that was made by the board in October 2023.

See p. 6 for a description of the long-standing program and a list of the employees, whose years of service totaled 233 years.

Budget parameter

The board approved a 2026 budget parameter for Core Ministries of $5,453,000 of income and $5,555,000 of expense, representing a $102,000 deficit. The decision on a budget parameter had been postponed from July because of lack of financial information for 2024 following a data breach. A final decision on the 2026 budget is expected in a Zoom meeting in late November.

Statement on gun violence

The board adopted a brief statement renewing the call to prevent gun violence and reaffirming the 2018 board statement "Lukewarm No More: A Call for Repentance and Action on Gun Violence." This followed discussion in March, when there were calls for gun violence to be addressed as the board adopted a "Resolution on Weapons Transfer."

After one board member urged that much stronger action be taken, citing the frequent incidents of shootings in neighborhoods across the country, others voiced support. Concern was expressed for those affected by gun violence in rural and urban settings.

"We need to be much more forceful in our statement," said board member Robert Jackson. "I would like to see us doing something in our neighborhoods. . . . Peace doesn't just mean the absence of war but the absence of violence."

Query

The board accepted referral of "Query: Our Response to Current Immigration Laws that Do Not Uphold Holy Scriptures" from Atlantic Southeast District and appointed a committee to draft a statement for consideration by the board in March 2026, to be passed on to the 2026 Annual Conference.

The committee includes board member Edward Cesar-Fincher and staff Nathan Hosler, director of the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy; Founa A. Badet, director of Intercultural Ministries; and Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, director of News Services.

The query came to the board at the suggestion of the Annual Conference officers, who felt the board rather than the Conference query process would enable a timelier response.

Citing numerous scripture texts and current national immigration practices, the query asks, "How should our Christian Church of the Brethren respond as individuals, fellowships, projects, congregations, districts, and denominational staff, when the United States Government imposes laws/policies that are unjust and contrary to Holy Scripture, the Ten Commandments, the ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ, and our historic peace witness? What statements should we make? What actions should we take?"

In other business

A committee will be appointed to recommend board action on a referral from the 2025 Annual Conference. The board is to consider two options for Annual Conference: a biennial Conference with a different staffing arrangement in order to decrease cost; or, to decrease the length of the event,

alternate years of in-person and online Conferences with the online year for business only and the in-person year for fellowship, worship, and other events.

Brethren Disaster Ministries received feedback from the board as it prepares for a major review and assessment of its work.

The board was led in a session on "A Place for Everybody" by Jeanne Davies of the Anabaptist Disabilities Network.

Numerous reports included the newest board committee called the "Revelation 7:9 Committee" that is addressing racial justice concerns. It is made up of board members Michaela Alphonse, Edward Cesar-Fincher, Colby Patton, Eric Ramirez, and Joanna Willoughby, with staff consultant Founa A. Badet, director of Intercultural Ministries.

A report on Lybrook Ministries in New Mexico shared that the group formerly overseeing that ministry for Western Plains District has disbanded. The property is now overseen by the denomination.

The next board meeting is in March 2026 at Modesto (Calif.) Church of the Brethren, continuing a practice of every five years holding the spring meeting at a location other than the General Offices. Board leaders will seek opportunities for worship and fellowship with churches in northern California.

Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford

Annual Conference 2026 schedule announced

The 2026 Annual Conference will be held Sunday, June 28, through Thursday, July 2, at the Grand Wayne Convention Center in Fort Wayne, Ind., in a change from the usual Wednesday through Sunday schedule. Registration and housing reservations will open online March 4.

There are significant numbers of Church of the Brethren members living in and around Fort Wayne who may want to participate on the opening Sunday afternoon. The exhibit hall will open at noon and equipping sessions will be offered that afternoon.

In addition, a lighter business agenda makes possible a special morning of "sparking, stirring, and serving" on Tuesday, June 30, including a keynote presentation, equipping sessions, and opportunities to serve the host city.

For more information go to www.brethren.org/ac.

Pastors with ordinations terminated

Two pastors of Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren—David R. Miller and Jennifer K. Scarr—have had their ordinations terminated by Shenandoah District. The district Leadership Team has instead credentialed them as commissioned ministers.

A letter from the Leadership Team to the congregation explained that "the district and the Bridgewater Church of the Brethren are not in harmony in understanding and practice related to theology of same sex marriage" and said that the re-classification as commissioned ministers "allows David and Jennifer full privileges and responsibilities for pastoral ministry solely in the Bridgewater Congregation rather than in the district or denomination."

The district's move followed a listening session with the Standing Committee of district delegates to Annual Conference, in which the two pastors along with pastor Erin Rinaca and congregational moderator Ted Flory presented information about the longstanding conflict between the congregation and the district.

A clarification of commissioned minister status was issued by the Ministry Office and the executive committee of the Council of District Executives. "According to the 2014 Ministerial Leadership polity paper of Annual Conference, a commissioned minister 'holds the legal credential of clergy and is commissioned to perform all ministerial services and to preside at the ordinances practiced by the denomination in the specific congregation for which they have been commissioned,'" said the clarification, in part.

"If a district terminates the ordination of a minister and then chooses to grant commissioned minister status as was the case in Shenandoah District, this does not imply a reduction of status or a diminishment of importance in any way. Commissioned ministers are not 'second class ministers.' They are fully credentialed ministers who are restricted to a specific setting and require the approval of the district to move to a new ministry setting."

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