

## **Mission and Ministry Board Communications Policy**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board communication policy is to clarify the lines of responsibility and standards for communications, marketing, and branding efforts. It is also to increase the visibility of Mission and Ministry Board programs and ministries, improve information flow, and reduce miscommunication and mixed messages. The guidelines outlined in this document apply to all staff, volunteers, departments, programs, ministries, groups and committees of the Mission and Ministry Board.

### **Background**

The development of this communication policy grows out of the changing needs of the Mission and Ministry Board related to organizational communication and marketing. With the advent of web pages, social media, and other forms of electronic communications since the last policy was developed in 1985, a more collaborative, coordinated, and strategic approach is essential. Recognizing the sharpening lines of diversity within the Church of the Brethren, messaging that clearly articulates and supports the programs and ministries of the Board and respects and cares for the whole fabric of the Church is crucial and requires a shift from previous communication practices. The Board is determined to work at bridging any disconnect between denominational leadership and “people in the pews,” real or perceived.

### **Authority**

The General Secretary is the official voice and speaks on behalf of the Mission and Ministry Board and its programs and ministries. No other department or staff member is authorized to release or issue statements. The General Secretary bears ultimate editorial responsibility and authority for the content, character, tone, and timing of all communications from all departments and ministries of the Mission and Ministry Board, except for direct communications from and in the name of the Mission and Ministry Board itself.

### **Guidelines**

Communications should be consistent in their external message, reflecting the Mission and Ministry Board’s strategic priorities and mission statement, Church of the Brethren polity, policy, values, and Annual Conference positions.

All communication should be sensitive to the needs of the whole church and upbuilding of the body of Christ. At the same time, all communications should be sensitive to the witness they bring, to what they may say about the church to those who are not yet part of our community of faith.

All communications should strive to present and honor the breadth of the church, being attentive to its diversities related to race, ethnicity, age, disability, gender, geography, devotional practice and Christian theology.

All external communication activities shall be coordinated by the General Secretary and/or the Communications and Marketing Team, as delegated by the General Secretary. These activities include, but are not limited to, organizational publications (including print and electronic publications), news

services, distribution of press releases, emergency communications, webpages, social media accounts, branding and logos, videos, etc. The General Secretary shall oversee, within each department related to communications, the development of additional guidelines which are to be in furtherance of those in this policy.

***This policy supersedes all previous communications policies and guidelines of the Church of the Brethren denominational board.***

### **Social Media**

The Mission and Ministry Board supports and encourages the use of social media for engagement with the wider church and community to promote events, share information, and advance ministries. Social media can add value by strengthening and upbuilding the Church of the Brethren.

The Communications and Marketing Team must be consulted prior to establishing any form of social media related to the work and ministry of the Mission and Ministry Board. Staff will be expected to provide an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of their respective Church of the Brethren social media accounts to the Communications and Marketing Team, based on reliable social media metrics.

All posts from organizational accounts and platforms should be inclusive, responsive, respectful, and friendly, and encourage communication with the audience. Posts should be collaborative and work toward cross-promotion opportunities within the organization. Confidential and proprietary information should never be shared publicly on social media.

Recognizing and respecting that individual staff, volunteers, and Board members also participate in social media personally, the Mission and Ministry Board urges that such participation always be undertaken with a due exercise of discretion, thoughtfulness, respect for the organization, the whole fabric of the church, and social media community, and, where applicable, in accordance with the Employee Conduct and Work Rules found in the Employee Handbook. Online postings are timeless and can impact the work and ministry of the Mission and Ministry Board. It is expected that staff, volunteers, and Board members will measure their posts and tone and how they may affect the goodwill and reputation of our common work and ministry together. There is much wisdom in the admonition to “pray before posting.” Posts should be transparent as to the poster’s identity and clear to distinguish where the poster is communicating in an individual capacity rather than speaking for the organization.

### **Website(s)**

The denominational website is the entry portal for many into a view of the church. It is an important vehicle for moving us beyond excessive insider-ism and “into the neighborhood.” The website should be constructed and maintained in ways that advance the direction and overall vision of the Mission and Ministry Board’s Strategic Plan. Aimed to twin goals of engaging our neighbors and equipping the church, the website must interest non-Brethren inquirers up front, while also being easily navigable by Brethren searching for such things as event information, updates, and documents.

### **News Services and Newslines**

Priority and prominence must be given to the programs and ministries of the Mission and Ministry Board. In addition, the Board expects “Jesus in the Neighborhood” stories of congregational engagement with their communities to be sought intentionally and regularly across the full breadth of the church and shared abundantly.

### **Messenger**

Priority and prominence must be given to promoting and following up on the programs, event, and ministries of the Mission and Ministry. The Board expects intentionality and regularity in seeking and sharing stories and perspectives across the breadth of the Brethren, including theologically, as part of an effort to promote healthy dialogue. These will include “Jesus in the neighborhood” stories of congregational engagement with their neighbors.

### **Statements and “Sign-ons”**

The Mission and Ministry Board sometimes initiates, creates, and adopts statements on matters of importance to our faith. These typically relate to general trends, to wider developments, conditions, or opportunities, or to newly emerging or ongoing concerns in church and society, rather than to discrete events. The board makes full use of the consensus model of decision-making in such cases, working to speak with one voice. The Board may choose further to recommend its statements for adoption by Annual Conference. (Two examples of both the context for a Board statement and the choice to recommend to Annual Conference can be seen in the 2013 Resolution Against Drone Warfare and the 2018 Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren.)

On other occasions, the General Secretary may issue statements to address more immediate concerns, such as sudden, dramatic, or rapidly unfolding or approaching events that call for a nimbler response. The General Secretary takes care to operate within the mission, core values and strategic direction of the Board when doing so. The General Secretary may or may not choose to consult with the Board’s officers or Executive Committee prior to issuing such statements. However, the General Secretary is expected, where feasible, to provide Board members with at least short advance notice that a statement from the General Secretary is about to be issued to the church and public, so that members may be prepared to give their attention and be on alert for others’ reactions, responses, and inquiries.

The Board does not make a practice of considering whether or not to affirm such statements of the General Secretary after-the-fact. If instead the Board were to add its endorsement to some General Secretary statements but not to others, this could convey some unintended or mistaken impression about the Board-General Secretary relationship. In keeping with better practice, the Board may discern that the subject of the General Secretary’s statement connects with a wider trend or concern that is worthy of consideration for a Board statement. In any case, other ways for Board members to express enthusiasm for a statement of the General Secretary include sharing it with their congregations and via social media.

The Leadership Team occasionally issues statements of its own. The General Secretary convenes the Leadership Team, which serves as the executive committee for Annual Conference. Serving with the General Secretary on the Leadership Team are the Annual Conference Moderator, Moderator-elect, Annual Conference Secretary and the Secretary of the Council of District Executives. Although the

persons serving in these roles also serve ex-officio on the Board, the Leadership Team is separate and distinct from the Board. While statements of the Leadership Team may impact the Board, the Board does not have oversight of the Leadership Team or its statements.

From time to time, the General Secretary is presented with (typically electronic) letters or statements drafted by organizations outside the Church of the Brethren and invited to endorse or “sign on” to them as General Secretary or on behalf of the Church of the Brethren. These usually relate to public policy, tend to come sporadically, and typically are framed as time-sensitive, which may not allow time for concerns to be considered for editorial changes by the originating organization. The customary internal practice is for staff (most often from the Office of Peacebuilding and Policy) to prepare a rationale and recommendation to sign on for the General Secretary, identifying connections with, and suggesting support from, existing statements and positions of Annual Conference.

In some instances, the General Secretary may choose to sign-on or not without any wider consultation, exercising responsibility to speak on behalf of the church. Common examples include recurring issue areas where there have been prior affirmations and occasions where the originating organization either is one with whom Annual Conference has approved affiliation (such as the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches, and Christian Churches Together) or with whom there otherwise is an established and ongoing partnership in voice and mission (such as Church World Service).

In other instances, the General Secretary may consult with the Board’s Executive Committee and receive their counsel. In such consultations, a threshold question is whether the faith basis for signing on is sufficiently articulated in the sign-on statement itself. It is reasonable to expect that a statement or letter from Christian leaders will make its case with foundational reference to the biblical and theological understandings that underly and prompt speaking out on a matter. Some sign-on statements read as if they could come from thoroughly secular organizations rather than from communities of religious conviction. Such sign-ons should be disfavored. Practically speaking, they leave leadership having to offer the church and public a faith-based rationale retroactively and reactively, rather than having it stated from the start in the document being endorsed. More profoundly, the church speaks most authentically and credibly when directly expressing, rather than suppressing, our identity as people seeking to be faithful to God.

Other considerations for consultations about sign-on statements include:

The strength of the sign-on statement’s connection to denominational pronouncements, most especially Annual Conference statements and positions, Mission and Ministry Board statements and resolutions, and the emphases and direction of the Board’s Strategic Plan;

The relationship of the Church of the Brethren to the originating organization and the preference given to recognized partners in voice and mission;

The ways in which the choices of sign-ons maximize rather than dilute the denominational voice;

The extent to which others look to the Brethren in particular for leadership of voice, as in matters of war and peacemaking, conscientious objection, military budgets and recruitment, etc.;

The degree of commitment to follow up to the statement with actions that demonstrate the integrity of our words, including engaging conversations at the grass roots that may hold more potential for the healthy upbuilding of the body than bare statements signed by leadership;

The assessment that the sign-on statement is not characterized by gratuitous partisan broadsides, that its content and tone are respectfully aimed to shining God's light rather than merely bringing political heat, and that it is purely about witnessing and working in public policy for the well-being of others and raising consciousness about their needs, but not haphazardly stoking society's divisions;

The opportunity available to suggest revisions that address concerns in the original or enhance the Brethren angle;

And the actual presence of a sign-on statement or letter, not just a list of organizations endorsing particular legislation or other proposed government regulations or actions.

### **Board conduct and Board member role**

The Mission and Ministry Board will continue to hold regular meetings which are open to the church, staff, and the public. The Board also meets in closed session for community-building/board development and occasionally to engage on sensitive matters. The Board shares its open meeting agendas, exhibits, and minutes publicly.

The Board utilizes a consensus model of decision-making. Among other things, this is meant to allow a full airing of each Board member's voice and view in the decision-making process. Once the Board has acted, it is expected that all members will speak with one voice in furtherance of the Board's action. Additionally, each Board member is expected to serve as an ambassador for the Board's programs and ministries in home congregations, districts, and the wider church and community.

### **Acceptable Use of Organizational Name and Logo**

The name and logo of the Church of the Brethren are registered trademarks and may only be used for authorized purposes. Any logo developed for organizational purposes must have the permission and approval of the Communications and Marketing Team.

### **Communications and Marketing Team**

The Communications and Marketing team will be appointed at the discretion of the General Secretary.