



Church of the Brethren General Board

Resolution on 50 Years of Women's Ordination in the Church of the Brethren

March 9, 2008

The year 2008 marks the 50th anniversary of the Annual Conference decision that “women be granted full and unrestricted rights” to ordination in the Church of the Brethren. Women have a long history of serving the denomination in ministry, and conversations about official recognition of their gifts extend back to the beginnings of the church. In 1958, after a decade of debate rife with disagreement, condescension and contention, Edward Ziegler declared,

The time is surely here, in this anniversary year, when we ought to remove all ambiguity and all discrimination which is based on sex alone... The time is here when we ought to take this step of recognizing that the gifts of God may be bestowed equally upon the sisters of the church.

As we observe yet another significant anniversary, celebrating our continued life together as the Church of the Brethren and part of the body of Christ, we give thanks for the nearly 400 women who have served the church as ordained ministers over the last 50 years. We rejoice in the work of women's hands, hearts, and minds that have built up the body of Christ.

We give thanks, too, for the openness of the church to the Holy Spirit, for the processes of discernment and discussion, for the slow and deliberate practices of listening to one another that lead, in time, to transformation. At the same time, we cannot help but recognize that this anniversary also points to the 250 years during which women ministered without equal or official recognition from the wider church. Women have been in ministry since the very first gathering of Brethren at the Eder River in Schwarzenau, where three women were part of the original eight baptized into a covenanted fellowship. Women have been serving others, proclaiming peace, and spreading the gospel in the Church of the Brethren since its very inception.

In the midst of our celebrations, we also remember that we are called to continual discernment. Fifty years ago, the church opened doors to women by expanding its understanding of ordination. The decision transformed the idea of leadership in the church, and challenged us to recognize the gifts of God in all people. We pray that our life together might be so filled with the spirit that we may live together in the realized fullness of God's promise to “pour out my spirit on all flesh,” (Acts 2) and embody Paul's insistence that “all of you are one in Christ Jesus,” (Galatians 3:28).

Sister Anna Mow, one of the first women to be ordained in the denomination, insisted that “the question is not women with men in the ministry, or men only in the ministry. It is instead, ‘is the Lord present in the message?’ and ‘is the message from the Lord?’” As we reflect on 50 years of women's ordination in the Church of the Brethren, we find ourselves faced with the same questions. We celebrate the work of women in ministry, and we commit to continue seeking the Lord in the life and leadership of the Church of the Brethren.

Adopted March 9, 2008, General Board Meeting