

225th Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

Bunkertown Church of the Brethren

Pastor Greg Jones

A total of 3,193 people met for the 2011 Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on July 2-6, including 868 delegates from congregations and districts. The Conference was led by moderator Robert Alley from Bridgewater, Virginia (who did an excellent job as moderator, by the way). Conference Delegates heard numerous reports, worshiped often, and even participated in Bible Studies twice a day at the beginning of each Business Session. Delegates debated and voted on the following items of business.

Old Business

Human Sexuality

The 2011 Annual Conference acted on two business items related to issues of sexuality--"A Statement of Confession and Commitment" and "Query: Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships"—that have been the subject of a two-year Special Response Process across the denomination. Annual Conference approved Standing Committees recommendation that was amended by the Delegate body.

The Conference approved the following recommendation from the Standing Committee of district delegates, and an amendment that added a sentence to that recommendation:

"In light of the Special Response process, as outlined by the 2009 paper 'A Structural Framework For Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues,' the Standing Committee recommends to the 2011 Annual Conference that 'A Statement of Confession and Commitment' and 'Query: Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships' be returned. *It is further recommended that the 2011 Annual Conference reaffirm the entire 1983 'Statement on Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective' and that we continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process.*"

The final decision approved the recommendation to return both items of business to the sending bodies, and included the amendment made by James Myer, a leader in the Brethren Revival Fellowship.

Congregational Ethics

In response to the "Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper" query adopted in 2010, a study committee brought recommendations to this year's Annual Conference. The committee recommended that the 1993 "Ethics in Congregations" paper be reviewed, revised, and updated. The revised document would also include guidelines and suggestions for a denominational process of accountability. The report recommends "that these revisions be facilitated by Congregational Life Ministries staff in collaboration with the Council of District Executives and the Office of Ministry."

New Business

Proper Decorum

Annual Conference also acted on a query about proper decorum brought by Mountain Grove Church of the Brethren and Shenandoah District. This query petitioned the Annual Conference to have rules of proper decorum relating to persons' positions on issues before the Annual Conference. The concern arose as a response to the custom for the past few years of many people wearing things at Conference to signal their stance on contentious issues. The recommendation from the Standing Committee of district delegates was that the query "be returned with appreciation and that the district be referred to the section in the Annual Conference booklet entitled 'Accountability to One Another.' "

Responses from the floor included much discussion of the rainbow and black and white scarves being worn. Some people deplored them for being divisive, but comment was also given that they were helping

stimulate good conversations between persons with different views. One delegate reminded the body of the biblical call to mutual submission and respect for one another.

Standing Committee's recommendation that the query be returned was adopted on a voice vote.

Climate change

This query asked for Annual Conference's position on climate change and for guidance about how individuals, congregations, and the denomination can take concrete action and offer leadership on this issue. Standing Committee's recommendation was that the query should "be adopted and that it be referred to the Washington Advocacy Office of the Global Mission Partnerships"--a program of the Church of the Brethren. During debate on the recommendation, a couple of amendments were proposed but none were adopted. One would have provided more detail about how the Washington office would handle this assignment and asked that a progress report be made to a future Annual Conference. Another, which was determined to be a substitute motion, would have returned the query to the district. Several spoke in favor of it, most because they did not believe that human-caused global warming has been established as scientific fact. The substitute motion failed when it was put to a vote.

Work on the query had to be suspended for the dinner break and evening worship. Moderator Robert Alley told the delegates to return after worship at 9 p.m. for an unusual night session. After more discussion, the recommendation from Standing Committee was adopted without amendment.

Resolution on the War in Afghanistan

At the request of the World Council of Churches, the Church of the Brethren joined with other denominations around the world to issue a statement calling for the end of military activity in Afghanistan. The delegate body approved this resolution.

Election Results

Moderator Elect: Bob Krouse, who was nominated from the floor, was elected to the position of moderator-elect. He is a resident of Fredericksburg, Pa., and serves as pastor of Little Swatara Church of the Brethren in Atlantic Northeast District.

Program and Arrangements Committee: Thomas Dowdy of Long Beach, Calif.

Bethany Theological Seminary trustees: representing the colleges - Jonathan Frye of McPherson, Kan.; representing the laity - D. Miller Davis of Westminster, Md.

Committee on Interchurch Relations: Torin Eikler of Morgantown, W.Va.

Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee: Herb High of Lancaster, Pa.

On Earth Peace Board: Patricia Ann Ronk of Roanoke, Va.

Brethren Benefit Trust Board: John Waggoner of Herndon, Va.

Mission and Ministry Board: **Area 3** - Becky Rhodes of Roanoke, Va.; **Area 4** - Jerry Crouse of Warrensburg, Mo.; **Area 5** - W. Keith Goering of Wilson, Idaho.

In addition, the following appointments were confirmed by the Conference:

Mission and Ministry Board: Janet Wayland Elsea of Port Republic, Va.; Don Fitzkee of Manheim, Pa.; and Patrick C. Starkey of Roanoke, Va.

On Earth Peace Board: Madalyn Metzger of Bristol, Ind.; Louise Knight of Harrisburg, Pa.

Bethany Theological Seminary trustees: Gregory W. Geisert of Harrisonburg, Va.; David W. McFadden of N. Manchester, Ind.

Brethren Benefit Trust Board: Deb Romary of Fort Wayne, Ind.; Craig H. Smith of Elizabethtown, Pa.

The Conference booklet and Delegate Packet are located next to the Bulletin Board if you would like to read more details about the items of business we discussed. If you have additional questions, give me a call.

I thank you for trusting me to speak on your behalf at Annual Conference. Each time I voted, I reminded myself that I represent you, the Bunkertown Church, not just myself. Next year conference will be held in St. Louis, Missouri July 7-11.