

Pacific Southwest District

Process for Responding to Congregational Disagreements with Annual Conference and/or District Conference Decisions

4 Background

5 At the 2004 Annual Conference, the delegate body passed a paper originating from the South/Central
6 Indiana District about how congregations can disagree with Annual Conference decisions yet remain in
7 unbroken fellowship with the sister congregations. The concern of the paper was, “How can the Church
8 of the Brethren speak with one voice and yet respect dissenting views?” More specifically, the paper
9 addressed how districts should respond to situations when a congregation disagrees with Annual Conference
10 decision(s).

11 Each district is encouraged to develop a framework for processing a congregational disagreement with an
12 Annual Conference action before a potential disagreement develops. The 2004 Annual Conference paper
13 recommended that each process should be flexible enough to allow for the wide variations of each case, yet
14 specific enough to offer accountability and direction. The Pacific Southwest District Board of
15 Administration agreed that such a process needs to incorporate District Conference decisions as well. The
16 purpose of a district response to congregational disagreements with Annual Conference and/or District
17 Conference decisions is to provide direction, support and conciliatory action.

18 PSWD Policy for Dealing with Congregational Disagreements

- 19 1. Congregations in disagreement with an Annual Conference and/or District Conference decisions are
20 encouraged to complete a thorough study of the conference action and seek counsel from the district
21 executive before taking action that might be misinterpreted and viewed as defiance and disloyalty.
- 22 2. The district process begins when an official letter is received from a congregation, or when district
23 leadership becomes aware that the congregation has taken action or is acting in opposition to an Annual
24 Conference and/or District Conference decision in a way that threatens the overall unity and ministry
25 of the district. The Pacific Southwest District intends to use the following outline as its process in
26 responding to the congregation:
 - 27 a. Schedule a visit to the congregation for respectful dialog, discussion, and interpretation. The
28 visit might include the district executive, Standing Committee representative, District Board
29 of Administration member and a member of the Shalom Team.
 - 30 b. If needed, the District Board of Administration may wish to appoint a special Task Team to
31 meet with the congregation for extended conversations around the area of concern.
 - 32 c. If mutually agreed upon, a call for the larger district to participate in a day of prayer and
33 fasting to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for appropriate spiritual conduct for these
34 conversations.

- 35 d. If needed, the Board of Administration may consult with resource persons outside the
36 district, including mediation leaders and representative agencies within the denomination,
37 e.g., Ministry of Reconciliation (MOR).
- 38 e. If needed and/or after all attempts at conversation between the congregation and district
39 representatives are unable to bring reconciliation regarding the area of disagreement and the
40 issue represents a threat to the overall unity and ministry of the Pacific Southwest District,
41 The Board of Administration may bring the concern and specific recommendations to
42 District Conference for action. Any actions taken by District Conference should fall within
43 the Pacific Southwest Constitution and By-laws and the polity of the Church of the Brethren.
44 Specific recommendations to the District Conference might include:
- 45 i. a statement acknowledging that the congregation in question is “out of harmony”
46 with the denomination on the particular issue, but remains in support and in
47 fellowship with the district and Annual Conference;
- 48 ii. a call to prayer for all congregations within the district seeking the guidance of the
49 Holy Spirit regarding the issue, and seeking a spiritual anointing that would express
50 love, tolerance and patience (Col. 3:12) rather than judgment and avoidance.
- 51 iii. Throughout the process, the intent should include careful listening and respectful
52 conversation that might lead to common understanding, even if agreement is not
53 reached.
- 54 iv. Finally, within our current polity, the Annual Conference Standing Committee
55 continues to serve as the appeals body. Any decision that is made by the Pacific
56 Southwest District Board of Administration or the District Conference can be
57 appealed to the Annual Conference Standing Committee. The decision of the Annual
58 Conference Standing Committee is final.

59 **Action of the Pacific Southwest District Board of Administration:** At its August 28, 2010 meeting,
60 the Board of Administration approved the “Process for Responding to Congregational Disagreements
61 with Annual Conference and/or District Conference Decisions” to be passed to the 2010 District
62 Conference.