

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PLURAL NONSALARIED MINISTRY

I. EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1996 Standing Committee in Cincinnati received a report from a polity task group subcommittee that it had appointed in 1995. The subcommittee had been asked to address some specific issues that had been assigned to them and to review the polity of our denominational structure to identify areas that might need to be addressed.

The task group made some observations about free ministry in the Church of the Brethren, noting specifically that our denominational polity did not address this form of ministry. The procedures for calling free ministers had not been addressed at the Annual Conference level. The task group suggested that a study be carried out to develop a process for integrating the free ministry into denominational polity. Standing Committee then adopted a motion “that a committee draft polity for the free ministry; that the polity be presented to Standing Committee who will refer the final draft to the Annual Conference for adoption.”

Standing Committee then authorized the Officers of Annual Conference to appoint a committee on their behalf. Subsequently, Samuel Cassel, Connie Burk Davis, and J. Stanley Earhart were called to carry out this assignment for the Standing Committee. At its meeting in 1997, the Standing Committee adopted the report of the task force. It became an item of business for the 1998 Annual Conference.

II. REPORT OF THE 1997 STANDING COMMITTEE

A. Introduction

This committee was appointed by the officers of the Annual Conference, pursuant to a motion adopted by the 1996 Standing Committee, to present to the 1997 Standing Committee a proposed draft of polity for the free ministry. It is our understanding that Standing Committee will consider the report and refer a final draft to Annual Conference for adoption. The committee recommends that the newly adopted polity on free ministry be inserted as a new section titled “Plural Nonsalaried Ministry” in the Ministry chapter of the *Church of the Brethren Manual of Organization and Polity*.

The goals of this report are to . . .

1. Correct the oversight that there is little specific guidance in Church of the Brethren polity for calling persons into free ministry;
2. Address free ministry at the Annual Conference level;

3. Clarify the authority and status of set-apart free ministers; and
4. Raise awareness of the possibilities for expanded use of the free ministry model.

In the Spring 1967 issue of *Brethren Life and Thought*, in an article entitled “The Free Ministry,” Harold S. Martin writes:

Historically, the ordained ministry within the Church of the Brethren consisted of a system known as the plural free ministry. Each congregation was served by more than one ordained [person] who earned their livelihood at regular occupations and gave their service to the church without charge.

This excerpt describes what traditionally has been called “free ministry.” In this report it is referred to more accurately as the “plural nonsalaried ministry.” A closer look at this model, which served the New Testament church, early Church of the Brethren congregations, and still serves some congregations today, is warranted. Perhaps by looking honestly at its benefits as well as its shortcomings, we can gain insight into an alternative form of ministry that could offer some solutions to the acknowledged leadership crisis in the Church of the Brethren and at the same time assist those congregations not able to afford a full-time salaried minister.

B. Background

There are many New Testament references to plural nonsalaried ministry. Jesus and Paul recognized the right to be supported, but chose the example of self-support for themselves. Jesus’ selection of twelve from among his followers and his teaching of them can be said to be the beginning of plural ministry. In Luke 10:1, Jesus appoints seventy and sends them out two by two. Paul’s vision of plural ministry in 1 Corinthians 12 describes calling out the varying spiritual gifts bestowed on people “for the good of all.” Acts contains several references to plurality in ministry, for example: Barnabas and Mark, Timothy and Erastus, and Paul and Silas. Plural ministries are described at Ephesus (Acts 19:7), Philippi (Phil. 1:1), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:12), and Crete (Titus 1:5). The instruction to ordain elders (e.g., Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) always refers to the plural.

In the early years, Church of the Brethren leaders had other occupations. For example, Alexander Mack was a miller, Peter Becker a weaver and farmer, and Christopher Sauer a printer. Elder John Kline, generations later, was a farmer. This practice embodied the understanding of the church from its inception that to be baptized as an adult believer was to be ordained into the ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

Annual Conference statements of the prior century affirm the nonsalaried ministry. The following was adopted in 1861: “Resolved that we are opposed to a treasury for the exclusive benefit of the ministry, but that every church should encourage their ministers to be active in their calling and also to support them in all cases of necessity.” A statement from the 1890 Annual Meeting *Minutes* says, “We think it wrong for churches to give, and brethren to receive, a stipulated amount for preaching.” The plurality of the early style of ministry is exemplified in the long “preacher’s benches,” which still remain in some of the older meetinghouses.

Salaried pastors in the Church of the Brethren originated in urban congregations. Perhaps Philadelphia had the first paid minister in 1866. In 1917, Annual Conference gave the first

official approval of a paid ministry, beginning a time of rapid transition from the free ministry to the salaried pastoral ministry. Robert E. Faus writes in “The Ministry Transition Project”: “With but a handful of salaried pastors before 1900, two-thirds of the congregations had salaried pastors by World War II. Surprisingly, very little is recorded about the implications and consequences of that change by church historians, theologians, or official church materials.” Today, with the exception of relatively few congregations, the norm is the singular, salaried, and formally educated minister. Further evidence of this is the fact that only one plural nonsalaried minister (James F. Myer in 1985) has served as Annual Conference moderator since 1922.

C. Description

The term *plural nonsalaried ministry* is relatively self-descriptive. This form of ministry has never been “free,” though that must be the attitude of those who serve in this way. It usually involves some unofficial remuneration to the minister, such as love gifts or Christmas offerings. At a minimum, congregations provide reimbursement for mileage and other direct expenses of ministry, and most pay for training for ordination. The term *nonsalaried* makes clear that whatever payment is made is not stipulated in advance as a result of wage-bargaining. With no expectation of any amount of remuneration, it is necessary for the minister to have other means of support in order to survive. In the past, these ministers earned their livelihood in one of the common occupations, such as farming, teaching, or banking. Today they might be in other professions or trades, supported by other family members, or have retirement income or other passive income, such as rental properties or other investments.

The *plural* part of the term refers to the fact that usually more than one person serves a congregation at the same time. Typically, they share the responsibilities, time commitments, and their various gifts. They rotate such tasks as preaching and visitation and respond to emergency needs as available.

Other factors that distinguish the plural nonsalaried ministry from the salaried ministry include the absence of paid benefits such as pension and medical and disability insurance. There is no expectation that a plural nonsalaried minister is available all of the time to the congregation. Also, the plural nonsalaried minister is usually elected or called from within the congregation served.

1. Benefits of the plural nonsalaried ministry to the congregation:
 - a. Experiences a variety of abilities and viewpoints;
 - b. Diversity in preaching;
 - c. More involvement by lay members;
 - d. Closer identification between minister and lay members;
 - e. Knowledge of faith community by ministers;
 - f. Less turnover, more consistency;
 - g. Seeking out members with gifts for ministry; and
 - h. Funds available for other needs.

2. Benefits to those serving in the plural nonsalaried ministry:
 - a. Sharing of responsibilities among ministers;
 - b. Mutual support of each other;
 - c. Mentoring of newer ministers;
 - d. Time to grow into the responsibilities;

- e. Knowledge of situation before accepting call;
 - f. Relative freedom in preaching; and
 - g. Ability to use ministry gifts without relocating.
3. Disadvantages of the plural nonsalaried form of ministry to the congregation:
 - a. Limited time for ministry by those serving;
 - b. Unmet program needs if not enough ministers;
 - c. Uncertainty of response for emergency ministry;
 - d. Varying levels of education and experience;
 - e. Ministers with life tenure may serve past prime;
 - f. Power may become centered in too few;
 - g. Unwillingness of volunteers who fear the call;
 - h. Less stewardship challenge of congregation; and
 - i. Isolation from denomination.
 4. Disadvantages to those serving in the plural nonsalaried ministry:
 - a. Limited free time and time with family;
 - b. Possibility of competition between ministers; and
 - c. Some financial hardship.

D. Uses of Plural Nonsalaried Ministry Models

In addition to the benefits as well as potential shortcomings of the plural nonsalaried ministry model of church leadership, other factors point to its suitability for addressing the leadership and financial issues of congregations. One such factor is the variety of configurations possible using the plural nonsalaried ministry model in combination with other models currently in use in the Church of the Brethren. The following are some of the possible combinations:

1. Full-time salaried minister and plural nonsalaried ministry team;
2. Part-time salaried minister and plural nonsalaried ministry team;
3. Salaried minister from neighboring congregation overseeing plural nonsalaried ministry team within the congregation;
4. Plural minimally-salaried ministry team;
5. Interim salaried minister during process of calling plural nonsalaried ministers from within;
6. Successive plural nonsalaried ministry teams for specific situations;
7. Spouse plural nonsalaried ministry teams;
8. Retired minister and plural nonsalaried ministry team;
9. Plural nonsalaried ministry team serving more than one congregation;
10. Full-time salaried minister and plural nonsalaried ministry team serving more than one congregation, etc., etc.

Use of the plural nonsalaried ministry model of leadership need not be limited to any particular type of congregation. For example, the model would be especially appropriate in ethnic congregations where there is need to develop leadership from within. It also would be an important model to consider in new church development. Perhaps there are other roles, such as chaplains or campus ministers, that could be adapted to the plural nonsalaried model.

The plural nonsalaried form of leadership is exciting in its possibilities for more reasons than financial savings. It is an opportunity to fully use the spiritual gifts that lay members of our congregations possess. It is an opportunity to live out our Brethren tenet of “priesthood of all believers” in a more intentional way. It is an opportunity to be faithful to our calling to “make disciples.” It is an opportunity to model “another way of living” to our ecumenical brothers and sisters.

It is an opportunity.

III. POLITY

In light of the above, we propose that the following “Plural Nonsalaried Ministry” document be inserted as a separate section in the Ministry chapter of the rewritten *Church of the Brethren Manual of Organization and Polity*, keeping in mind that other sections of the chapter apply to the plural nonsalaried ministry as well.

IV. EXPECTATIONS

In addition to the document being inserted in the polity manual, it would be wise for expectations between the parties involved to be set out clearly before entering into a new style of ministry. The expectations to be defined run in both directions, and include the following.

A. Expectations of the Minister by the Congregation

1. Job Description
 - a. How the duties will be divided among the ministers
 - b. Visitation expectations
 - c. Emergency responsibilities and coverage
 - d. Preaching schedule
2. Time
 - a. Situations to be covered
 - b. Participation in other non-church pursuits
 - c. Expectation of wider church involvement
 - d. Preaching in other congregations
 - e. Coverage when not available
 - f. Notification when not available
3. Tenure
 - a. Lifetime or for a period of years
 - b. Openness to other callings

4. Other
 - a. High character
 - b. Challenging and prophetic preaching
 - c. Use of abilities to fullest potential

B. Expectations of the Congregation by the Minister

1. Spiritual support
 - a. Prayer, encouragement
 - b. Take seriously the matter of calling
 - c. Direct feedback
2. Financial assistance
 - a. Especially with travel and education expenses
 - b. Insurance coverage for long-term service, if not available through other employment
 - c. Mutual aid in case of catastrophe
3. Educational opportunities
 - a. To provide competency in various areas
 - b. Continuing education to meet specific needs
 - c. Examples include weekend seminars, books, Annual Conference attendance

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VI. Plural Nonsalaried Ministry

A. Calling to Set-apart Ministry

1. To Serve the Calling Congregation

The calling process in “free ministry” churches traditionally has been done to meet the specific ministry needs of the calling congregation, and it is affirmed. This assumes that the initial call is issued before the licensing steps (interviews and testing) are completed.

2. To Serve the Wider Church

The “free ministry” congregations are encouraged to periodically (every 3-5 years) call persons with demonstrated gifts and spiritual maturity, even when a local need does not exist, in order to make them available for the leadership pool of the wider church.

3. To Affirm the Self-Identified Call

Such congregations should consider the inner calling of the Spirit that comes to individuals and provide a supportive nurturing and mentoring context for such persons.

B. Licensing

1. Pre-licensing steps include:

- a. “Readiness for Ministry” testing as required by districts;
- b. Completion of the “Pre-Licensing Interview Guide”; and
- c. Pre-licensing interview with the District Ministry Commission.

2. Licensing Service

When approved for licensing by the congregational call and favorable decision of the District Ministry Commission, the licensing service will be conducted, and the newly licensed minister shall function in keeping with congregational expectations.

C. Training and Support

1. An educational plan and schedule should be initiated under the guidance of the District Ministry Commission, taking into account the training the licensed minister has already completed.
2. Opportunities for training may include completion of college and seminary. If this is not feasible, other options include Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership programs: Training in Ministry (TRIM), Education for Shared Ministry (EFSM), or the district-administered training (which replaces the Three Year Reading Course).

NOTE: Some adjustments in training expectations may be necessary when dealing with ethnic congregations and leadership.

3. The respective congregation and district will arrange for ongoing ministry service, mentoring, evaluation, and support.

D. Ordination

1. Ordination may be considered when the prescribed training plan has been satisfactorily completed and when there is a call to service in keeping with the polity guidelines for all ordained ministers.
2. A pre-ordination interview is conducted by the District Ministry Commission subsequent to completion of a pre-ordination interview guide.
3. Approval for ordination requires favorable action by the District Ministry Commission, the district board, and the candidate's congregation.
4. Ordination takes place in the congregation with the laying on of hands, under the direction of the District Ministry Commission (or its appointee), in consultation with the candidate and the local pastor/moderator.

E. Accountability and Review

1. Authority for ordination lies with the District Board. A review of the ordination is required every five (5) years and includes issuance of a new certificate of ordination.
2. Nonsalaried ministers, as all set-apart ministers, are subject to the Annual Conference "Ethics in Ministerial Relations" statement.

F. Continuing Education

Nonsalaried ministers are strongly encouraged to engage in a discipline of continuing education as opportunities are offered by the denomination and are available in keeping with location and time available. Examples include workshops, seminars, conferences, Annual Conference events, etc.

Free Ministry Study Committee:

Connie Burk Davis, Chair
J. Stanley Earhart, Recorder
Samuel Cassel

Adopted by the 1997 Standing Committee at its meeting on June 29, 1997, and referred to the 1998 Annual Conference as an item of new business.

David Wine, Moderator
Anne Myers, Secretary

Action of the 1998 Annual Conference: Standing Committee member Sam Cassell presented the recommendation with committee member Connie Burk Davis present. The Standing Committee recommendation was that the report of the 1997 Standing Committee, with its explanatory note, be accepted. The delegate body adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee.

Further, Standing Committee recommended that the polity statement on "Plural Nonsalaried Ministry" be adopted. The delegate body, by a two-thirds majority vote, adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee.

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