

---

## Report of Standing Committee Delegate

Brethren gathered together in Omaha, Nebraska, for the first time in three years to conduct the business of annual conference under the theme of “Embracing one another as Christ embraces us.” COVID kept conference goers masked up while embracing one another in spirit.

Standing Committee met in open sessions for three days prior to the beginning of conference going into the evening hours to attend to the business at hand. Led by David Sollenberger, storyteller, listener, videographer, Sunday School teacher of youth, we kept to the agenda of the meeting with humor, encouragement and compassion. “You get a one-time exemption” was a standard byline of the moderator for outbursts, tardiness, and other miscues. Standing Committee felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as it worked through differences, motions, substitute motions and at times emotional responses.

The task team assigned to have conversations with On Earth Peace completed its work with four recommendations:

1) Standing Committee is to ensure clarity of expectations for agencies in the creation of covenants with the agencies including clear and specific provisions to deal with serious concerns when they arise.

2) Standing Committee is to bring clarity on how Annual Conference decisions and policy statements are to be received and implemented as well as giving clear guidelines for how judgments regarding compliance are to be impartially examined, appealed, or reviewed.

3) Annual Conference is to examine the need for change in the organizational structure of the Church of the Brethren to address the deep dysfunction that exists in the communication processes, organizational structure, and our ability to resolve conflict and division.

4) A time of significant intentional confession and repentance is to be a part of the 2023 Annual Conference for the failure in our relationships that have caused intense pain and brokenness.

One item of unfinished business, “Polity Regarding Agencies of the Church of the Brethren,” assigned to Standing Committee the development and management of covenants with agencies. Attempts were made to send the item to Standing Committee or back to Leadership team for further work, and to reject the item of business. In the end, it was approved with more than the required 2/3 vote.

Conference delegates approved Standing Committee recommendation to implement the concerns of the query, “Standing with People of Color,” through a two year study/action process. The presenting district,

Southern Ohio/Kentucky, is to work with On Earth Peace and the Intercultural Ministries team to develop the materials. Standing Committee members are to support and encourage the use of the materials and report back to Annual Conference in 2023 and 2024.

Delegates also approved Standing Committee recommendation that a study committee be formed to examine the theological, philosophical, and practical implications of the query, “Breaking Down Barriers,” along with a feasibility study with recommendations to the 2024 Annual Conference.

Five new items of business were all adopted by the delegates including the new “Integrated Annual Ministry Agreement and revised Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries and Benefits.” The committee presenting this will offer training in all districts in 2022 and 2023 for the use of this tool. Congregations will start by looking at what they can afford to pay, putting information into a calculation by Eder Financial (formerly known as BBT). The table will then determine the number of hours a minister could be asked to work, with an agreement with the congregation to find others in the church able to care for other tasks needed for the work of the church.

Great debate and attempts to change the amount of the recommended Cost of Living Increase for the pastors’ salary tables gave way to approval of the 8.2% increase recommended by the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee.

With support and guidance from former Annual Conference Director, Chris Douglas, Rhonda Pittman-Gingrich managed the changes in convention and hotel leadership. New conference secretary, David Shumate, will support Tim McElwee, moderator and moderator-elect, Madalyn Metzger in the coming years.

Music, worship, Bible study, meals, equipping sessions, concerts and drama added to the spiritual health of the gathered body in Omaha. New congregations were celebrated, guests from other countries recognized, reports given, and the growth of the Church of the Brethren around the world highlighted. The Church of the Brethren is focused on Jesus and finding ways to embrace our neighborhoods with service and ministry for Jesus.

Next year the annual gathering of the denomination will be in Cincinnati, Ohio, July 4-9. “Living in Love” will be the theme under the leadership of Tim McElwee.

With thanks for the opportunity to serve,  
Don Shankster