

Church of the Brethren  
South/Central Indiana District  
**DISTRICT CONFERENCE**  
September 13-14, 2002  
MINUTES

The thirty-second annual district conference of the South/Central Indiana congregations of the Church of the Brethren assembled for its annual business meeting at the Anderson Church of the Brethren in Anderson, Indiana. Conference officers were Paul Schrock - Moderator, Allen Kahler - Moderator Elect, Dwight Beery - Secretary, and Leslie Pettit - Coordinator.

In the opening worship service, Rev. Harriet Finney, Annual Conference Moderator, brought the evening message, "Clothed with Christ," based on Galatians 3:23-29. Paul Schrock served as worship leader. Kristen Seward led singing, accompanied by Sue Wagner. The Bell Choir was directed by Chris and Jaye Caldwell, assisted by Donnesa Bilyeu. Jeff Bach was the organist.

Those present included over 141 registered delegates (of 214 eligible) from fifty congregations. The evening offering of ~\$1000 was designated for our district's Ministerial Scholarship Fund.

Following worship, Moderator Paul Schrock opened the business meeting at 8:15 p.m. Brother Schrock read the conference rules. The agenda was approved after five items were removed and two items were reversed in order.

The conference approved the following appointments, by a unanimous voice vote:

- Auditing Committee.....(to be appointed by the District Board)
- Discipleship & Reconciliation Cmte...Helen Beery, 2nd, 2006
- Ethics Committee.....(to be appointed by the District Board)
- Financial Secretary.....(to be appointed by the District Board)
- Treasurer.....David Doudt, 1st, 2006
- Indiana Camp Board.....Carol Seward
- ..Steve Cripe
- Manchester College.....William N. Harper, 2007
- trustee                                  Donald E. Miller, 2007
- appointments                        Ralph R. Naragon, 2007
- Amadea Tette, 2007
- Ministry Interview Committee....Jean Updike, Salamonie, 2nd, 2007
- Timbercrest Board.....Devoe Cobbs, 2nd, 2003
- Robin Lahman, 1st, 2005
- Wilbur McFadden, 1st, 2004
- Rosalyn Neuenschwander, 2nd, 2004
- Paula Shively, 2nd, 2005
- Judie Silvers, 2nd, 2003

At-Large Director

Jim Robbins

Youth Camp Council.....Stacy Schwarze, 1st, 2004

The following individuals were elected in a ballot vote:

- Moderator-Elect.....David Donaldson
- Standing Committee of A/C    (no new members this year)
- General Board (Church of the Brethren - Elgin)
- Jay Carter
- Program and Arrangements Committee

Central Section Sharon Fife  
South Section Phyllis Bell  
Personnel & Nominations Committee  
East Section Tim Vogleman  
North Section Carolyn Bollinger  
District Board  
East Section Barb Wood  
South Section Elbert Stockberger  
West Section Kristen Roop

Brother Paul closed the evening session with prayer at 9:15 p.m.

The Saturday morning session opened with prayer at 8:30 a.m.. Morning Worship was presented by Kelly Beutler, pastor of the Liberty Mills congregation.

Written reports were distributed to delegates in the conference booklet.  
Oral reports were given by the following four Church of the Brethren agencies:

General Board (GB) report was in written form.

Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC) report was presented by Steve Mason, Executive Director of ABC. Since July 23, 1998, Annual Conference has had five separate and independent agencies (ABC, BBT, OEP, BTS, GB). Some congregations are not aware that ABC is not funded by the General Board. It is hoped that each congregation would build ABC into its annual budget.

On Earth Peace Assembly (OEP or OEPA) report was presented by Matt Guynn, OEP Staff member. OEP works with peace witness, peace resources, peace education, and the ministry of reconciliation (including mediating and workshops). OEP provides Peace Retreats for congregations, and Matthew 18 workshops.

Bethany Theological Seminary (BTS) report was presented by Marsha Shetler,

Oral reports were given by the following three Church of the Brethren affiliated agencies:

Manchester College report was presented by Parker Marden, President. He described a Peace Studies collaboration with Goshen and Earlham Colleges based in Indianapolis, directed by Julie Garber, and funded by the Lilly Foundation.

Indiana Camp Board report was presented by Camp Mack's new director, Rex Miller.

Timbercrest - Church of the Brethren Home, Inc. report was presented by Anne Myers, Director of Fund Raising and Public Relations. Report contents included the success of Timbercrest in state inspections placing them in the top 5 percent of comparable retirement homes in Indiana.

District Ministers report was presented by Ron and Harriet Finney. Harriet's year of service as Annual Conference Moderator began with the 2002 Annual Conference at Louisville. This has been a year framed by stressful events. One priority for the 2002-2003 year is a "Healthy Congregations" emphasis.

Indiana Partners for Christian Unity and Mission (IPCUM) report was presented by our representative to that group, Ernie Barr. IPCUM deals with hate crimes, violence, child/spouse/elder abuse, death penalty, and other issues of common interest to many individual denominations.

Advisory Committee for Rural Congregations report was presented by Les Cooper.

Just before the morning break, Karl Stone noted that the District Ministers have an unruly flock because of our displaced aggressions. We expressed our appreciation to our District Ministers, Ron and Harriet Finney, with a standing ovation.

The following new business item one was approved by the district board for presentation to the S/C Indiana District Conference in September 2002. It was the approved by this conference as a query to be forwarded to the Annual Conference Standing Committee.

### **Query on Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions**

**Whereas** the 2001 Manual of Organization and Polity recognizes Annual Conference as “the ultimate legislative authority of the Church of the Brethren,” and

**Whereas** the model constitution and bylaws for congregations passed by Annual Conference in 1969 states that “the congregation shall covenant to support faithfully the program of the Church of the Brethren, recognizing Annual Conference enactments of the Church of the Brethren as having governing force in its life,” and

**Whereas** the 1996 Annual Conference Statement of Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren states that, “The congregation has an ethical responsibility to support the denomination,” and

**Whereas** the 1996 Annual Conference Statement of Ethics for Congregations in the Church of the Brethren states that, “There may be rare instances in which the congregation may conclude that conscience will not permit participation in a particular aspect of denominational program,” and

**Whereas** the Church of the Brethren holds the New Testament as its creed, but finds variation in interpretation of the scriptures;

**Therefore**, we the District Board of the South/Central Indiana District and the Manchester Church of the Brethren petition the Annual Conference through South/Central Indiana District to appoint a committee to study and offer guidance on how congregations can disagree with Annual Conference decisions yet remain, as much as possible, in unbroken fellowship with their sister congregations, including how District Boards should respond in these situations.

A “Resolution Regarding Restoration of the Relationship of the Manchester Church of the Brethren and the South/Central Indiana District” action of the District Board was described by Board Chair Gale Burkholder.

Resolution Regarding Restoration of the Relationship of the Manchester Church of the Brethren and the South/Central Indiana District.

Whereas: The Manchester Church of the Brethren has made a decision to approve same-sex covenant ceremonies to be performed within their facility, and

Whereas: There is an Annual Conference position statement from 1983 and reaffirmed in 2002, stating that same-sex covenants are not appropriate, according to our understanding of Christian teaching, and;

Whereas: The South/Central District Board has received a large number of responses from sister congregations objecting to the decision of the Manchester congregation, including strong direction for the District Board to respond to such a decision, and

Whereas: The connectional bonds between the Manchester Church and her sister congregations within the district are becoming increasingly strained, to the point of creating risk to the congregation and the district at large.

The South/Central Indiana District Board resolves:

1. That a District Advisory Board will be appointed, to serve for a period of two years, beginning October 1, 2002 through September 30, 2004. The Advisory Board will include three persons from outside the Manchester Church of the Brethren and three persons from within the congregation.
2. A qualified person, from outside the Church of the Brethren denomination, will be selected by the District Board to serve as the facilitator of the Advisory Board.
3. The Advisory Board will relate to the Manchester Church of the Brethren primarily, though not exclusively through its Executive Board and Congregational business meetings.
4. The Advisory Board will be accountable and reportable to the District Board.

Goals of the District Advisory Board:

1. To reduce the risk of fractured relationships among congregations of the South/Central Indiana District.
2. To reduce the risk of harm from isolation and loss of connectional bonds.
3. To provide counsel to both the District Board and the Executive Board, regarding ways to improve communications and heal relationships.
4. To provide a “connectional presence” within the Manchester congregation, especially related to controversial issues that implicate the wider church.
5. To identify issues which have caused division and give counsel regarding possible solutions.
6. To provide assistance for the District staff and the District Board, enabling them to give attention to the ongoing work of ministry, as well as to provide leadership in a unique situation.

New Business item two was introduced in four stages.

1. Wayne Grumbling presented the District Board’s motion.
2. Delegates asked questions of information and clarity.
3. Statements for and against the motion were given, starting with “I am in favor of (or opposed to) this motion because . . .” to help us understand the context of statements made.
4. Actions to amend, table, move the previous question, . . . could be stated, followed by supporting statements, again to help us all understand the context of statements made.
5. The New Business item two proposed by the District Board was:

#### **“Intra-District Consequences for Congregations Performing Same-Sex Covenant Ceremonies”**

Whenever the property or buildings (owned, leased, or rented) of a member congregation of the South/Central Indiana District are knowingly\*<sup>1</sup> used for the purpose of conducting a covenant ceremony\*<sup>2</sup> for persons in a homosexual relationship: that congregation will be understood to have removed itself from (forfeited) a leadership position within the district.

Ninety days after the District Board verifies that this has occurred, all members of that congregation will be unable to serve on the District Board for a period of three years. This also applies to all positions which the District Board appoints, oversees (positions which report to it), or employs; and this applies to District Representatives to Standing Committee and General Board. The congregation may still send members to district conference to participate in discussions and make or second motions, but they would

not have the privilege of voting. Since this policy is designed to respond to congregational decisions, individual members will have an option\*<sup>3</sup>.

If a congregation whose leadership in the district is already in a three-year period of abeyance allows another such covenant ceremony during this time period, the same policy will be followed. If the three-year time frames overlap, the District Board may decide if they will run concurrently or consecutively on a case-by-case basis. If the District Board does not specify otherwise, they will run concurrently, ending three years and ninety days after the last verified occurrence.

The District Board will review this policy at least every five years. If changes are deemed necessary, the proposed changes will be brought to District Conference for approval.

#### Footnotes:

\*<sup>1</sup> Knowingly is understood to mean that persons who could make the decision to give permission or would be in a position to initiate that process are informed prior to the event. From there, allowing the ceremony to take place officially or unofficially is really the same in its impact on the district. A local church may clarify that it did not support at the time the action taken without official permission and is not in support of it now by officially expressing its disapproval of the covenant ceremony itself (not just that the action was undertaken without official permission).

\*<sup>2</sup> Covenant ceremony for two persons of the same gender, refers to a service (ceremony) intended to publicly acknowledge that these two individuals are bound together in a relationship that includes sexual intimacy. It is utilized as a rough equivalent to a marriage ceremony for a man and a woman. This service, when conducted: by church officials and/or on property used by the church for other purposes associates church approval and God's blessing upon the relationship celebrated.

\*<sup>3</sup> Individuals in a position of service to the district would have the option (during the ninety day period) of moving their membership to another congregation within the district and continuing in their current ministry position. Many overlapping loves and senses of duty are involved here and most of us serve God in congregations that occasionally make choices we do not agree with. Therefore, we do not know (based upon an individual's actions to move membership to continue serving the district) what the sister or brother believes about this issue. Unless they choose to tell us, we do not know what they think.

During stage two of the discussion, at 12:13 p.m., we broke for lunch.

After lunch, the new District Board met briefly to reorganize and schedule its first meeting. Gale Burkholder will continue as Board chair and Elaine Stone will be the new vice chair. Our next two Board meetings were scheduled for Saturday, September 28 at the Richmond Church of the Brethren, and for Friday/Saturday, November 8-9, at Camp Mack or Koinonia. The latter meeting will include a retreat. The former meeting will be to choose three members of the advisory committee mandated by District Board action.

The afternoon session began at 1:45 p.m..

Pastor Carol Pfeiffer from Nettle Creek led the afternoon worship based on Galatians 3:28-29 and the conference theme, "One in Christ Jesus."

The discussion of new business item two continued and shifted to stage three and then four.

Pastor Ken Rieman proposed the following motion to refer, which was seconded:

“I move that we refer new business item #2 to study by a committee appointed by District Board and composed of members who fairly represent the breadth of perspectives found in our district on the issues presented in the aforementioned proposal.

“This committee shall be charged with exploring ways to address the concerns of all involved while also trying to strengthen the bonds of love and unity which hold us to our brotherhood and sisterhood in Jesus Christ.

“This conference also respectfully requests that the Manchester Congregation refrain from performing same-sex covenant unions while this committee works in earnest to promote understanding and clarity on how we might proceed in our life together.

“This committee shall report to the 2003 S/C Indiana District Conference.”

This amendment was not approved, so we returned to the original new business item two.

A point of order was raised for the purpose of clarifying whether delegates had a third voting option of “abstain”; and how such votes would be interpreted in the final tally. After consulting with the conference officers and a parliamentary advisor, it was the ruling of the moderator that delegates could cast a “yes/Y” vote to indicate their support of the motion, or cast a “no/N” vote to indicate opposition to the motion, or cast a vote of “abstain/A” to indicate a lack of support for the motion’s proposed sanctions while not casting a vote that might be interpreted by some as being supportive of the Manchester congregation’s decision to perform same-sex covenants. The moderator advised the delegate body that “abstain” votes would be counted as a vote cast (in contrast to not voting at all, which is always an option) and that such votes would dilute (bleed off) the number of “yes” and “no” votes that might otherwise have been cast. To pass, the motion would need to receive 2/3 (66.7%) “yes” votes from among all votes cast. The delegate body was asked if they were clear on their voting options as described. This ruling of the moderator was not challenged. In response to another point of order, the moderator agreed that voting by paper ballot would be the most appropriate way to accurately record the three-option votes.

As a change of polity, this motion required the approval (or “yes” votes) of 2/3 of all voting delegates. The vote was 89 (63.1%) yes, 32 (22.7%) no, and 20 (14.2%) abstained. So the motion was not approved.

District Board report by Gale Burkholder described the board function and organization.

The board’s ministry to congregations is accomplished and facilitated by a strong core of volunteers.

The Financial Reports were presented by Jim McKinney. These were approved.

2002 District Budget of \$148,630 was approved. This was an increase of \$6,421 over the 2002 budget.

Standing Committee report was presented by Louise Baldwin-Rieman and Martha Cory. The next Annual Conference will be held from July 5-9, 2003 in Boise, Idaho.

Decade to Overcome Violence report was presented by Nancy Boettner from the Northview congregation. This is a program operated by the World Council of Churches and brought to the Church of the Brethren by On Earth Peace Assembly.

District Youth Advisors Report was presented by Pastor Valarie VanVoorhis from the Upper Fall Creek congregation.

Moderator Schrock thanked those who helped with the conference for their hard work. The gavel and cup were presented to Allen Kahler, the new moderator. Hands were laid on Allen, pastor of the Marion congregation and the new moderator-elect, David Donaldson from the Mexico congregation.

Brother Allen Kahler noted that last year things fell out of the sky. We have to pick up the pieces and move ahead. As we do, we are challenged to move ahead in Jesus' Name. Dialog and the query move with us.

Brother Allen Kahler closed the conference with prayer at 4:04 p.m.