“To the Interests of Others”

As of Friday, May 15\textsuperscript{th} at 5 PM, the “Safer at Home” policy (Governor Hogan’s phase 1 approach to re-opening Maryland) began. Shortly after this announcement our District Executive, Gene Hagenberger, followed with a recommendation of his own. You will find his letter later in this newsletter. His thoughts are guided by a passage from the book of Philippians, Chapter 2, verse 4, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others”. In Gene’s letter, he strongly recommends that the church remain behind the rest of the world and continue our Virtual Worship through the end of June. He expressed amazement at the many ways our pastors throughout the district have navigated the virtual scene to continue worship with and caring for their congregations. Many thanks to our Pastors, our musicians, other worship participants and especially our technicians who have brought us a Virtual Worship each week.

The Leadership Team met virtually Tuesday Evening, May 19\textsuperscript{th}. In our meeting we discussed the policy of our Governor and the recommendation of our District Executive. The Pastors and I have also met with epidemiologist, Kate Jacobsen, who is a member of the Oakton Church of the Brethren. We shared our insights from our discussion with her to the Leadership Team. One of the main points she made is that it will take 2 to 4 weeks after the state has reopened to know the influence of reopening on the spread of the coronavirus. She strongly recommends waiting until we see those results before deciding on when to gather again. Not wanting to promise the church a specific date, the Leadership Team has decided to continue our Virtual Worship services until further notice. We will inform you when we are ready to gather again. The Leadership Team has also decided to be proactive and form a committee to begin planning for when we can gather again in Worship. The committee will consider the changes that will be implemented to safely gather.

The pastors are now able to offer at-home visits in crisis situations. They still are unable to offer physical visits to hospitals. They will be required to wear masks for the safety of all who are present. Please wear a mask also for the safety of all. Call or email them if you are in crisis and require a home visit.

My thoughts and prayers go out to each of you and the ways the pandemic has and is affecting you.

Blessings,

Bruce Hollenberg

“Continuing the work of Jesus Christ by inviting people to... discover...grow...share...live...God’s Word...God’s Love...God’s Grace.”
Sermons for June 2020

June 7
Pastor Scott
Matthew 28:16-20
“And therefore Go”

June 14
Pastor Britnee
Genesis 18:1-5
“Abraham and Sarah”

June 21
Pastor Scott
Matthew 10:34-39
“Not Peace, But the Sword”

June 28
Pastor Britnee
Genesis 22:1-14
“Abraham and Isaac”

Deadline for Joanne Grossnickle Scholarship application is June 10, 2020.
Applicants are reminded that they need 2 letters from college professors and both high school and college transcripts in addition to a completed application.

M & M Meeting
The M & Meeting for June has been cancelled.

Vacation Bible School
There will be no vacation bible school this summer.

May Clothing Drive Rescheduled for JUNE
Many of you have been cleaning your closets during this time of “Stay at Home” during the coronavirus. You were already planning for the May clothing drive, however, now it will be our June Clothing Drive. We are hoping Second Chances will be open to receive donations in July. Remember you can include gently used towels and bed linens. Donations should be left in the narthex under the coat racks. If the church is not open in June, donations may be left in the side room where the Puzzle Swap and food donations are happening. Clothing Drive to end June 30.

Covid-19 Together Fund
Dear Church Family,
As we enter the new phases of this virus and less restrictions, the struggle and difficulties people faced while staying at home may still linger. Many have donated to the Covid-19 Together Fund to support you, our congregation members. Finances can bring much stress to a household and we hope you know we want to support anyone dealing with any financial strain due to the virus.

If you are in need of some assistance, please contact the pastors at unionbridgepastors@gmail.com or call the church 410-775-2717 and fill us in. One set amount will be given to you. If you feel this amount is too much, you are welcome to request less.

We hope you will reach out and utilize this support. We are here for you and our community. If you know someone in the community who is also struggling with finances, we have the Benevolent Fund for them. Have them contact the pastors.

Stay safe. Stay healthy. God is with you each step of the way.

Blessings,
Leadership Team

Annual Conference Witness to the Host City
This Witness opportunity for June has been cancelled due to the cancellation of the 2020 Annual Conference in Grand Rapids.

The Witness Team is always open to opportunities to share God’s love. If you have suggestions for programs/projects we can support, please contact a Team member: Sara, Karen, Kaye, Rhonda and Pam.

Just a Reminder
Deadline for the July/August Newsletter will be June 22, 2020. Please submit any articles or announcements you would like included (including upcoming events in September) to the office by that date.
May 15, 2020

Dear Mid-Atlantic Pastors, Congregational Chairpersons, and Members:

Greetings. Every day you are very much in my thoughts and prayers that God’s Spirit will sustain you through this coronavirus time.

Our district leadership team is recommending that congregations continue not to gather in buildings through June 30. As Mid-Atlantic district comprises five states and D.C., the leadership team also asks congregations to do no less than follow the reopening guidelines of their particular jurisdiction. Links to state reopening policies and guidelines follow my letter.

Since MD as of 5 pm this evening is allowing limited reopening including churches at no more than fifty percent capacity following social distancing guidelines including the use of masks, why would the leadership team and I recommend that congregations not gather in the church through June 30? A biblical admonition that has guided my thinking is, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Ph 2:4). I believe in many things, and particularly in regard to reopening, the church should be a bit behind the world around us. Our congregational demographics tilt toward those most vulnerable to a negative outcome if they catch this virus, in other words those more likely to become seriously ill and die. The truth is that no one of any age is immune to negative and permanently damaging effects from covid 19. The biggest news story this past week has been the growing number of children suffering inflammatory disease from covid. I encourage us if we err to err on the side of caution, to hang on another month-and-a-half, and see where we are and what is known about this virus in the next month or so. The district leadership team will be meeting again on June 6 and following that meeting will communicate with our fifty-nine congregations their best discernment about reopening.

In the meantime, we need to plan for reopening. Some of the considerations must be:

- Continuing social distancing – while family groups could sit together, there needs to be at least six feet between people.
- Masks must be worn. Churches will need to have some on hand. What will be done if someone refuses to wear one?
- Will we sing hymns and songs? While social distancing requires six feet of separation, scientists believe the virus can travel thirty feet. Singing expels breath more forcibly. Do we mouth hymns? What about the use of hymnals? Restaurants are transitioning to disposable menus.
- No more greeting the pastor at the sanctuary door. No more shaking hands with each other. No more bumping elbows – that’s zero distance.
- Will we be able to have congregational meals? I don’t think so for now. What about our beloved gathering and conversation times before and after services?
- Thorough cleaning will need to be done after every gathering.
- This is all going to take a lot of thought, communication with, interpretation to, and education of members, and sometime we’re going to forget, reach out, touch, and then what?

“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”
In the meantime, let us:

Continue to pray for potent therapies and vaccines for covid.

Continue to reach out, and I commend our congregations and ministers for ministries and mission in this direction, toward those whose lives have been devastated through job loss, illness of themselves or loved ones, the death of a dear one, to those who wake up wondering how they’re going to feed their family or pay the rent or mortgage and keep a roof over their heads. To whom is God calling us to extend our ministry and mission during this time?

Keep in touch with and care for the members of our congregations, mindful that some have been battered beyond discouragement into the depths of depression.

Find ways to care for your pastor(s). Although most pastors are working from home this has been the opposite of a vacation for pastors. Most pastors I know have been working more rather than less, with the stresses of having to learn whole new ways of relating, communicating, preaching and leading worship, caring for their people, and new computer and IT skills. They’ve been tremendously committed, courageous, and creative, I feel. Like many of us who have been transitioned from office to home it seems like everything I do takes more time, attention, and energy than previously. Please ask your pastor what they need, care for them as they care for you, and pray for them.

Pray for those who are sick, in hospital, for the protection of caregivers, for doctors and nurses and room cleaners and chaplains and the effectiveness of their ministrations.

Keep gathering together and worshiping God and caring for your sisters and brothers and neighbors in all the creative ways you have been since the start of this pandemic. I am humbled by and amazed at the congregational and ministerial creativity that has emerged during this time of social distancing, and at the way so many of us “old dogs have learned, or are learning new [IT] tricks.” I’m a little behind in the learning of new IT tricks, but I’m inspired to get with the program.

Sustain and continue to encourage the faithful and generous stewardship and financial support that congregations and the district are experiencing through this time.

Identify ministries that have developed during coronavirus time that should continue after “reopening.”

Keep the faith that God is with us, God is good, and that if our hearts are turned and tuned toward God, God will bring good out of this dark time. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1). As Mr. Rogers advised, “Look for the helpers.”

I love you. Call or email me if and when you need me.

“Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

God bless and keep you,

Gene

Gene Hagenberger
Mid-Atlantic District Executive Minister

State Reopening Policies and Guidelines

MARYLAND
https://governor.maryland.gov/recovery/
https://governor.maryland.gov/coronavirus/
May 7, 2020

Church of the Brethren Annual Conference will not be held this summer

The Standing Committee of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference met by video conference call for a specially called meeting on Thursday, May 7. The Standing Committee, which is made up of district delegates to Annual Conference, discussed a recommendation from the denomination’s Leadership Team, in consultation with the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee, to cancel the Annual Conference scheduled for July 1-5 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Standing Committee affirmed that recommendation and is announcing that an in-person Annual Conference will not be held this summer. It is with great sadness that this decision had to be made.

As previous news releases regarding Annual Conference have indicated, the safety and health of Conference participants have been the highest priority. It became apparent within the past few weeks that because of the unsettling character and demands of the COVID-19 crisis, the denomination could not safely have a large gathering in July. This special meeting of Standing Committee was called because, by Church of the Brethren polity, Standing Committee is given the authority to make decisions for the Annual Conference between Conferences.

The decision included a deferring of the Annual Conference theme, program, and featured leadership to the 2021 Annual Conference scheduled to take place in Greensboro, N.C., on June 30-July 4. The business of the 2020 Annual Conference, such as affirming the Compelling Vision, is deferred to the 2021 Annual Conference.

The Nominating Committee of Standing Committee also brought a recommendation to the full Standing Committee that the ballot that would have been presented for election in 2020 will be presented to the 2021 Conference instead. The Nominating Committee will be contacting each person on the ballot to ask if they are willing for their name to be considered in the 2021 vote. People holding positions elected by Annual Conference whose terms expire in 2020 will be asked if they are willing to extend their terms one additional year until the election in 2021 can determine who will replace them.

The Annual Conference Office is preparing to offer full refunds of registration and all other fees paid by those who already had registered for Annual Conference this year. Refund information, and an option to donate, will be sent by email.

We are blessed that our host facilities in Grand Rapids have agreed to waive over a half million dollars in cancellation penalties if Annual Conference will return to Grand Rapids in our next open year. The Program and Arrangements Committee is glad to announce that Annual Conference will be back in Grand Rapids on July 3-7, 2024.
The Program and Arrangements Committee is working on plans for one or two online gatherings as a denomination during the week of July 1-5 when Annual Conference would have been held, although no business will be conducted. More information will be available in the coming weeks.

This will be the first time in the 233 years of recorded Church of the Brethren annual meetings that the Brethren will not be able to meet together in person. Even throughout the Civil War years, World Wars I and II, the Great Depression, and more, Brethren have gathered each summer to discern God’s will, worship, and fellowship together. We mourn that this year the pandemic makes such a gathering impossible.

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**Full text of recommendations and background information presented to Standing Committee:**

**Recommendation from the Leadership Team:**

The Leadership Team, in consultation with the Program and Arrangements Committee, recommends to the 2019 Standing Committee that the 2020 Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, MI July 1-5 be cancelled. We further recommend that the theme, program, and featured resource leaders for the 2020 Conference be deferred to the June 30-July 4, 2021 Annual Conference in Greensboro, NC. And we recommend that the Compelling Vision and other items of business (other than the ballot, which will be addressed in a separate motion) become the business of the 2021 Annual Conference.

**Recommendation from the Nominating Committee of Standing Committee:**

The Nominating Committee of Standing Committee met on April 30 and recommends to Standing Committee that the ballot for 2020 be deferred to 2021 with the understanding that:

1. Annual Conference-elected officers, committee members, and board members whose terms would be ending this year will be asked to serve an additional year in their position

2. Committee members and board members who will be elected by the current ballot when the vote is taken in 2021 will serve one year less to complete their terms in the year they had expected to finish when they were nominated (the moderator-elect, however, will serve the full three years of the moderator role, as usual)

3. Another ballot will be prepared during the coming year to replace committee members and board members whose AC-elected terms conclude in 2021.

This recommendation applies only to Annual Conference-elected positions.

Districts will continue to determine the elections and terms of service for their Standing Committee members and other district-elected positions.

Annual Conference agencies will continue to determine the elections and terms of service for their board-elected board members. Any board-elected board members that were scheduled to be confirmed by the 2020 Conference will be confirmed by the 2021 Conference instead.

**Background information:**

As we have reported via news releases, the health and safety of attendees, volunteers, and partners is our first priority. We have carefully monitored guidelines issued in response to the COVID-19 challenge from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as authorities in the state of Michigan. The uncertainty of governmental decisions regarding stay-at-home restrictions and how many people
may gather at an event, as well as the expectation that social distancing will continue to be required through the summer, according to federal guidelines stated thus far, makes it difficult to know how many Brethren would attend and whether the convention center would be allowed to host our Conference.

Our second primary concern has been the financial circumstances we would face if we would decide to cancel. We have now been able to negotiate with the convention center and three hotels in Grand Rapids that they will waive the $665,000 cancellation penalties. In return, we have agreed to return to Grand Rapids our next available year, 2024.

There are, nevertheless, financial consequences in the decision to cancel Annual Conference. The Annual Conference budget has certain fixed costs apart from the costs of the on-site event itself. The year-round costs for the work of the Annual Conference Office, such as salaries and benefits, office related expenses, travel for the moderator and committees, etc., are normally covered by Annual Conference registration fees. By cancelling the 2020 Conference, we will need to refund registration fees and then pay for the year-round costs out of Annual Conference reserve funds.

If we were to move ahead with holding the 2020 Annual Conference, we would have income from registration fees, yet that income would undoubtedly be much less than normal because of the number of persons who are indicating that they will not be attending Annual Conference due to concerns related to COVID-19. In addition to the costs noted earlier, the registration fees we received would also need to cover audiovisual costs, exhibit set up, union fees in the convention center, travel costs for the many volunteers who serve Annual Conference, etc., in addition to our year-round expenses. We would likely lose even more money by holding the Conference with a smaller number of people.

Contributors to this issue of Newsline include Chris Douglas and editor Cheryl Brumbaugh-Cayford, director of News Services for the Church of the Brethren. Newsline is the email news service of the Church of the Brethren. Newsline stories may be reprinted if Newsline is cited as the source. Send news tips and submissions to cobnews@brethren.org. All submissions are subject to editing. Find the Newsline archive at www.brethren.org/news. Sign up for Newsline and other Church of the Brethren emails, or make changes to your subscription, at www.brethren.org/intouch