

Elections and appointments

Annual Conference moderator-elect: **Dennis Beckner**, Columbia City (Ind.) Church of the Brethren

Program & Arrangements Committee: **Amber T. Harris**, Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren, Durham, N.C.

Pastoral Compensation & Benefits Advisory Committee: **Harry Biddle**, Oakton Church of the Brethren, Vienna, Va.

Review & Evaluation Committee: **Ilexene Alphonse**, Miami (Fla.) Haitian Church of the Brethren; **Lupita Ortiz Cruz**, Mt. Hermon Church of the Brethren, Bassett, Va.; **Chris Douglas**, Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren, Elgin, Ill.; **Anna Lisa Gross**, Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Fort Wayne, Ind.; **Daniel L. Rudy**, Monte Vista Church of the Brethren, Callaway, Va.

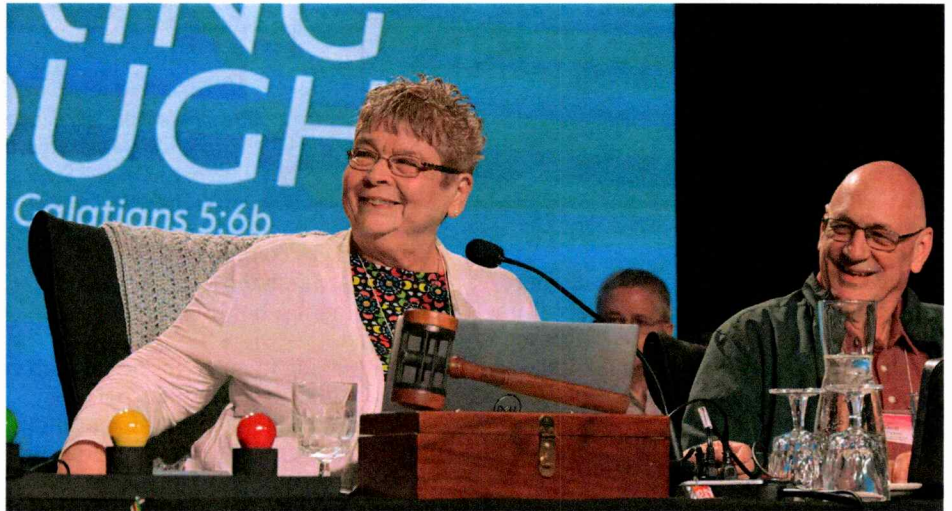
World Council of Churches delegate, affirmed: **Linetta Alley**, Linville Creek Church of the Brethren, Broadway, Va.; *alternate:* **Nadine Monn**, Living Stream Church of the Brethren

Mission & Ministry Board, Area 1: **Eric Ramirez**, Ebenezer Church of the Brethren, Lancaster, Pa.; *Area 4:* **Sarah Mason**, Monitor Church of the Brethren, McPherson, Kan.; *affirmed:* **Daniel Landon Butler**, Ivester Church of the Brethren, Grundy Center, Iowa

Bethany Seminary trustees, affirmed: **Katharine "Katy" Gray Brown**, Manchester Church of the Brethren, N. Manchester, Ind.; **John D. Miller Jr.**, York (Pa.) First Church of the Brethren; **Dennis Webb**, Naperville (Ill.) Church of the Brethren

Eder Financial board, affirmed: **Jan Fahs** and **Katherine Haff**, both of Manchester Church of the Brethren; **Derrick Petry**, Beavercreek (Ohio) Church of the Brethren

On Earth Peace board, affirmed: **Stephen Niamke**, Roanoke, Va.



Moderator Dava Hensley presides over the 2025 Annual Conference, with moderator-elect Don Fitzkee (at right). Also assisting the moderator was Annual Conference secretary David Shumate. Photo by Glenn Riegel

Conference renews status for three agencies, approves study committee recommendations

The 2025 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren renewed the agency status of Bethany Theological Seminary, Eder Financial, and On Earth Peace, and approved numerous recommendations from study committees.



Delegates vote using green cards to signify approval. Photo by Keith Hollenberg

vides a ministry on behalf of the Church of the Brethren that Annual Conference cannot or does not choose to provide or accomplish itself." Agencies report to Annual Conference, exhibit and provide equipping sessions, and are authorized to publicly identify themselves as agencies of the Church of the Brethren.

The only significant questions regarding agency status came during discussion of On Earth Peace in a session marked by high emotion on the part of people both supporting and opposing the renewal of agency status, as well as about the broader work to support immigrants.

Query: Concerns about Current Practices Related to Matters of Sexuality: After energetic discussion, the delegates referred this query—from Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren and Illinois and Wisconsin District—to the new Review and Evaluation Committee. The vote approved the Standing Committee recommendation to that effect, and also the recommendation that the concerns of the query be accepted as a legitimate question.

The query asks how the church can move forward in a manner that reflects greater mutuality and space for differing understandings about sexuality among individuals and congregations.

Query: Reducing Harm: Interim Steps to Reduce Suffering: The Standing Committee's two-fold (continued on p.2)

Renewal of agency status: Delegates approved renewal of status for the three Conference agencies in separate votes. Covenant agreements for the three were presented as information. The covenants were established between the Standing Committee of district delegates and the agencies following a 2022 polity update.

An agency is "an organization recognized by Annual Conference which pro-



Photos by Donna Parcell



2025 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Greensboro, N.C.



Preachers (from left): Moderator Dava Hensley spoke Wednesday; Lupita Ortiz Cruz brought Friday's message; guest speaker Gennifer Brooks preached on Saturday; Thursday's Cowbell Service featured (from left) Tony Price, Becky Baile Crouse, and Josiah Ludwick; Dave Kerkove gave Sunday's closing sermon. Photos by Glenn Riegel

(continued from page 1)

recommendation was adopted with more than two-thirds majority. The query from the Arlington Church and Mid-Atlantic District raises concerns about the treatment and suffering of LGBTQ+ people, asking what can be done about outdated language and science in previous years' Conference statements.

Discussion was lengthy and passionate, with much personal and vulnerable sharing. Also expressed was weariness with the 40 years of conflict in the church since the 1983 paper on human sexuality.

The full text of the decision:

"1. We lament that conversion therapy was considered a safe or viable option in previous Annual Conference statements, and do not endorse 'conversion to heterosexual orientation [as] another option' (Human Sexuality from a Christian perspective, 1983).

"2. We acknowledge that Annual Conference's position statements should reflect 'the denomination's current best discernment of the way of life God calls us to live' (2025 Annual Conference booklet, p.66), and recognize that some existing position statements on human sexuality appear out of step with current realities and merit further discernment. In the interest of unity and care for all in the body we await the Spirit's leading for renewed study. While the current statements on human sexuality remain on record, we seek to honor and love all in the body by lifting up guidance that builds safer and more compassionate communities, including:

- 'challenging openly the widespread fear, hatred, and harassment of [people in

the LGBTQ+ community],'

- 'advocating the rights of [LGBTQ+ people] to jobs, housing, and legal justice,' and

- 'engaging in open, forthright conversations with [people in the LGBTQ+ community]...stop alienating one another and instead venture toward understanding.' (All quotes from Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective, 1983)

"As Paul counseled a divided church, 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26, NIV)."

Calling Denominational Leader-

ship: Eight recommendations from this study committee of Eric Bishop (chair), Erika Clary, and Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred were adopted, with one amendment.

The committee was formed in 2023 in response to recognition by the Nominating Committee—which prepares the Annual Conference ballot—of significant challenges in the nominating and elections process. The committee's report provides extensive research into the process and concerns.

The recommendations that were adopted range from reducing the required minimum number of nominees to fill ballot positions, to referrals to the Review and Evaluation Committee to consider a slate, among others. As a whole, they encourage the church to continue to seek a diverse leadership and to share greater gratitude with those willing to serve who are not ultimately chosen.

Breaking Down Barriers: The four recommendations brought by this study

committee of Jeanne Davies, Brandon Grady, and Dan Poole (chair) were adopted without amendment.

The committee's reporting since its formation in 2022 offers detailed information identifying multiple barriers to full and equal participation in events such as Annual Conference.

The final decision:

- Refers to the Review and Evaluation Committee a review of processes and language used in Annual Conference.

- Asks Conference planners to uphold statements and policies that remove barriers to participation.

- Revises eligibility for the Annual Conference Travel Scholarship to those traveling 1,200 miles or more.

- Refers to the Mission and Ministry Board and other leadership consideration of two new options for Annual Conference: 1. a biennial conference with a different staffing arrangement; and 2. alternate years of an in-person and online Conference, with the fully online year for business only and the in-person year for other Conference functions.

Standing with People of Color: The final report of this group made no recommendations but commended its work to develop study materials, lists of resources, and practices for healing racism as tools for the church to continue a much-needed effort. The group was formed in 2022 to carry out a study/action process to identify and dismantle racism and other oppressions in the church, among other measures. See www.onearthpeace.org/swpoc.

Find full business items at www.brethren.org/ac2025/business.

By the numbers

1,342 people registered including 409 delegates and 933 nondelegates (52 virtual)

3 fellowships were welcomed:

- **Iglesia del Salvador Viviente** in McFarland, Calif., Pacific Southwest District
- **Monte de Dios** in Eden, N.C., Virilina District
- **The Way** in Roanoke, Va., Virilina District

\$52,216.17 total offerings:

- **\$17,032.78** for the **Witness to the Host City** to benefit Backpack Beginnings
- **\$19,054.56** for **Annual Conference:** \$11,941.13 for operating expenses and \$7,113.43 for efforts toward full participation
- **\$16,128.83** for the **Core Ministries** of the Church of the Brethren

\$13,790 raised by the Silent Auction for Annual Conference efforts to break down barriers and expand welcome and access

116 units collected by the Blood Drive

40 to 50 people attended a vigil sponsored by the Gun Violence Prevention Action Team

2.6 percent increase in cost of living adjustment to minimum cash salary table for pastors