

Pacific Northwest District Conference 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are in a unique moment in the life of the Church of the Brethren. From tensions and conversations at Annual Conference and beyond, we notice significant anxiety about living with diversity, navigating conflict, and discerning the future of the denomination. Here in the Pacific Northwest, we have asked ourselves how pastoral and district accountability, and mutual discipline can best intertwine with loving and faithful witness to how we discern the movement of God?

As a district, we remember and re-claim the values we have articulated in the past:

Pacific Northwest District Mission Statement

adopted 2011

Our focus is threefold:

- To nurture the church, the body of Christ, as we grow spiritually: *“Love tenderly, do justice, and to walk humbly with our God.”* Micah 6:8
- To witness God’s love to others: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Creator and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* Matthew 28:19-20

“Beloved, since God loved us so much; we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is perfect in us. 1 John 4:11-12

- To be good stewards of the gifts God has given us: *“God’s various ministries are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of gifts are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!”*

1 Corinthians 12:4-6, from *The Message*

Core Values and Foundational Principles

We as a District:

Hold the New Testament as our guide in faith and practice. We value the interpretation and inspiration which springs from its study and shared experiences as guided by the living Christ:

- Conduct our business by discerning the “sense of the meeting.”
- Empower and respect congregations and foster our inter-relatedness.”
- Support each other, respecting and embracing diversity, while seeking unity.
- Nurture a sense of wholeness and possibility in everyone we meet.
- Continue the struggle of growth and change.
- Affirm the Brethren genius of holding in tension community and obedience with individual conscience and Spiritual discernment.
- Celebrate!
- Are God’s stewards in the world, continuing Jesus’ work; Peacefully, Simply, Together.

Seeking unity while affirming the sacred tension between honoring community wisdom and individual conscience, we have struggled with our differences in theology and practice. We have not always succeeded in honoring one another; at the same time, the spirit and practice of many in our district is to support same-sex couples who wish to marry, in keeping with Jesus’ teachings of inclusivity. Despite our differences, we have chosen to be Brethren together, to step away from punitive actions and to seek to live the love of Christ with one another. We have long respected the Brethren tenet of no coercion in religion. We don’t choose someone else’s walk for them. In light of our articulated values above, we as a district will not punish pastors or congregations for performing same-sex weddings; nor will anyone in our district force a clergyperson to perform a wedding against their conscience.

Seeking wholeness, seeking faithful response to God’s call to live as disciples of the living Christ, we pledge as a district to honor and support each other. We publicly affirm our intention to live and minister peacefully, simply, and together, trusting in God and the creativity of the Holy Spirit in times of adversity and change.

This letter was approved by the Pacific Northwest District Board and District Conference Delegates September 24, 2016 at Camp Koinonia.