

## Board adopts vision for a global church

**T**he Mission and Ministry Board adopted a “Vision for a Global Church of the Brethren” and recommended it to Annual Conference, at its meeting Oct. 20-23 at the General Offices in Elgin, Ill. The meeting was led by chair Connie Burk Davis, assisted by chair-elect Patrick Starkey and general secretary David Steele.

The board also adopted a 2018 budget, approved two large allocations from the Emergency Disaster Fund, and acted on Review and Evaluation Committee recommendations referred by Annual Conference, among other business.

The board spent a short time hearing a delegation from the “Moorefield gathering,” a meeting of “concerned Brethren” that was hosted at Moorefield Church of the Brethren in West Marva District earlier this year. The board discussed the presentation in closed sessions, and later issued a letter to the group.

### Vision for a global church

The new mission philosophy paper was presented by Jay Wittmeyer, executive director of Global Mission and Service. It has been in process for some time. The Mission Advisory Committee has been involved in its development, among other groups, and leaders of Church of the Brethren denominations in several countries have been consulted.

Impetus has come from a disconnect between polity and practice, Wittmeyer said, citing a mandate for a global Church of the Brethren in Annual Conference statements made in 1981, 1989, and 1998. The denominational polity currently in force calls for international districts, but in practice, independent denominations have grown up in various countries.

The heart of the vision is found in a section of the paper titled “Becoming a global church,” representing a significant shift in understanding of mission relationships:

“The Church of the Brethren in the United States envisions a Global Church of the Brethren as a union of autonomous bodies, a spiritual community bound together by a common passion to be followers of Christ, a common New Testament theology of peace and service, and a common commitment to be in relationship with one another. Consistent with the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, no one regional or national church will be regarded as the authority over other bodies. No one Brethren body in the Global Church of the Brethren, including the ‘mother’ church in the United States, will presume to have the mind of Christ for its sister churches. . . . Decisions regarding the role and responsibilities of the Global Church of the

Brethren, including the acceptance of new Brethren bodies into this fellowship, will be made in mutual consultation with existing national Church of the Brethren bodies.”

### Disaster grants

A second EDF grant of \$75,000 for disaster relief in the Caribbean was approved, following a previous grant of \$25,000. Much of the money will be used for hurricane relief efforts in Puerto Rico, in a collaboration between Brethren Disaster Ministries and Puerto Rico District, with some going to Haiti. An allocation of \$400,000 continues support of the Nigeria Crisis Response.

### Budget for 2018

The budget was presented by treasurer Brian Bultman and assistant treasurer Ed Woolf. The board approved a balanced budget of \$5,192,000 for Core Ministries, and a “grand total budget” of \$8,809,160 anticipated income, \$8,824,280 anticipated expense, for all the denominational ministries including Core Ministries, Brethren Disaster Ministries, Brethren Press, Global Food Initiative, Material Resources, and Conference Office.

Bultman and Woolf shared background information, including the transfer of \$510,000 from the Brethren Service Center Quasi-Endowment to the Core Ministries. This represents a portion of the proceeds of the sale of the upper campus property in New Windsor, Md. It continues a 2016 board-approved budgetary “bridge” in anticipation of a fund-raising campaign being considered for the near future.

### Assigned tasks

The board acted on recommendations referred by Annual Conference, when the Conference adopted recommendations from the Review and Evaluation Committee. Most require changes to the bylaws of the Church of the Brethren. The board’s proposed changes will come to the 2018 Conference, along with additional changes to terminology. In addition, a Stewardship of Property Working Group has been formed to create a process for a study of the General Offices property. It includes board members Carl Fike, chair, Colin Scott, David Stauffer, and Steele.

Davis led a brainstorming session seeking strategies for “Living Together as Christ Calls,” continuing another assigned task. A working group will process the brainstorming and bring a proposal to the board in March. It includes board members Lois Grove, Diane Mason, Jonathan Prater, and a staff member to be named.

## Puerto Rican Brethren engage with Brethren Disaster Ministries

**T**he Puerto Rican churches are an inspiring example of being the church in a crisis," reports Brethren Disaster Ministries associate executive Roy Winter. "While burdened with many hardships, the Puerto Rican Brethren are coming together, supporting each other, and reaching out to their communities."

In mid-October, Winter joined Puerto Rico District executive José Otero on a visit to six of the seven Churches of the Brethren in Puerto Rico, their pastors, the district board chair, and families who suffered major damage in the hurricanes.

About 20 homes of Brethren members, some from each congregation, received major damage. Other homes in communities around the churches suffered a wide range of damage or were destroyed. Through district leadership, a disaster response program is being built around each congregation, doing needs assessments and organizing to provide disaster assistance in the communities and churches. Specific needs of families are being addressed by each church's leadership, and funding is being sought for a part-time staff person for the response in Puerto Rico.

At Río Prieto Church of the Brethren a drinking water station is being developed for families without access to safe



water. Periodic food distributions also are planned. In Caimito (Río Piedras) at Segunda Iglesia Cristo Misionera and community center, work teams from the US will repair homes, the center, and volunteer housing. Teams are being organized by a long-term Brethren Disaster Ministries volunteer. A work-camp is planned for Jan. 13-20, led by Shirley Baker.

Brethren Disaster Ministries expects to establish other work teams when the Puerto Rican church leadership feels this is helpful. To volunteer, contact Terry Goodger at [tgoodger@brethren.org](mailto:tgoodger@brethren.org) or 410-635-8730. To support the work in Puerto Rico, give at [www.brethren.org/edf](http://www.brethren.org/edf).

## Church rebuilding in Nigeria

**The Church of the Brethren has provided a second large grant to Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria** (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) to support church rebuilding. A first installment went to EYN in March. Out of this second grant of \$109,000, 20 churches will receive grants of \$5,000 each.

EYN leaders selected the churches to receive grants "after careful consideration and prayers . . . taking into account safety of the returnees and

general peace of the areas," reported Daniel Mbaya, EYN general secretary. News of the grants "have ignited our spirits," he said. "As a church, we remain grateful to . . . all sisters and brothers of the Church of the Brethren for this kind of support."

The two primary mechanisms to support the church's work in Nigeria are the Nigeria Crisis Fund for humanitarian relief and the Church Rebuilding Fund. Find links to both at [www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis](http://www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis).

## Personnel notes

**Traci Rabenstein** has assumed leadership of the Church of the Brethren Donor Relations team. **John Hipps** has concluded his work as director of Donor Relations, a position he held since September 2012. Rabenstein will work out of the General Offices in Elgin, Ill., and her home in Enola, Pa. She began as Congregational Support representative in Donor Relations in October 2016.

**Fatima Kurth** has been hired as accountant/bookkeeper for Brethren Benefit Trust. She has more than 13 years of accounting/bookkeeping experience and is completing a bachelor's degree in accounting.



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