

CHAPTER III

THE DISTRICT

I. Organization and Function ¹

Preliminary to any plan of district church organization is an understanding of the mission of the church and the place and function of the district in that mission.

The mission of the church is set forth in the great commission of our Lord (Matt. 28:18-20). Although never fully understood, it seems clearly to have an inner and an outer direction. The inner mission of the church is to nurture its members that they may grow more and more into the stature of maturity in Christ. The outer mission of the church is to be related as God's instrument to the problems and needs of the world. These two major functions of the church are effective to the extent that they are undergirded by stewardship of time, talent, and treasure on the part of the membership.

The district is a group of congregations located in geographic proximity to each other and having common purposes. The district enables the member congregations to do together what they cannot do separately and helps them to carry out in better fashion their major functions. The organizational structure of the district should reflect as much as possible the purposes of the district. Above all, the organization should be a helpful means to the achievement of the district's goals and the fulfillment of its functions.

Every district should develop its own constitution and bylaws clearly defining its purposes, its organizational structure, and its working procedures. These need to be in harmony both with congregational purposes and polity and those of the Church of the Brethren. The following outline is suggestive of basic principles and procedures to be incorporated into a district plan of organization. It attempts to conserve the major values already existing in the organizational structures of our districts. Further, it seeks to add to the effectiveness of the work of our church through greater uniformity and simplicity of structure and nomenclature.

Districts are encouraged to explore creative ways of sharing personnel and financial resources to facilitate effective ministries both within and among districts. Districts may initiate dialogue for a cooperative relationship that will resource the needs of district ministries (i.e., Christian nurture and church planting).

A constitution is understood to be a statement of the fundamental principles of government adopted by the district. The bylaws are the detailed rules and regulations that allow for the effective working of the district within its basic organizational

structure.

A. CONSTITUTION

1. Incorporation

The district shall be incorporated under, and pursuant to, the religious corporation act of the state in which its principal office is located. Where feasible, the office of the district executive/minister shall be named as the principal place of business. The affairs of the corporation shall be managed by the district board whose chair, secretary, and/or treasurer shall be the legal officers of the corporation and shall sign all the legal documents.

2. Purpose of the District

The purpose of the district shall be to administer and coordinate the religious and business activities of the Church of the Brethren within the bounds of the district. The district shall have power to own and convey real estate and to be trustee of property and of endowment and other funds. The district shall send delegates to the Annual Conference and may appoint representatives to cooperative religious bodies as need and opportunity allow.

3. Member Churches

All Church of the Brethren congregations that are recognized by the district as organized churches shall be member churches of the district within which they are located. A new church development shall be called a “fellowship” until it has seventy-five² or more members and is chartered as a member church.

4. District Conference

a. Purpose of a district conference

District Conference is a mass meeting to which delegates and others interested from the member congregations come in business sessions to give implementation to district purpose. District Conference is the final authority of the district on policy, program, and procedure. Although worship and fellowship may become part of district conference, the following agenda is indicative of its principal business function:

- 1) to review achievements;
- 2) to analyze procedures and results;

- 3) to survey continuing opportunities and needs;
- 4) to set goals, outline objectives, and determine priorities;
- 5) to approve strategy and adopt policy;
- 6) to organize for action and assign responsibility;
- 7) to dedicate resources;
- 8) to go forth in service.

b. *Conference delegate body*

- 1) All members of the churches and fellowships of the district shall have the privilege of moving and discussing the business of district conference. However, only the official delegates of the member churches or fellowships shall have the right to vote.
- 2) There shall be four delegates for each member church or fellowship³ with two hundred members or fewer. Larger churches shall have one delegate more for each additional one hundred members or major fraction thereof.
- 3) The pastor and church board chair of each member body shall serve as delegates by virtue of their offices. Each congregation or fellowship shall elect the remaining quota of its delegates from its membership at large. Pastors of recognized fellowships shall also be delegates.
- 4) Delegates serving from the membership at large shall be elected for a two-year term with half of their number being selected each year.
- 5) The delegate body shall have the following functions:⁴
 - a) Serve as the final authority of the district in all matters of polity, procedure, and function.
 - b) Elect the officers of the district conference, the members of special committees authorized by the district, and members of the district board.
 - c) Review the work of the district as presented to the district conference in the reports of the elected boards and committees.
 - d) Project the program of the district, determining fields of endeavor, plans for advance, size of budgets, and all other necessary matters;

- e) Dispose of queries that come to the district conference;
- f) receive reports from individuals and/or committees appointed to deal with specific problems in the life of the district;
- g) determine what resolutions shall be the voice of the district on the problems of the day.

c. *Conference officers*

- 1) The officers of District Conference shall be the moderator, moderator-elect, and clerk.
- 2) The moderator-elect shall be elected by District Conference for one year and then shall automatically become moderator for one year. The clerk shall be elected by district conference. The treasurer and financial secretary shall be appointed by the district board subject to the approval of district conference.

d. *Conference committees*

- 1) *Nominating and personnel committee.* There shall be a nominating and personnel committee of five members. Three members shall be elected by district conference for one term (see B.1. in this chapter) and shall not be eligible to succeed themselves. The moderator-elect, who shall be chair of the committee, and the moderator shall complete the committee.
- 2) *District conference program and arrangements committee.* There shall be a district conference program and arrangements committee of five members. The committee shall be constituted in the same manner as the nominating and personnel committee except that the moderator shall be chairperson.

e. *Standing Committee delegates*

Delegates shall be named by District Conference to represent the district on the Annual Conference Standing Committee. The directives of Annual Conference shall be followed in determining their eligibility, the number allowed, and the length of term.

5. District Board

a. *Purpose of the district board*

The district board, hereafter referred to as the board, shall manage and administer the work of the district as authorized by the district conference. The board is the legal agent of the district and shall be empowered to act on behalf of the district conference ad interim except for those actions specifically reserved for District Conference as set forth in its constitution and bylaws.

b. *Board members*

There shall be a board consisting of from fifteen to twenty-three members, including ordained ministers and lay people. The district conference shall elect from twelve to twenty members in multiples of four. The district moderator, moderator-elect, and treasurer shall be ex officio members without vote. If any of these three officers is elected with an unexpired term on the board, the former position on the board shall be declared vacant.

c. *Board officers and organizations*

The board shall be organized annually, following District Conference, by the district moderator. The chair and vice chair of the board and the commission chairs shall be selected by the board from among its elected members. The district executive shall be secretary for the board.

The board shall group its remaining members into four commissions based on aptitude and interest. The board chair shall be an ex officio member of all commissions and committees. The treasurer shall be on the commission of stewards.

6. Commissions

a. The work of the board shall be implemented by the following four commissions:

- 1) Commission on nurture
- 2) Commission on witness
- 3) Commission on ministry
- 4) Commission of stewards

b. The commissions shall be responsible to the board. Each commission shall elect its own vice chair and secretary.

7. Committees

a. *Executive committee*

- 1) There shall be an executive committee of the board consisting of seven members, namely, the chair and vice chair of the board, who shall be the officers of the committee; the four commission chairs; and the district treasurer, who shall be ex officio member without vote.
- 2) The executive committee shall recommend staff for employment by the board and shall counsel with the staff regarding their work and record of agreement. The executive committee shall assist the chairs of the board and commissions in developing their respective agenda. The committee shall serve ad interim when the work of the board can be expedited without infringing upon the board's responsibilities and authority.

b. *Historical committee*

- 1) There shall be an historical committee of three members appointed by the board.
- 2) The historical committee shall be concerned with all matters of historic interest to the district and shall collect, preserve, write, and, as authorized, publish such materials.

c. *Auditing committee*

- 1) There shall be an auditing committee of three members, including at least one qualified public accountant, appointed by the board for one term (see B.1.c. in this chapter) without being eligible to succeed themselves.
- 2) The auditing committee shall review annually the financial records of the district treasurer, the financial secretary, and such other agencies handling district funds as may be requested by the board. The committee shall submit an auditor's report to the district conference.

d. *Discipleship and reconciliation committee*⁵

- 1) A committee of five shall be appointed by the board (one each year) for a term of five years. Tenure shall be limited to two terms. The chair of

the board and the district executive/minister shall serve ex officio.

- 2) The committee shall, on behalf of the board, be responsible for working at discipleship and reconciliation concerns between any member and those with whom the person may have difficulty. It may also be called upon to work at discipleship and reconciliation concerns within a congregation or between congregations and the district.
- 3) The committee shall bring a report of its efforts and experiences to the board, along with any appropriate recommendations it has to make.

e. *Other committees*

The district conference and/or the board may constitute or authorize such other continuing or short-term committees as necessary to assist with the ongoing work of the district. When the specific assignment of a committee is achieved, the committee shall be dismissed.

8. Related Institutions and Interest Groups

- a. The district may enter into relationship with separately organized and incorporated Church of the Brethren institutions such as camps, homes for the aging, colleges, and other institutions of interest to the district. In each instance there shall be mutual agreement between the district and said institution as to the nature of the relationship. The involvement of the district in terms of financial support, selection of trustees, program endorsement, receiving of reports, etc., shall be subject to District Conference action.
- b. No other organization, entity, or body shall be deemed to be the agent of a district, the Church of the Brethren, Inc., or Annual Conference. Only the Annual Conference, Annual Conference agencies, the Church of the Brethren, Inc., a district, or a congregation duly recognized by a district shall be entitled to use the name "Church of the Brethren" in its own name or to indicate in any way it is an agent of another Church of the Brethren entity without the express written authorization of Annual Conference Standing Committee. Unless expressly recognized as an agent of another Church of the Brethren entity, no institution or interest group should suggest in its documents, publicity, or communications that it is the agent of a Church of the Brethren organization. Consent to use the name "Church of the Brethren" will not, unless otherwise indicated in writing, indicate an intention to create an agency relationship but will

merely indicate the involvement of members of the Church of the Brethren in the organization.⁶

- c. As requested or as need arises, the board shall give direction to the formation of special interest and/or age groups within the district. All such organizations shall exist to aid in fulfilling the mission of the church at large in the district and shall be subject to the oversight and direction of the board or its respective commissions.

9. The Section Plan

a. Purpose

The district may circumscribe within its boundaries workable units—geographically and/or numerically defined—in order to facilitate the organization and administration of district affairs. These units shall be called sections and, for purposes of clarity, may be numbered or named.

b. Size

The size of a section may vary according to prevailing circumstances. Where possible a section shall include five to fifteen congregations and/or fellowships within a radius that allows for travel and sufficient time for a meeting within one day.

10. Fiscal Year and District Conference Year

- a. The fiscal year of the district shall be the same as that designated by Annual Conference.

- b. The conference year shall be from the end of one annual district conference to the end of the next annual district conference.

B. BYLAWS

1. Personnel Selection and Tenure

- a. The nominating and personnel committee shall prepare a ballot for the use of the district conference in the election of (a) officers of district conference, (b) members of district conference committees, (c) Standing Committee delegates, (d) board members, and (e) such other officers as are to be elected by district conference.
- b. Elections and appointments shall be conducted in such a way as to secure leadership from all parts of the district. Board membership shall provide a good balance between pastors and lay members.
- c. The term of office for all elected or appointed personnel shall be three years unless otherwise stated in the constitution or bylaws. No one shall be eligible to serve more than two terms in succession. The office of anyone who does not fill the position in a responsible way and is absent from meetings for six months may be declared vacant by the board.
- d. Approximately one-third of the membership of the board and continuing committees shall be elected in any one year.
- e. The prepared ballot shall include only the names of people who have consented to be nominees. Prior to the election, information about each nominee shall be given to the delegates. Immediately following the election, a letter shall be sent to each nominee reporting the results. These duties shall be the responsibility of the nominating and personnel committee.
- f. For the aid of those groups making nominations or appointments, the district office, in cooperation with the nominating and personnel committee, shall maintain a personnel file indicating the training, aptitude, and record of service of individuals showing promise of district leadership.

2. Employed Staff

a. District executive/minister

- 1) The district shall employ an executive. He or she shall be a person qualified by training, experience, and personal dedication to Christ and the church to guide, counsel, and encourage district and local church workers in the development of vital and well-balanced church programs.
- 2) The executive shall be the executive officer of the board and shall give general oversight to the implementation of district work. He or she shall serve as secretary of the board, arranging for someone to record the minutes, and shall be custodian of all official papers of the district. He or she shall be an ex officio member without vote of the board, the commissions, and the committees of the district.
- 3) The executive shall give guidance and assistance for pastoral placement in the district.

b. Additional professional staff

When the work and size of the district warrant it, additional qualified staff shall be considered.

c. Office secretary

The district shall provide sufficient secretarial assistance for the employed staff and district office.

3. Staff Employment Procedures

- a. The selection and employment of an executive and other professional staff people, as well as the termination of such services, shall be the responsibility of the board in keeping with approved pastoral placement procedures and in consultation with the Church of the Brethren, Inc. through its coordinator of district ministries.
- b. The office secretary shall be employed by the board upon the recommendation of the executive. The office secretary shall be responsible to the executive.
- c. The terms of employment for all employed personnel shall be carefully stipulated and reviewed annually. When the terms have been mutually

accepted, such terms shall be set forth in writing on approved forms and shall be considered an agreement between the contracting parties.

- d. When there are multiple staff, the division of responsibility and the lines of authority shall be clearly defined and periodically reviewed by the appropriate district officials. Although there must be close cooperation and harmony among staff members, in the final analysis all personnel are responsible to the board.
- e. There shall be a written position description for each employee.

4. District Conference Officers' and Delegates' Qualifications and Duties

- a. All officers and delegates shall be members in good standing of a member church or fellowship and shall serve faithfully in their respective offices.
- b. The moderator shall preside at business sessions of the district conference, be an ex officio member of the board, and serve on one of its commissions. He or she shall be chair of the conference program and arrangements committee and shall serve on the nominating and personnel committee. The moderator shall study the needs of the district and give interpretation and counsel regarding them to the board and district conference and to any other appropriate district agency.
- c. The moderator-elect shall perform the duties of the moderator in the moderator's absence or at the moderator's request and shall become familiar with the program of the district in preparation for moderatorship. The moderator-elect shall be an ex officio member of the board and shall serve on one of its commissions. He or she shall be chair of the nominating and personnel committee and a member of the district conference program and arrangements committee.
- d. The clerk shall record the minutes of District Conference and shall, in cooperation with the district executive/minister, prepare them for publication and distribution to the churches.
- e. The treasurer shall be custodian of all district funds, disbursing them as authorized by the district conference and the board. He or she shall be an ex officio member of the board and shall serve on the commission of stewards. The treasurer shall make written reports to the board and to the district conference as requested and submit the accounts for an annual audit.

- f. The financial secretary shall receive all current district funds, acknowledge receipt of such, and deposit said funds promptly in a depository designated by the board. The financial secretary shall prepare at least quarterly a report of the giving from member churches and of all other receipts. Said reports shall be made available to the commission of stewards, the board, and the churches. The accounts shall be submitted for an annual audit.

- g. Congregational delegates shall be elected only from among the active, informed, and committed membership of the church. Delegates shall be expected to attend all business sessions of District Conference and all meetings of the delegate body. They shall report and communicate actions and concerns from district to congregation and vice versa.

Delegates shall strive to be alert to the work and opportunities of the Church of the Brethren at all levels of its organization and program. A delegate shall be expected to attend the business meetings of one's congregation.

Delegates shall be elected at the time of general elections in the church and shall serve on a year-round basis. When elected, delegates' names and addresses shall be reported to the district office to be included on the mailing list for newsletters, financial reports, and other pertinent information. Delegates shall register at District Conference to indicate their presence.

5. District Board Functions

The board shall . . .

- a. fulfill the directives of the district conference and make an annual report to the conference;

- b. assign, supervise, and coordinate the work of the commissions;

- c. interpret rules of procedure for commissions and committees;

- d. study the member congregations and strive to help them meet their needs and to fulfill their mission (see section V, “Congregational Evaluation,” in this chapter);
- e. project long-range planning, set goals, and initiate new program;
- f. promote, administer, and supervise through the commissions the total church program in the district;
- g. employ and direct the work of a district executive/minister and such other personnel as may be authorized by the district conference;
- h. make all appointments for which the board is responsible;
- i. fill vacancies in elective district offices occurring between district conferences, and fill such other vacancies not provided for otherwise;
- j. have custody of all district capital funds, endowments, and annuities, and hold title to district properties. Distribute district current funds and invest permanent funds as authorized by the district conference. Negotiate the purchase and sale of property and the borrowing and lending of money in behalf of the district;
- k. prepare the district budget for presentation to the district conference;
- l. provide for the annual audit;
- m. allocate and define authority with respect to the establishment of bank accounts and the signing of checks and other legal documents;
- n. arrange for bonding the district treasurer and financial secretary;
- o. receive, consider, and make disposition of concerns brought by any individuals or church group;
- p. coordinate the district program and prepare the district calendar;
- q. bring queries or other business to district conference, and process queries from local churches for district conference action;

- r. plan or otherwise provide in-service training opportunities for board members, employed staff, and other district personnel;
- s. when problems of discipline arise, the board shall follow the procedures and suggestions outlined in chapter V, section IV, of this manual, “Discipleship and Reconciliation,” especially the instructions for the appointment and functioning of a district committee on discipleship and reconciliation;⁷
- t. nominate candidates for ordination to the ministry (the local church may also nominate candidates);⁸
- u. exercise its authority for licensing and ordaining ministers;⁹
- v. act on nominees for ordination recommended by the district commission on ministry, and present those approved to the local church for action;¹⁰
- w. assign to an appropriate group or commission (such as ministry or nurture) the responsibility for training and resourcing of deacons.¹¹

6. Commission Responsibilities

a. Commission on nurture

The commission on nurture shall initiate and stress such program and work in the churches as fosters the spiritual growth and development of members. This commission shall stimulate the congregations to have a vital encounter with God, promote the total cause of Christian education, provide opportunities for training church leaders and workers, supervise the camp program, counsel and coordinate age and interest groups, maintain audiovisual and book libraries, and do whatever else may nurture the inner life of the church.

b. Commission on witness

The commission on witness shall be responsible for directing and undergirding the witness of the churches to the world. The commission shall urge each congregation to share the love of God and the gospel of Christ with all people everywhere through the work of evangelism, to support missions at home and abroad, to send and maintain service workers, to give material aid, to act on social concerns, and to proclaim and use the power of God to meet the needs of the world. This commission shall direct the work of church extension through the

development of new congregations, the growth of existing ones, and the receiving of unrelated congregations. When needed, guidance shall be given to the merging or disorganizing of churches. In these and other outreach ministries, the commission on witness shall encourage and assist the congregations toward the fulfillment of the great commission of our Lord.¹²

c. *Commission on ministry*

The commission on ministry, comprising ordained ministers and lay people, shall give counsel and guidance to all ministerial affairs in the district. This commission shall seek ways to strengthen the relationships and understanding between congregations and pastors, provide training for local people responsible for church-pastor relations, encourage pastors in their professional growth, and in various ways strive to increase the joy and effectiveness of the pastoral ministry. This commission shall counsel and assist churches and individuals in the various phases of extending and receiving a call to the ministry, becoming equipped and trained for the ministry, and licensing and ordaining ministers. This commission shall review the ministerial list periodically and shall make recommendations to the board regarding those ministers who no longer appear to show interest or dedication in their ministerial calling.

Along with the congregation, this commission, on behalf of the district board, has the authority for licensing individuals to the ministry.¹³

This commission shall review all nominations for ordination to the ministry and recommend nominees to the district board. The commission shall proceed with ordination when the district board and the congregation vote approval.¹⁴

d. *Commission of stewards*

The commission of stewards shall aid and challenge the congregations and all district agencies to be good and faithful stewards of God's resources. This commission shall promote a program of general stewardship education and enlistment in the churches, supervise the financial interests of the district, safeguard and utilize the property of the district, assist in preparing the annual budget, and in other ways solicit support for the basic work of nurture, witness, and ministry throughout

the district.

7. Business Meetings

a. District Conference

- 1) The district conference shall convene once a year at such a time as to allow district organization and program to be in readiness for the new church year. Special meetings may be called at the discretion of the conference officers in consultation with the board. Generally, the conference should convene at a place offering facilities conducive to attendance and providing adequate and comfortable arrangements.
- 2) The time of the week for the conference should be as free as possible from conflicts with work schedules. Business sessions shall be at the hour when the delegates are most free to attend.
- 3) The district conference program and arrangements committee shall be responsible for planning the conference program, obtaining leadership, determining the place of meeting, securing facilities, providing for exhibits, registering delegates, and making other necessary arrangements for the conference. Suggested scriptures, hymns, litanies, and worship themes may be offered to the churches for their use locally on District Conference Sunday.

b. The board shall meet at least quarterly. Special meetings of the board may be called by the

c. The commissions and committees shall meet regularly or as the board may direct.

d. Adequate advance notice of all business meetings shall be given to the membership involved.

8. Quorum

a. It is desirable to have as many delegates present as possible for the district conference. No quorum shall be required except as may be specified by rules of order or state corporation law.

b. For meetings of the board and commissions, a majority of the elected members shall consti

9. Rules of Order

Unless otherwise specified in the bylaws, Robert's *Rules of Order* shall be the official rules of order for the district conference and the board meetings.

10. Amendments

The constitution and bylaws of the district may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the delegates present and voting at any regular session of the district conference. Written notice of the proposed amendment shall be given with the call of the meeting issued at least thirty days prior to the meeting.

This plan of organization is to become effective one year after its adoption by the district conference. All former decisions in conflict herewith are hereby rescinded.

II. Structuring and Restructuring Congregations¹⁵

The district board through its appropriate commission shall direct the work of church extension through the development of new fellowships and congregations, the growth of existing ones, and the receiving of unrelated congregations. When needed, guidance shall be given to the merging or disorganizing of congregations. Procedures to be followed in organizing and dividing congregations have been summarized as follows:

A. ORGANIZATION OF NEW CONGREGATIONS

A body of members or the district board through its appropriate commission may call for organization when, in the judgment of the said commission, conditions of the place from which the call comes justify such organization. Area councils of churches should be notified and their counsel sought and considered.

The call for organization shall be the responsibility of the district board through its appropriate commission. A moderator shall be selected by the responsible commission. The commission shall provide assistance and counsel in establishing a plan of organization. It shall also assist the organizing congregation in the election of such officials as may be deemed advisable.

The new organization shall then be reported to the district conference and, after its acceptance as a fellowship or congregation by that district conference, its delegates shall be seated in the district conference.

B. RECEIVING UNRELATED CONGREGATIONS

When an organized congregation seeks to affiliate with the Church of the Brethren, the district board shall initiate a series of exchange visits and conversations with the congregation to explore the theological, biblical, and ecclesiastical perspectives and beliefs of each. If there proves to be potential for mutual compatibility and supportive participation, the district board shall recommend to District Conference that the district and congregation enter into a year of dialogue and fellowship. During the ensuing year, the district board will review and evaluate the relationship and make recommendation to District Conference for final action.

C. MERGING ORGANIZED CONGREGATIONS

When two or more congregations desire to merge, they shall seek the counsel and assistance of the district board. After procedural details have been determined regarding property and other assets, liabilities, organization, and identity, and a plan of merger has been approved by the congregations and the district board, the board shall recommend the merger to the district conference. Following acceptance of the merger, the new congregation shall be received and its delegates seated.

D. DIVIDING ORGANIZED CONGREGATIONS

If a majority of an organized congregation decides to divide into more than one Church of the Brethren congregation, the congregation shall notify the district board of that decision and the date of the congregational business meeting to determine lines, division of church property, etc., and to elect a moderator for each of the new congregations and other officers, if deemed advisable. The district board shall then send at least one member of the appropriate district commission to the meeting to assist the congregation in those tasks. The new organization(s) shall be reported to District Conference and recognition shall be obtained, after which the delegates of the newly formed congregation(s) shall be seated.

If a minority of a church desires to be organized, they may petition the district board. This board shall call a business meeting of the congregation and after hearing the reasons for and against a separate organization, shall make a report of its findings. If this report is favorable to the petitioners and is accepted by the

congregation, the new organization shall be effected and reported to the district conference as above.

If the report of the district board favoring the new organization is rejected by the congregation, the district board may, if deemed advisable, organize the petitioners as outlined above, provided two-thirds of the petitioners support the new organization.

If the report of the district board is unfavorable to the petitioners, they shall be counseled to work in harmony with all the other members in a spirit of love for the best interests of the congregation and to exercise patience until such time as conditions may be more favorable.

E. DISORGANIZING CONGREGATIONS

Requests for disorganization of a congregation shall be made to the district board. The board shall appoint a committee to consider the request. This committee shall examine the circumstances of this request, consider carefully the spiritual welfare of all involved, and report their findings to the board. Upon receiving this report, the board shall determine the advisability of such disorganization and make a recommendation to District Conference. If the recommendation is approved by the conference, the district board shall arrange for a transfer of membership of the then remaining members of the congregation. The district board shall also recommend to District Conference a plan for the use or disposition of the property of the disorganizing congregation according to the guidelines in this manual (Chapter VI, "Property Holdings and Financial Resources").

Special care shall be taken to ensure that the official records of the congregation as listed above are transferred to the district. In addition, related information on the life of the disorganizing congregation, if available, should be transferred to the district. Such information may include . . .

1. photographs taken in connection with special events or collected from members;
2. newspaper and periodical articles documenting church activities;
3. manuscript histories of the congregation or any of its subunits or activities;
4. information about special achievements or honors attained by the pastor or lay members;
5. biographical material on the minister and other church leaders;

6. artifacts connected with the history of the church.

III. Procedures in Adjusting Districts¹⁶

A. SEPARATION FROM EXISTING DISTRICTS TO FORM A NEW DISTRICT

1. The new district must have the approval of the district or districts from whose territory it is to be formed.
2. New districts shall be formally recognized as bona fide district units at the opening session of the first Standing Committee meeting following the formation of the new district.

B. MERGER OF EXISTING DISTRICTS

1. As a basic administrative and legislative unit in our church, a district should be strong enough in total membership and in number of vital, active congregations, and well enough contained geographically, to be able to accomplish functional tasks effectively and to maintain high standards.
2. When districts are ready to effect merger, notification shall be sent to the officers of Annual Conference, together with a request to the moderator that the new district be acknowledged as a de facto district and its members seated in Standing Committee. (Technically, the seating of Standing Committee members has been regarded as tantamount to recognition of the newly formed district.)
3. Records of defunct districts may be deposited at the Brethren Historical Library and Archives or one of the Brethren college libraries for preservation and to enable their availability for historical research.

C. DISTRICT BOUNDARIES¹⁷

1. Districts shall accept responsibility for initiating the realignment process. All plans involving realignment of district boundaries, mergers of districts, or changes in district names should have the support of the district boards affected by the changes and the approval of their district conferences. These changes will be submitted to Standing Committee for recognition and be reported to Annual Conference.
2. All undesignated territory within the United States and beyond not presently included within the boundaries of existing districts shall be under the

jurisdiction of Standing Committee. If districts wish to expand into presently undesignated territory, they should consult with the officers of Annual Conference, representing the Standing Committee. If districts wish to relinquish or remove territory from the district as presently constituted, they should consult with the officers of Annual Conference.

3. A congregation established in any undesignated territory is understood to belong to and to be responsible to the sponsoring district. Establishing a congregation in undesignated territory is not itself sufficient to claim that territory for a district or to prevent another district from initiating work there.
4. A district may decide to annex adjacent undesignated territory (i.e., expand its boundary). Such proposals, after being supported and approved at the district level, shall be reported to the Standing Committee.
5. If a congregation or group of congregations wish(es) to realign with another adjacent district, the district boards of the two districts shall consider the request. The proposed realignment between the two districts shall be submitted to the two district conferences for approval. If the congregation(s) or districts are not in agreement with the action taken, they may appeal to Standing Committee.

IV. Ecumenical Relationships¹⁸

When a district desires to relate to another denominational body organically or in shared administration, the following procedures should be followed. There are three potential levels of relationship and hence three levels of complexity and necessary authorization. A district should follow the procedure most appropriate to the level of relationship that is anticipated.

A. YOKING

In a yoked relationship, two or more districts operate essentially separate programs. They maintain separate identities but have shared leadership with single or multiple denominational relationships.

1. In developing proposals for a yoked relationship with another denominational body, district leaders should consult with the coordinator of district ministries of the Church of the Brethren, Inc. staff and the executive of the Committee on Interchurch Relations.

2. The proposal will need the approval of the district conference and the equivalent body of the other denomination or denominations involved.
3. After the proposal has been approved, the action should be reported to Standing Committee.

B. FEDERATION/AFFILIATION

Federation is defined as two or more districts with joined programs. They share leadership but retain separate denominational identities. *Affiliation* is defined as two or more districts with a single identity and program. The organizational unit is affiliated with two denominations.

1. In developing such a plan, there should be adequate time for preparation, study, and interpretation of a proposal. Related denominational staff should be consulted.
2. Approval of the proposal requires a two-thirds favorable vote by the district conference and the favorable action of the equivalent body of the other denomination or denominations according to their polity.
3. These actions should then be submitted to Standing Committee for ratification and reporting to Annual Conference.
4. Implementation of the approved plan should follow as rapidly as possible after ratification by Standing Committee.

C. UNION

Union, or merger, is defined as two or more districts adopting a single new identity or one district uniting with another judicatory in a new organizational unit, which has a single denominational relationship.

1. Initiative in proposing study and action toward union may be taken by a local church in the district or by the district board.
2. Adequate time should be taken to involve local church leaders, district officials, Church of the Brethren, Inc. staff, and other related parties in the preparation of a plan of union. (Some of the elements of a plan of union are listing of all assets; a plan for transferring titles to property; satisfying the requirements of

endowments and trusts; validity of membership and ministries; concern for dissenting opinion; administrative relationships.)

3. When the district conference approves a plan of union, it shall arrange for a referendum within three months in each congregation. Local rules on advance notice and eligible voters shall apply.
 - a. The congregational officers shall report the results of the referendum in writing to the designated district officers.
 - b. Approval shall require two-thirds of the total accumulated votes cast in all of the duly held referenda.
4. Based on a favorable referendum, the district officers shall petition Annual Conference through Standing Committee to ratify the proposed union. The petition must be presented at a time to allow it to be printed in the Annual Conference booklet of business.
5. Standing Committee will receive the petition, certify that proper procedures were followed, and forward the petition with its (Standing Committee) recommendation to the Annual Conference delegate body. Approval by the delegate body shall constitute ratification of the district's action.
6. Following Annual Conference ratification and similar appropriate action by the sister denomination(s) involved, the union shall be consummated, the transfer of property titles and administrations effected as rapidly as possible, and official relationship with the Church of the Brethren adjusted accordingly.

When a plan of union results in an administrative unit solely related to another denomination but provides for individual congregations to continue relationship with the Church of the Brethren, Annual Conference, upon recommendation of Standing Committee, shall assign the congregation(s) to an adjoining district(s).

V. Congregational Evaluation¹⁹

We recommend that each district, through the district board, examine all its congregations in light of the following criteria:

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- Public worship every Sunday in which the corporate nature of the church is realized (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
- Periodic celebration of communion (1 Cor. 11:23-26).
- An aggressive evangelistic effort by the members.
- A closely graded Sunday church school with several students in each grade.
- Enough people in age-group activities to provide individuals with opportunity to establish primary peer relationships within the church.
- A building adequate to house these activities.
- Financial participation in a non-local ministry of at least thirty percent of the total budget exclusive of building fund.
- No member carrying more than one major institutional chore at any one time.
- A program of service to the immediate community of the congregation directed to economic, social, and educational, as well as to spiritual, needs.
- A capable pastoral ministry for which the master of divinity degree is the standard education and the district-administered training is the absolute minimum education.
- Pastoral support according to Annual Conference standards.
- Participation in the denomination's life through district conferences, workshops, camps, retreats, etc.

The committee realizes that such a list of criteria does not always indicate the effectiveness of a congregation in every particular situation. It also recognizes that many responsible congregations will not qualify in every regard. Although this list can be only approximated in many situations, we believe that districts can use it to help determine the proper action for particular congregations.

We further recommend that . . .

- if, in the judgment of the district board, the criteria can be more nearly met by the merger of adjoining congregations, the district board shall assume the initiative for conversations regarding mergers;

- where the merger of Church of the Brethren congregations with congregations of other denominations may seem, in the judgment of the district board, to be in the best interest of the church, the district board shall work with the congregations and the planning and strategy committees of the councils of churches toward such mergers;
- the district board shall supervise and counsel with congregations with fewer than one hundred members in the appointment of the pastor and the moderator when necessary;
- enough congregations shall use the same pastor as is necessary to extend his or her ministry over a minimum of one hundred family units. Two hundred family units may be considered the maximum. The district board should also feel free to enter into arrangements with other denominations to share pastors where this seems advisable and possible. The ratio of pastor to congregation need not always be one to one. With modern transportation and communication facilities, availability does not require residency.
- lay people can be trained to direct worship so that congregations may have worship each Sunday even though the pastor is not present. Extensive use should be made of reading courses and the continuing education sessions provided by Bethany Theological Seminary. We reaffirm the spiritual leadership role the deacons have played in our denomination's history and call the church to use them in a manner similar to that in which lay ministers and lay readers are used in many other denominations (Acts 6:3; Acts 8:12). Pastors assigned to pulpits they cannot occupy every Sunday can aid the lay leadership by providing them with worship and sermon materials and assisting them in preparation;
- substantial grants and aid should be considered by the district and the denomination to those congregations willing to cooperate in a program using these criteria and recommendations in attempts to deal constructively with the problem;
- pastors serving one congregation of fewer than one hundred units should be used by the denomination in other areas such as study, writing, and administration so that their talents may be challenged to the maximum.
- wherever possible and necessary, the district board should encourage congregations in areas of major sociological change to use every resource available to try to rebuild the community.

We realize that not all circumstances can be cared for by these criteria and recommendations. However, we believe that if districts will originate positive action and give major attention to their congregations, using the guidance of these criteria and recommendations, major steps will be taken in helping every congregation mature in service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

VI. Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions

Annual Conference 2004 approved the report of a study committee assigned to examine a query asking 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.”²⁰ The paper needs to be read in its entirety to get the full background and impact of the report. The following is the section giving guidance to the district for its response to disagreeing congregations.

There is an expectation that within the context of ongoing district ministries and congregational relationships, awareness of disagreement with a specific Annual Conference action might emerge early on. District leadership should anticipate potential congregational disagreement with any particular Annual Conference action before receiving official notice in the form of a letter from the congregation, and review district procedures for processing congregational disagreements. Once official notice is received, the district is encouraged to review the matter and determine a response as soon as possible. Response measures might be to:

- send a letter of response from the district executive, the district board chair, board commission chair, district Standing Committee member, or some other appropriate individual;
- schedule a visit to the congregation for respectful dialog, discussion, and interpretation;
- appoint a group or committee to meet with the congregation to discuss the disagreement;
- utilize the skills of the district Shalom Team and other reconciliation workers to give guidance and facilitate dialog;
- call for a day of prayer and fasting to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for appropriate spiritual conduct;
- facilitate a forum at which the congregation in disagreement might present its position or understanding;

- consult with resource persons outside the district, including mediation leaders, On Earth Peace staff members, Mission and Ministry Board members, Annual Conference officers, Leadership Team, and others;
- bring the matter to the district conference only if all attempts at reconciliation have proven unsuccessful or unsatisfactory, and if the issue is such that it represents a threat to the overall unity and effective ministry of the district. Specific recommendations to the district conference might include
 1. a statement acknowledging that the congregation in question is “out of harmony” with the denomination on the particular issue, but remains in support and in fellowship with the district and Annual Conference;
 2. a call to prayer for all congregations within the district seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the issue, and seeking a spiritual anointing that would express love, tolerance and patience (Col. 3:12) rather than judgment and avoidance.

Each district is encouraged to put in place framework for processing a congregational disagreement with an Annual Conference action, in keeping with these suggestions. The process should be flexible enough to allow for the wide variations of each case, yet specific enough that it has accountability and direction. Each district should establish such a process prior to the recognition of the need for said process. The goal of the district response process should be to help the congregation move to an understanding of the Annual Conference action and willingness to support the action, or at least a willingness to refrain from taking any action that would be interpreted as being defiant or insubordinate. If this goal is unattainable and there is a lack of reconciliation, an acknowledgment should be made that the congregation continues supporting the larger church in other aspects of its life while disagreeing with Annual Conference in the particular matter. It is expected that reconciliation attempts will continue.

Finally, within our current polity ¹Standing Committee continues to serve as the appeals body. Any decision that is made by a district board or a district conference can be appealed to the Standing Committee, and the congregation in disagreement retains that right. The decision of Standing Committee is final.

NOTES

1. 1965 Minutes (1965–1969), “District Organization and Relationships,” 23-30. A historical overview of district organization appears in the 1971 Minutes (1970–1974), “Merger

- Procedures,” 151.
2. This number was one of the guidelines in a revised statement on church extension policy adopted by the General Board in November 1966 and reported to the 1967 Annual Conference in 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), 201.
 3. 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “Recognition of Church Fellowships,” 257.
 4. 1947 Minutes (1945–1954), “Brotherhood Organization,” 64.
 5. 1977 Minutes (1975–1979), “An Addition to 1976 Discipleship and Reconciliation Paper,” 372.
 6. 1987 Minutes (1985–1989), “Revisions of Brethren Polity,” 486.
 7. 1987 Minutes (1985–1989), “Revisions of Brethren Polity,” 487. See also 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “A New Basis of the Eldership,” 235; 1976 Minutes (1975–1979), “Discipleship and Reconciliation,” 199-204; and 1977 Minutes (1975–1979), “An Addition to 1976 Discipleship and Reconciliation Paper,” 372.
 8. 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “A New Basis of the Eldership,” 235.
 9. 1999 Minutes (1995–1999), “Church of the Brethren Ministerial Leadership,” 992-1011
 10. 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “A New Basis of the Eldership,” p. 235.
 11. 1997 Minutes (1995–1999), “Deacon Ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” 570.
 12. 1987 Minutes (1985–1989), “Revisions of Brethren Polity,” 487.
 13. 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “A New Basis of the Eldership,” 235.
 14. 1967 Minutes (1965–1969), “A New Basis of the Eldership,” 235.
 15. 1987 Minutes (1985–1989), “Revisions of Brethren Polity,” 487-489.
 16. 1987 Minutes (1985–1989), “Revisions of Brethren Polity,” 489; 1991 Minutes (1990–1994), “Denominational Structure Review,” 271-272; 1961 Minutes (1955–1964), “Some Procedures on Merger of Districts,” 212.
 17. 1991 Minutes (1990–1994), “Denominational Structure Review,” 271-272; 1961 Minutes (1955–1964), “Some Procedures on Merger of Districts,” 212.
 18. 1971 Minutes (1970–1974), “Merger Procedures,” 150-151, 153-154.
 19. 1964 Minutes (1955–1964), “Problems Confronting Small Congregations,” 343-345.