

Covenant Brethren Church



Information and Frequently Asked Questions

August 2020

What is the Covenant Brethren Church?

The CBC began with a vision cast in July 2019, as Church of the Brethren leaders--pastors, ministers, District Executives, Standing Committee members, and other District leaders from thirteen Districts--gathered in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania to pray, discern, and discuss a new vision for Brethren in the 21st Century.

This meeting included about 50 Standing Committee members, District Executives, and prominent pastors from 13 Districts. This meeting was to *pray* and *ponder* what could be done to heal the COB of its recent ills, which consist

- of an increasing rejection of Biblical authority;
- of a COB agency (On Earth Peace) rejecting Annual Conference statements on homosexuality;
- of the inability of Annual Conference to discipline On Earth Peace;
- of the official introduction and affirmation of a lesbian pastor and her "spouse" on the platform of Annual Conference; and
- of the affirmation of same-sex unions by various pastors and congregations across the denomination;
- of forty years of wrangling over homosexuality with no end in sight, and distraction from the real work of the Church;
- of many Brethren and their congregations deciding to depart from the Church of the Brethren. Between May 2018 and May 2020, at least sixteen congregations and nearly 4,000 members left the Church of the Brethren. This is the largest departure from the Church of the Brethren since the 1880s.

After several hours of vigorous discussion and earnest prayer, the group nearly unanimously agreed to “explore the

process to separate from the denomination” over these three primary concerns:

1. The need to provide a haven for congregations who are making the decision to leave, but want to *retain* their Brethren values, and do not want to be independent.

2. The failure of the denomination to stand strong on Biblical Authority.

3. The recent Compelling Vision process that completely skirted around the homosexual issue and will likely do little, if anything, to bring closure to this major point of division.

A temporary Executive Board was named out of the group as well as several task teams who began researching all aspects of this move. The initial Executive Committee consists of Grover Duling, Chair (West Marva District Board Chair and Standing Committee member); Eric Brubaker, Secretary (Middle Creek Church, BRF Secretary); Larry Dentler (pastor, Bermudian Church), Scott Kinnick (Southeastern District Executive), Jim Myer (minister, White Oak Church), and Craig Alan Myers. Task teams appointed were: **Editorial** (to develop a statement of faith based on the Brethren Card), **Prayer** (to send out prayer reminders monthly), **Name** (to report on an appropriate name), **Location** (for an office), **Legal** (bylaws and incorporation), **Structure** (to develop an appropriate structure for the group).

Larger meetings of interested persons were then held at the Calvary Church in Winchester, VA and Antioch Church in Woodstock, VA. COB representatives attended these meetings, as well as a number of deacons and spouses from Blue River and representatives from sixteen Districts. These larger meetings affirmed the work of the Executive Board and the task teams. Throughout all these developments, COB leadership was kept informed.

At Antioch Church in November 2019, the name Covenant Brethren Church was adopted, and the location of an office in Northcentral West Virginia was agreed to. Previews of the

Statement of Faith and Bylaws were considered. The Statement of Faith contains a ***strong*** endorsement of Biblical authority ***and*** Biblical marriage, as well as ***affirming the historical understandings of the Brethren.***

On February 1, 2020 at Fairmont, WV, the larger CBC leadership team again met with COB General Secretary David Steele and Annual Conference Moderator Paul Munday for amicable discussion and sharing. At the conclusion of those talks, CBC leadership agreed to continue the development of the new group. The Statement of Faith received final approval, as did the CBC Bylaws. After final review by an attorney, Covenant Brethren Church was incorporated in West Virginia on May 22, 2020. A website at covenantbrethren.org continues to grow.

Since that time, an official logo was designed and approved, office space was secured in Fairmont, WV. Congregations have been received as members of CBC and ordination or licensing credentials of several dozen ministers also have been received and are now recognized as CBC ministers. After two delays from restrictions due to COVID, the first Annual Meeting and Worship Conference will be held October 23-24, at the Antioch Church in Woodstock, Virginia.

The Covenant Brethren Church fully affirms Biblical authority, the sanctity of marriage as expressed in Genesis 2 and affirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19, the sanctity of human life from conception, and the historical New Testament ideals and practices held by the Brethren since 1708.

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Questions Frequently Asked About Covenant Brethren Church

- **What is the structure of the Covenant Brethren Church?**

A first a simple 11-15 member executive board, elected by the Annual Meeting and Worship Conference. The Annual Meeting and Worship Conference will be a gathering of local congregation delegates and others, keeping business at a minimum, and focusing on worship, spiritual growth, practical workshops to equip congregations to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- **Is this just a “BRF” movement?**

No. CBC is broader than Brethren Revival Fellowship, and involves both BRF people and people not normally associated with BRF. A broad representation of evangelically-minded Brethren has been involved with CBC from the start.

- **Is this all just about homosexuality?**

No. Homosexuality is just the presenting issue that calls into question Biblical Authority and shows the weakness of our accountability. It is NOT the focus of CBC, though it will not be contemplated by CBC.

- **Have you dialogued with COB denominational leaders?**
Repeatedly. Our first meeting face to face meeting was September 17, 2019 and have been in phone contact with COB denomination leaders frequently.

- **Why can't we stay Church of the Brethren and put out those who reject Biblical Authority and Accountability?**
 - Repeated attempts to hold leadership and agencies accountable – persuasion, decisions of Annual Conference – have been fruitless.
 - Appeals and queries have either rejected by District or Annual Conferences and agencies (like OEP), or ignored in actual practice, or side-stepped.
 - Key positions either held or controlled by those unsympathetic to Biblical Authority and Accountability.

- **How does this affect Ministerial Credentials?**
COB ministers joining CBC will transfer at their current level of either ordained or licensed minister. New ministers will be called by the congregations and vetted by a national ministerial committee and approved by the Executive Board.

- **How will Pastoral Placement be handled?**
Up to each congregation, with assistance from CBC office.

- **What about pensions and insurance through Brethren Benefit Trust?**

BBT leadership has indicated willingness to serve CBC. We are actively working with BBT on these issues.

- **How will local Property Insurance be handled?**

Local property insurance remains congregational option (many COB congregations carry from Brotherhood Mutual, a non-Brethren company in Fort Wayne, Indiana). Those arrangements may continue.

- **Will this affect our relationships with camps?**

This may vary by District, as some Districts own their camps outright, and other camps have an independent board.

- **What about property issues related to the Church of the Brethren?**

This varies by state. Many states are “neutral principles” states, depends on wording of local church documents (cf. Mt Olivet Presbyterian case, Roann COB case). Please consult an attorney in your state with expertise in this issue. We urge congregations to work at unanimity within the congregation, and gracious dealing with Church of the Brethren leadership.

Each CBC congregation will hold full title to its own properties. The national or regional CBC organizations will not hold congregational properties.

- **How will our relationship to Brethren Homes be affected?**

Our Brethren homes receive support and volunteers from both Brethren and non-Brethren congregations.

- **Will my local congregational structure, program be affected?**

Each congregation is left to its own decisions and program; covenantal agreement with the Statement of Faith is the key aspect of joining CBC.

- **What is CBC's view on divorce and remarriage?**

Please see the Statement of Faith. Particular applications are the decision of the local congregation.