

Northern Ohio District Church of the Brethren

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October 18, 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Northern Ohio District,

These are difficult times within our denomination and within our district. Over 100 churches have left the Church of the Brethren. We have three of our Northern Ohio churches that have formally begun the process to withdraw from the denomination and hence the district. At least one other is seriously considering this path.

Much of the concern comes from issues surrounding homosexuality and same-gender weddings. The Church of the Brethren's official position on covenantal relationships between homosexual persons is that they are "an additional lifestyle option but, in the church's search for a Christian understanding of human sexuality, this alternative is not acceptable." This is from the 1983 Annual Conference Statement, "Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective" which was again affirmed in 2011 by the Annual Conference delegates. You are encouraged to read the full statement. It can be found at <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1983-human-sexuality/>

At the Northern Ohio District Conference at Dupont in 2018, our district affirmed the 1983 paper and adopted a "Resolution on Same Sex Marriage" that states in part that our district:

- a. Understands these statements to mean that the practice of homosexuality is not acceptable for members of our congregations, including leaders;
- b. Affirms that in keeping with the Annual Conference Statement it is the policy of the Northern Ohio District not to license, ordain, commission, or install as pastors individuals who are acknowledged practicing homosexuals;
- c. Affirms that regardless of state and federal laws, marriage is a God-ordained covenant that can only be entered into by one man and one woman;
- d. Affirms that ordained, commissioned, or licensed ministers are prohibited from performing or officiating any same sex marriage;
- e. Affirms that the use of Northern Ohio District buildings, camps, properties, or churches for the use of same sex ceremonies is prohibited;
- f. Reaffirms a commitment to extend Christ-like comfort and grace to LGBT persons in the spirit of the 1983 Annual Conference Statement, Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective;
- g. Affirms that the District will encourage for leadership positions those persons that uphold the teachings and beliefs of the Church of the Brethren.

While this is the official position of the Church of the Brethren, there have been incidents in other districts where practices have not followed Annual Conference guidance on these issues with minimal or no consequences. Annual Conference 2022 also raised concerns for some about where the denomination might be headed.

As the Executive Committee for the Northern Ohio District, we strongly believe this is not the time to leave the Church of the Brethren, but rather to more actively engage at the national level of our denomination. The voices of the individuals and churches that affirm these values need to be heard.

Here are some basic, practical ways to begin:

1. Send delegates to Annual Conference. The 2023 Annual Conference is in Cincinnati, so travel costs are minimal.
2. Prayerfully consider who is gifted to serve in positions that will be on the ballot at Annual Conference. You can see those open positions and make nominations directly at <https://www.brethren.org/ac/nominations/>
The Northern Ohio District has not had a member on the Mission and Ministry Board for over 10 years. This is a position on the ballot for 2023.
3. Allow your name to be used on the ballot for elected positions at the denominational level.
4. Serve in appointed roles when asked; seek out opportunities to volunteer at Annual Conference.
5. Engage in fellowship and education opportunities within the denomination, sharing and listening together.
6. Send emails expressing your concerns to:
 - a. David Steele, General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren at generalsecretary@brethren.org
 - b. Tim McElwee, Annual Conference Moderator at TMcElwee@brethren.org
 - c. Rhonda Pittman Gingrich, Director of Annual Conference at RPGingrich@brethren.org
7. Letters to those listed above can be sent to 1451 Dundee Ave, Elgin, IL 60120.

As you have thoughts, questions, or would just like further conversation, please feel free to call any of us listed below. We are committed to the Northern Ohio District and believe that each of us – and all of us together as the church – are called to grow as disciples and to make disciples to share the light of Jesus with the world. Please join us as we seek to follow this calling. May God make us faithful!

In Christ,

The District Executive Committee

Patrick Bailey, District Board Chair
Terry Baldwin, District Board Vice-Chair
Carol Kuryn, District Board Secretary
James Washington, District Moderator
Mark Pollock, Congregational Commission

Dean Foster, Connections Commission
Steve Simmons, Ministerial Commission
Dave Bassett, Stewardship & Finance
Lisa Snyder, District Treasurer
Kris Hawk, District Executive Minister