



Required Readings for Licensing and Ordination

2026 Edition

The following Documents are required reading for all candidates seeking licensing and ordination, and are included in the study list of the Written Examination

Table of Contents

The Message of the Brethren Ministry	3
The Brethren Church: Why? by J. Allen Miller	4
The Origin and Spirit of the Brethren People by J. Allen Miller	7
The Brethren Church: A Challenge by J. Allen Miller	10
Why A Church Called Brethren by Jerry Flora	14
The Concept of Membership in the Brethren Church.....	18
Statement on Ordination of Divorced Persons.....	22
A Historical Overview of the Issue of Ordination of Women in the Brethren Church	24
Recommendation on the Subject of the Ordination of Women.....	31
Guidelines for Pastoral and Congregational Ethics	33

In addition, the following documents, available from the National Office, MUST be acknowledged to have been read. These may be included in the intensives, or in other documents, but are relisted here for clarity and to assure the candidate has read ALL required readings.

Brethren Pastor's Handbook, J. Allen Miller, et al.

Manual of Procedure for The Brethren Church (latest revision)

Brethren Beliefs

Background and Development of Brethren Doctrines, 1650-2015, Dr. Dale R. Stoffer

The Message of Faith, Jerry Flora

A Brethren Witness for the 21st Century, Brian Moore

A Brethren Witness for the 21st Century, Jason Barnhart and Bill Ludwig, ed

The Complete Writings of Alexander Mack, William Eberly, ed. ISBN: 0-936693-12-6

-OR-

European Origins of the Brethren: A Source Book on the Beginnings of the Church of the Brethren in the Early Eighteenth Century, Donald F. Durnbaugh ISBN-13: 978-0871782564 (only the writings of Alexander Mack Contained herein)

The History of The Brethren Church, Albert T. Ronk

Fruit of the Vine, Donald Durnbaugh

The Brethren Encyclopedia, Donald Durnbaugh, ed.(it is not expected for the candidate to have read the entire encyclopedia, but be aware of it as a resources for Brethren history, doctrine, and polity)

Meet the Brethren, Donald Durnbaugh, ed.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BRETHREN MINISTRY

The message which Brethren ministers accept as a Divine Entrustment to be heralded to a lost world, finds its sole source and authority in the Bible. This message is one of hope for a lost world and speaks with finality and authority. Fidelity to the apostolic injunction to preach the Word demands our utmost endeavor of mind and heart. We, the members of the National Ministerial Association of the Brethren Church (now National Association of Brethren Church Elders), hold that the essential and constituent elements of our message shall continue to be the following declarations:

1. Our motto: The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.
2. The Authority and Integrity of the Holy Scriptures. The ministry of the Brethren Church desires to bear testimony to the belief that God's supreme revelation has been made through Jesus Christ, a complete and authentic record of which revelation is the New Testament; and, to the belief that the Holy Scripture of Old and New Testaments, as originally given, is the infallible record of the perfect, final and authoritative revelation of God's will, altogether sufficient in themselves as a rule of faith and practice.
3. We understand the Basic Content of our Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Be:
 - (1) The Pre-existence, Deity and Incarnation by Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ the Son of God.
 - (2) The Fall of Man, his consequent spiritual death and utter sinfulness, and the necessity of his New Birth.
 - (3) The Vicarious Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ through the shedding of His own Blood.
 - (4) The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in the body in which He suffered and died and His subsequent Glorification at the Right Hand of God.
 - (5) Justification by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in of which obedience to the will of God and works of righteousness are the evidence and result of the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the world, and the life everlasting of the just.
 - (6) The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit Who indwells the Christian and is His Comforter and Guide.
 - (7) The Personal and Visible Return of our Lord Jesus Christ from Heaven as King of Kings and Lord of Lords; the glorious goal for which we are taught to watch, wait, and pray.
 - (8) The Christian should "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind," should not engage in carnal strife and should "swear not at all".
 - (9) The Christian should observe, as his duty and privilege, the ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, among which are (a) baptism of believers by Triune Immersion; (b) confirmation, (c) The Lord's Supper, (d) The Communion of the Bread and Wine, (e) the washing of the saints' feet; and (f) the anointing of the sick with oil.

From The Brethren Evangelist
Ashland, Ohio, Wednesday, July 30, 1913
Editorial

THE BRETHREN CHURCH: WHY?
By J. Allen Miller, the Editorial Committee

I have been thinking much lately as to the real ground upon which our denominational existence may be justified. The discussion that follows is the outline of the writer's denominational conviction. Others may lay stress elsewhere or rest their fealty to the Brethren Church upon altogether different grounds. The position defined below is at once the writer's apology for our existence as a people and is his judgment also the bulwark of our strength.

CREDAL STANDARD

Our Cedral Standard is the New Testament. Aside from this we have no creed. Thus far I have said no more than many other bodies or churches say. But when we say this, we mean more than others. We mean that its precepts, commands, and examples are to be taken seriously in the present day as they were in the first Christian period. We hold that its primary, and therefore its only true and inspired meaning, is to be ascertained by the well-defined laws of language and rules of grammar. The content of the Gospel message is the same for every age and people. It is therefore not to be interpreted by and traditions of the Middle Ages nor by the modern definitions determined by any party spirit. It is a first Century Book recording the eternal principles and methods of the Kingdom of God. Historical] Criticism is therefore of inestimable value when pursued within the bounds of its legitimate sphere. As a people we have nothing to fear and everything to gain by its help in the interpretation of our only CREED. Ours is an UNCHANGING CREDAL STAND, perfect and complete in every detail, whose eternal spiritual and social principles await interpretation in every age in terms of the life and experience of that day.

INTERPRETATIVE STANDARD

Here again I find myself held by a controlling principle among our people, it is the method of approach to the Word of God when we seek its meaning and its message to the heart. Being indited by the Spirit of the living God we hold with St. Paul that only the spiritually minded can ascertain its divine import. Its interpretation is not an intellectual feat. On the other hand, it is not a privilege of a select not is it necessarily mystical. A man born of the Spirit of God and led by the same Holy Spirit has a necessary qualification in the understanding of the Spirit's message in the Book. Consider now what this will involve. In the **high right of approaching the Word of God** and receiving the message it brings him. In the next place it compels everyone to hear the message the Spirit brings in its totality. There can be and dare be no limitations upon nor false nor partial division of the eternal truth of God expressed in precept and command. Neither the right of private judgment, the decrees of kings or councils, the opinions of priest or parson, nor the preferences of the individual can set aside the eternal truth of God revealed through His Word to his child. The thirteenth chapter of John will speak as authoritatively as Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus' teaching on divorce and the oath will be as sacredly regarded as His teaching on honesty and kindness. In the third place this principle holds every

man to the full surrender in obedience to every teaching of the Gospel without any let or gainsaying. There is not a command taught in the New Testament that a member of the Brethren Church has not high privilege of obeying. There is not a solitary principle of life, not a teaching that can not be heartily accepted and as heartily incorporated in life. This may result in various differences of opinions on multitudes of minor beliefs, but it allows great spiritual freedom in Christ Jesus. On the great fundamental ordinances of the Christian church, on the fundamental Christian principles the church is a marvelous unit. No elimination of either has ever occurred under this guiding principle. The greatest brotherly love and the strongest ties of Christian fellowship bind us together under this interpretative principle. I hold it **FUNDAMENTAL and VITAL** to the fullest development of the individual life and **THE ONLY WAY OF APPROACH** to the Word of God by an honest soul.

THE DOCTRINAL STANDARD

Here I speak not of those great evangelical doctrines which practically all Protestant Christians hold in common. But I speak of those that mark us as distinctive in practice. It is in these elements of difference that we find our strength and not in those of agreement with other bodies I here refer to doctrinal strength.

Believer's Baptism. The unchanging position of the Brethren Church has been the practice of the Apostolic form of Christian Baptism. This is a Triune Immersion of a believer in the name of the triune God. Twenty-five years of earnest study has only made the writer the more certain of the position of the church on this question. Our faith rests upon two considerations, namely, the teaching of the Word of God, and the unanimous testimony of the early Christian church as revealed in the extant writings. If there is anything whatsoever in the Ordination: Call to Ministry and institution of Christian Baptism the Brethren Church has it. If Jesus meant that anything else than that which he instituted would do just as well, when certainly the original will do. Practically all Protestant Christians accept the validity of Triune Immersion.

The Communion Service. In this service we make much of the Words and the example of Jesus Christ. There is first of all the example of Jesus in the Feet Washing, in the eating of a Supper, and in the institution of the Bread and Cup. Positively no method of interpretation whatsoever could evade His example in each as set forth in the Gospels. No criticism, no matter how radical, could escape these facts in the Gospels. But what about the words of institution? Without controversy, for it is a matter of simple fact, no ordinance practiced by any church today has the words of institution so full and strong as Feet Washing in John 13:1-17. As for the Love Feast, it stands in immediate connection with the Eucharist or Loaf and Cup in every place in the New Testament in its institution, or rather, therefore, **THEIR** institution. With this agrees the writer of Acts, as well as St. Paul.

The Non-resistant Principles. Only a line need be written here for the matter is at once clear, the bearing of arms in carnal warfare, and the swearing of an oath, are utterly incompatible with and contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ. So, we find His teachings as well as those of the Apostolic writers equally strong in the condemnation and prohibition of each. The Christian is a follower of the Prince of Peace. He speaks the truth in his affirmations. The godless and sacrilegious oaths of men's invention he shuns. The Apostolic word, "Sear not at all," is enough for him.

The Non-conforming Principles. This principle in its broad statement means that the Christian avoids the world spirit of his age. This spirit is dominated always and everywhere with

the selfish and carnal, the satanic and lustful traits and qualities of the unregenerated life. This world spirit manifests itself so artfully and so insidiously that it entangles those not on their constant guard. No wonder then that Jesus and the apostles teach strongly against it. These principles find expression in several directions, the chief of which are those which guard the sacredness of the sexual and marital relations and those which lay stress upon the life of humility, simplicity, and service. The first is concretely the second in the teachings of the use of property or in the necessity of the new life in Christ and the subsequent crucifixion of the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life.

This Doctrinal Standard I find fully set forth in the Creed, and I find myself held by it in constantly growing admiration and reverence. It is an impregnable foundation and bulwark of denominational strength to the people holding to it.

Thus, upon three separate and independent lines of thought, each of which is our peculiar heritage and possession today, I give the answer to the "why" in the subject.

"CONTRIBUTIONS"

"THE ORIGIN and SPIRIT of the BRETHREN PEOPLE"

By J. Allen Miller

August 18, 1915 (Page 4)

This brief article is not intended to give a history of the rise of the Christian Body with which we stand identified. I have told this story in a bit more extended Ordination: Confidential Reference Form these pages before. The present article has to do more with the spirit and genius of our people.

However, it should be said in brief that the Brethren, as a separate body of Christians, originated in Germany at the opening of the 18th century. During the half century preceding there had been a great religious awakening in all parts of Germany and in the countries beyond. Primitive Christianity had declined. The reformation and reformers, while they had accomplished great things for the spiritual liberation and purification of the people, had stopped far short, so many thought. They were disturbed in their spiritual experiences. Numerous attempts were made to approach more nearly to the standards of life and doctrine of the Apostolic church. One cannot here even enumerate the numerous streams of religious life and thought that sprang therefrom. In one of these we are interested. It was in the German village of Schwartzenu, in the province of Wittgenstein, Hesse-Cassel, under the protectorate of a kindly count that Alexander Mack and seven others of like mind met for the study of the Bible and for mutual edification. These eight were the first to covenant together in an attempt to renounce all human creeds and confession of faith and substitute therefore the New Testament alone. In so doing, they determined to restore to the Church which they formed all the ordinances of the New Testament. So far as we know they were all prior to this time members of the recognized Protestant churches. They were not a group of fanatics or spiritual enthusiasts. They were earnest and pious and intent upon finding out the will of God and doing it. They found it impossible to live as they felt they must to please God in the State Churches. Neither could they live as Separatists for they believed too strongly in the New Testament ordinance. So, the only course open to them was the one which they took. They were driven to Ordination: Call to Ministry new body in which the life and practices of Christ and the Primitive Church were honored and taught. Thus, they covenanted together, "To take all the commandments of Jesus Christ as an easy yoke, and thus to follow the Lord Jesus, their good and faithful Shepherd, in joy and in sorrow, as his true sheep even unto a blessed end."

They began restoring the Apostolic form of Baptism, namely Triune Immersion. They rejected infant baptism. They returned to the full communion service including the feet-washing. They lived the sincere and earnest life of the humble follower of Christ, and they bore testimony to their joy in this new found service. Many others were attracted to them, and their numbers increased. In spite of bitter persecution, loss of property and imprisonment, the faith spread. Men of learning and piety were joined to the movement and became the ministers. At least four centers of activity were established in a short time. Members were found in the Rhine provinces of Germany, in Switzerland and in Holland.

Persecution continued with increasing severity and the Brethren were scattered. Mack himself went to Holland where he met with Penn. From him an invitation came to settle within the limits of his colony in the New World. Here prosperity and religious freedom were assured. The movement to America began in 1719, when a body of Brethren which had been settled at

Crefeld learned of the hopes held out by the opportunities of Pennsylvania. They heard glowing reports of the prosperity of the settlement at Germantown and resolved to go hither. Under the leadership of Peter Becker the first group of Brethren migrated to the New World. They settled in and around what is now Germantown and on Christmas Day, 1723, the first Brethren church was organized in America. Within the next ten years practically all the members of influence left Europe and came to America. It was this coming to America, the continued persecution and the loss of leaders that crushed the movement in Germany.

In the New World these pioneers of our faith proved themselves worth followers of the Faith they had espoused. The hardships and the discouragements, the faithlessness of some and the indifference of others made progress at first slow. It was perhaps not far from 1800 before the Brethren had reached as far west as Indiana. Since then, churches have multiplied and the Brethren people have scattered to almost if not every State in the Union as well as into many foreign parts, this brings me to the limit of the historical side of the topic.

In seeking to characterize what I like to call the spirit and the genius of Brethrenism I always find myself at a loss for words. In the first place this is true because it is a **LIFE** that I am trying to depict. And what makes this all the more difficult at least for me is the fact that it is not the life of a particular man or woman but the life of a community that I am trying to describe. Yes, it is a life. To appreciate it one must really enter into it. I am not now speaking of the narrow idiosyncrasies and oft-times ignorant and mistaken notions or customs, local or general, which stifled progress and led to intolerance. But I am thinking of those magnificent traits of Christian conduct, the unfaltering devotion to convictions, the honesty and integrity of character, and loyalty to the Church and the Word of God which silently but powerfully influenced the whole community. I am thinking of the quiet and peaceful life, for the most part rural, which flowed on as a deep stream of spiritual righteousness. The unobstructive and undemonstrative life of the fathers still lives. Absence of emotional outbursts was no evidence of the lack of deep and genuine spiritual feeling. The tear dimmed eye and the trembling hand; the silence of a spirit moved within a shaking body spoke loudly of the Spirit's work. I am thinking, too, of the simple and the sincere fraternal fellowship that has always characterized our people. I also am thinking of the strong and distinctive elements of the personal character of the people. Many a man and woman can bear testimony to the fact that after the lapse of fifty or sixty years, these characters appeal more strongly than ever; that the influences of the life tug irresistibly and that the joys of the old day, the childhood day, with its old meeting house and the songs and very accents of the earnest minister still linger. I wish I could describe the life. Stripped of the peculiarities of its yesterday it still goes on. It is the old life reproduced in the new day-our day. May the heritage of our day be as precious tomorrow to our children as they attempt to live the characteristic Christ-life.

The Brethren spirit is heroic. Witness the stern devotion to duty under stress of lash and torture as in the instance of John Naas. Witness the toils of a galley slave in the experiences of Christian Libe. Witness the loss of property as in the instance of Alexander Mack. Witness the thrilling story of the endurance for his Faith of Ernst Christopher Hochmann. The son of a distinguished, noble father he was spiritually "awakened" by the great Francke. Homeless and persecuted, whipped, and imprisoned, hungry and forsaken, to the end of his days he never doubted his Master nor shirked his duty to his convictions. "He was a rare man~" Would that the spirit of the heroic would possess us.

The Brethren spirit is the self-sacrificing spirit. Space fails me to recount the sacrifices made for the spread of the Brethren faith in the pioneer days. Were we half so devoted to the

cause even now many neglected and urgent fields would be occupied regardless of temporal considerations.

But Brethren spirit lives apart, I can only say a word here. It is the genius of our people to make a sharp distinction between the worldly and pleasure loving, the fleeting, sensual and evil spirit of the age and the holy and lofty things of the Christian church as depicted in the New testament, there has always been the conviction that the world, and its lusts, work havoc within the soul.

And here I must abruptly close. My deepest conviction is that Brethren doctrine and practice, the Brethren spirit and genius, sincerely and truly lived makes a type of character the most nearly Christ-like possible to attain. I am pronouncing no judgment on others, but I know what Brethren ideals will do for character and life, for the life that now is and the hope of the life to come.

THE BRETHREN CHURCH: A CHALLENGE

by Dean J. Allen Miller

Ashland, Ohio

One time since in an article in the Evangelist, and now printed as a tract under the title, "The Brethren Church: Why?" I sought to justify our denominational existence. In the present contribution, I shall suggest a mere outline of another line of justification. I call it THE BRETHREN CHURCH: A CHALLENGE. I am persuaded that it is a challenge that means a life and death struggle. Forms of organization perish but the principals of Jesus Christ are never dying. The challenge that faces us at this very hour is whether we as a people are worthy to remain the champions of these undying principles, the personal representatives of Jesus Christ to the world. Shall we become, as I most devoutly and implicitly believe we may, the growing Church Apostolic life and conduct or shall we remain a struggling and small body doing a worthy work indeed but nevertheless insignificant and unnoticed?

Why shall we not now be wise enough and bold enough with faith enough to launch propaganda that will be our deliverance? Upon whom if not upon us does this task fall? We have every element of power and efficiency to make us a great people. We also use every open door challenging entrance that would make us a people championing Apostolic Christianity. Whether we shall become a people great and influential, not in the sense of numbers, but in compelling respect for the WHOLE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST and WINNING MEN TO HIM depends upon several considerations. These will appear in the sequel.

First, I wish to repeat here that our STANDARDS are CHRISTIAN, UNASSAILABLE, and THEREFORE A CHALLENGE TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

What are these standards? I group them for simplicity's sake under the following heads:

1. Our Creedal Standard is the NEW TESTAMENT. By this, we mean not a part of it or select parts of the whole but the whole. When we say this, we mean more than others who say the same thing. This is a CREED that needs no REVISION. The principles of the New Testament, in themselves unchanging and complete because given from God, await interpretation in every age in the terms of the life of that age.

2. Our interpretative Standard is that revealed by the New Testament itself. It is therefore from God and must be heard. How shall we approach the Word of God and find its message to the heart? By the same HOLY SPIRIT that INSPIRES the Word and BEGETS the child of God. This Spirit gives every disciple the high right to approach the Word of God unhindered and receive its message to him. It compels everyone to receive the whole message the Word brings through the guiding of the Spirit. And finally, it holds every man to a full surrender in obedience to every ordinance and teaching of the WHOLE GOSPEL.

3. Our Doctrinal Standard is that unfolded in the Gospel. For the sake of being clear I must enumerate in part without stopping to justify in any particular. I shall do so in simple and clear statements.

1. The New Testament is the Word of God, authoritative, perfect, final and complete.
2. Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God.
3. For want of space I cannot enumerate here in systematic order those great and fundamental doctrines which all Protestant Christians hold in common. It is not necessary here because so utterly disregarded or perverted by others, - namely,
4. Believer's baptism by triple immersion in the name of the Trinity.
5. Confirmation.
6. The complete Communion Service according to the New Testament and the practice of the Apostolic Church including, the Washing of Feet, the Lord's Supper or Love Feast, and the Communion of the Bread and Cup.
7. The Non-Resistant Principles which regard the bearing of arms in carnal warfare and the swearing of an oath as contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel.
8. The Non-Conforming Principles by which we are compelled to regard the sacredness of the sexual and marital relations and the sinfulness of divorce and remarriage except as taught by Jesus; this principle further holds us to the denial of the selfish and carnal world-spirit of the age both in the use of our property as stewards of God and the living of the humble, simple and serviceable life among men.
9. The anointing of the sick according to James 5th chapter.
10. The immanent, personal, and glorious return of the Lord, the consummation of the Age, and the ultimate triumph of the Will of God concerning this world.

This enumeration is not exhaustive, but it is a Doctrinal Standard which by its fullness and uniqueness must compel respect. Our profession of this high standard is a challenge to us to be true to it.

Second, We are face to face with the CHALLENGE that cannot be evaded. This challenge takes the following Ordination: Confidential Reference Form my thought. It might be expressed otherwise. The Ordination: Confidential Reference Forms are unessential but the fact of it and its meaning are inescapable. We must meet it whatever way we may put it. I put it thus:

1. Our exalted standards which I have just indicated as Creedal, Interpretative, and Doctrinal challenge us to action. Either our high claims are meaningless and valueless judged by ourselves, or they challenge us to the highest endeavor. Either the form of and the institutions of the Christian Church and the principles of the Christian life were meant by the Spirit inditing them to have permanent value or else they were changeable, transitory, and subject to displacement by others that would do just as well. We hold to the former position and if our contention is worth anything whatsoever it is a challenge to us to meet our divinely imposed obligation or confess ourselves spiritual bankrupts and defaulters.

2. The life which these same standards inculcate, foster, and perfect is a challenge to us to act. Everywhere we hear the cry of the emptiness, the barrenness, and worthlessness of the Christian life. We hear of the Church's impotency, its vast machinery and its tremendous

expenditure and its small actual gain in life and its insignificant contributions to human need and human society. And we hear much more of such and similar things. Let us say, No, these things are not true. And then we must confess to the barrenness, the indifference, and the failure to actualize in terms of high living and real serving of our current and popular (?) christianity (small c). All this is a terrible indictment of us all and a tremendous challenge to US TO GIVE THE WHOLE GOSPEL WITH ITS TRUE SPIRITUAL LIFE TO ALL WHOM WE CAN REACH.

3. Besides all this is the vast un-Christian and non-Christian field of the world. Look at

- Africa, 150,00,000, one-third entirely unreached
- India, 300,000,000. China, 400,000,000. Ah, God, help us to think of the untouched world, a 1,000,000,000 men, women and children all as yet without any hope of hearing about Christ.
- Argentina with her 7,000,000. And Brother Yoder with a parish as large as all Ohio and 1,000,000 in it all untouched. 5,000,000 Mountain Highlanders; 1,000,000 Spanish speaking people: and what of Mormonism as yet untouched, the Indians, the frontiers, and the lumber and mining camps? And what of a thousand rural communities, small villages and even larger centers of population in our own land yet untouched? And what of the rural and small town churches that are forsaken by the thousands.

DO YOU SAY THERE IS NO OPEN DOOR FOR AGGRESSIVE WHOLE GOSPEL EVANGELISM WHEN THERE ARE IN OUR OWN COUNTRY:

cities unevangelized, with vice and wickedness prevailing? Hundreds of new towns growing up without religious services? Numerous country communities with lifeless and fruitless Churches?

Hundreds of thousands of lumbermen and miners and their families untouched by a wholesome Christian life?

Hundreds of thousands of workingmen estranged from the Church and from Jesus Christ?

Yes, when there are in the United States THIRTY-FIVE MILLION PEOPLE OVER TEN YEARS OF AGE OUTSIDE THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH?

What a challenge to a WHOLE GOSPEL CHURCH that is really in earnest!

Third. We must formulate a propaganda' that is commensurate with these amazing facts and our high profession. Here again I merely suggest, I pray God He may lead in forming our plans so that the best may prevail. I suggest to provoke thought.

1. A consecrated Ministry that will follow a divinely inspired leadership in an absolute and first requisite. Without leadership no great work can be undertaken and much less accomplished. It is God's way. Selfish ambition in the leaders and in the hosts that are led must vanish. Sincerity and singleness of purpose to do the WILL OF GOD and SAVE MEN must motive every effort. Love must abound in every heart. WILL OUR MINISTRY PAY THE PRICE REQUIRED OF THEM TO DO THE WILL OF GOD?

2. A consecrated laity willing to do the will of God and to enter upon THEIR MINISTRY is the second of the first requisites.

- The laity must acknowledge the OWNERSHIP of the Lord. The laity must acknowledge their STEWARDSHIP in everything.

- The laity must live the exemplary life as well as the minister.
- The laity must remain true to their faith and not separate from the Church for easy and trivial or selfish causes.
- The laity must serve Christ and the Church in every place.

WILL OUR LAITY BE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE REQUIRED OF THEM TO DO THE WILL OF GOD?

3. Isolated members and small groups of members must in every community become centers of this Whole Gospel propaganda.

4. Consecrated laymen and lay-women, and especially our strong young men and women, must prepare themselves for Christian service and then undertake it. They must go where we have a nucleus of Brethren or into any needy rural or city field and become the spiritual guide and dynamic there. They must gather those of like mind, organize Sunday Schools, and do any sort of Christian work that will prepare for the coming of the evangelist with his message of salvation, all with a view to organizing a Whole Gospel Church. And such workers must earn their livelihood by toll. Why cannot a consecrated young layman earn his livelihood in the shop and superintend a Sunday School for Christ's sake on Sunday?

5. Our inactive and unemployed ministers must place themselves in centers of activity where they may be able to discharge their divinely imposed obligation by serving others and paving the way for others to come and build the Church there. Self-surrender? Yes. Building and not destroying. Helping others lead where he cannot lead himself and doing it in utter forgetfulness of everything and everyone but Christ and His work and the saving of men.

Brethren, this is the burden of my heart. I am not presuming too much when I say that I take the privilege, as I think I have the right, won by more than twenty-five years of hard and sincere labor for the Church, to say this much and to suggest the CRISIS THAT IS UPON US AS A PEOPLE.

I say this in view of the General Conference now in session as well as those who are at home.

I write thus as an appeal with the prayer that out of it and the discussion that out to follow a greater Brethren Church may come.

Finally, as for myself I hereby pledge myself anew to the Creed. I accept the challenge and by God's grace will spend my strength and my days to meet the obligation wherever I may be called to serve. Finally, I pledge myself to hearty support of any plan that may be formulated to meet our denominational responsibility and I declare myself ready to loyally and faithfully follow any leadership that has the seal of divine approval upon it.

Hail, Brethren!

Hearken!

It is the call of our Loud to larger and more faithful service.

It is not the call to the division of the spoil.

It is the trumpet call to the forward march to conflict.

"WHY A CHURCH CALLED BRETHREN?"

By Jerry Flora

Here's a "both-and" answer for Brethren searching for a distinctive identity.

Some days you can't do anything right. If some joker asks, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" you're stumped. No matter which way you reply, he will charge you with cruelty to your spouse.

Some questions can't be answered, it seems because they are improperly formed. Other questions should receive a clear specific answer. Either it is Monday, or it is not. Either you live as though there is a God, or you don't.

Still other questions deserve a response of both-and. Life on planet earth, for example, demands both centrifugal force and gravity. Scripture teaches divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Once Jesus was asked which of the 613 commands in the law of Moses is the greatest. "I'll tell you which is the great command," he replies, "but it doesn't stand alone. There is a second that goes with it, and these two depend on all the law and the prophets: love the Lord your God completely and love your neighbor personally."

If we apply that kind of both-and approach to life in the Brethren Church, it may help us. Why does this denomination exist? Why should there be a church called "Brethren"? The Brethren Church exists to express our allegiance to the Lord Jesus in a family style out of loyalty to the gospel and love for the world. We have here both the "what" and the "why" of our existence.

The identity, the "what" of the Brethren Church is our faith in God through Jesus Christ our Lord and the family style in which we express it.

Allegiance to Jesus as Lord

Jesus said in reply to that question, "You shall love the Lord your God." Now, "Lord" is the Hebrews' name for the God who gets involved with people. "God" is the general term for the Infinite One who created the universe and keeps it going. But "Lord" or "Yahweh" - this is that same God in his personal relationships with sinful humanity. It was he who reached down and called Abram, sustained an Isaac, transformed a Jacob, and freed a whole nation from slavery. Jesus said, "The Lord, this God who acts on behalf of such people - love him! Answer his love with all that you are: heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your Rescuer completely, utterly, always, and love only him."

The apostles never forgot what he said. And the central thrust of their writings is not "accept Jesus as your personal Savior." That is both true and necessary, but the basic confession of the New Testament declare, "Jesus Christ if Lord!" Jesus the Jew is God Almighty come to earth for us sinners and for our salvation. Jesus is "Lord," the God who gets involved with people.

The early Brethren knew what the lordship meant and were prepared to accept it. They took as basic a passage in Luke's Gospel where Jesus taught, "If a person is going to come after me, let that person count the cost and not be like the fellow who begins to build but cannot finish, or the king who goes to war but cannot fight. Neither of them has estimated the cost." Alexander Mack, founder of the German Baptist Brethren, wrote much of obedience and

sacrifice in following Christ. There is a price tag on loving this Lord completely, and a would-be disciple must count the cost.

We in a republic don't understand lordship. We elect our mayors, we elect our commissioners, we elect our senators, we elect our presidents. We don't know how it feels to have someone over us, before whom we fall prostrate and whisper, "Master!" - someone whose every utterance carries the force of law, whose very glance signs life or death.

The Brethren who first braved the Atlantic to reach Philadelphia knew the meaning of lordship. They talked much about the cost of discipleship. They recalled the story of John Naas, the giant of a man among them. So large in stature was he that the king asked him to join his elite personal bodyguard. But Naas refused to be recruited. They tortured him to no avail, hanging him at last from a tree by one thumb and one big toe. Fearing that he was going to die, they cut him down and dragged him before the monarch. Simply Naas explained that he could not join the king's elite corps because already he was in the army of King Jesus. He had pledged his allegiance to Christ as Lord.

A Family Style

One unique feature of the kingdom of God is that all its citizens are adopted children in the royal family. The King is their Father, the Crown Prince their Elder Brother. This, too, is part of the "what" of the Brethren Church - this family style.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." If the neighbor is an outsider, that outsider must become an insider and insiders must become family. The old Brethren used to talk about our denomination as "the brotherhood", We experience that brotherhood each year at General Conference. the Brethren are a family, and the General Conference is the annual reunion.

It's frightfully easy for us to get caught up in the life of our local churches, forgetting that we are in fact a part of one another. Each congregation is a cell of the body, and each must think of itself in such terms. Henry Holsinger and the others who started the Progressive Brethren described our church government as federated congregationalism. Incidental affairs of operation are left to the local churches, but in major areas of thought and life all Brethren must stand together. We really do need each other!

Rev. Kent Bennett described in a 1970 article in the Brethren Evangelist "What It Means to be Brethren." So far as outsiders are concerned, he wrote, the quality that distinguishes the Brethren is their caring fellowship, what we are here calling a family style of Christianity. Think for a moment about the names of other denominations. Lutherans are disciples of Martin Luther. Presbyterians are so called because they govern their churches by a system of elders (presbyters). Baptists insist on that great rite of the church, and that it be by immersion. The Methodists got their nickname because the founding Wesley brothers were so methodical in everything they touched. But what can you do if your name is "Brethren"? You have to be a family! That is what outsiders noticed about the first Christians, and this is what observers marked about the early Brethren, too.

The Brethren Church exists to express our allegiance to the Lord Jesus in a family style out of loyalty to the gospel and love for the world. The second half of the sentence contains the "why" of the Brethren Church, our reason for existence.

Loyalty to the Gospel

As Jesus interpreted it, loyalty to his saving good news means obedience. "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and don't do the things that I say?" he asked. "If you love me, keep my

commandments, And so, for Brethren from 1708 to 1078, love has meant loyalty more than coziness or ecstasy.

Now, every family has its forms, and the forms of various families differ. Some whole families, for example, squeeze the toothpaste tube in the middle. In one family that father takes out the garbage; the father in another family wouldn't think of taking out the garbage. Call it tradition, call it ritual, call it whatever you like - every family has its forms. And the Brethren Church has hers. Best known are the external forms of baptism by trine immersion, confirmation by the laying on of hands, the threefold service of the Lord's Supper, and prayer with anointing for healing.

In addition to these, the Brethren family style from the beginning took the internal form of an obedient life. Here is the root of which the external forms are fruit. If Jesus commanded something, the original Brethren tried to do it. Sometimes they went too far and had to pull back; then they might change direction, only to correct their course again. But they were desperately intent on obeying the word of the Lord to whom they had pledged allegiance.

This family style was also a separated life, a life set apart from the world and reserved for Jesus' use. At times there was too much emphasis on being separated "from" and not enough on being set apart "for". Today many Brethren haven't ever heard of the doctrine of the separated life. It is in Scripture and it's part of our heritage.

In the third place, Christian life for the founding Brethren was a simple life. Modesty and frugality in obedience to the New Testament characterized their style of living. Now then ecologists are urging us to simplicity, the Brethren could take their flag out front if they really believe in a simple life.

It also was a peaceful life. This meant a life in which they not only tried to put away violence in religion and international relations, but also, they tried to avoid harsh feelings toward one another. These may arise as part of life in a family, but Scripture calls Christ's followers to be reconcilers and peacemakers.

Likewise it was for the early Brethren a ministering life, one in which at their best they approached the world and asked, "May I serve you?" If Jesus the Lord came to minister and give away his life, his servants who followed him could do no less.

Can we today hold together these historic forms and our contemporary methods? Or must one be sacrificed in the interest of the other? The Progressive Brethren were convinced that no necessary contradiction exists between eternal realities and time-conditioned techniques. They said in effect, "We can both be loyal to the truth of the gospel as practiced by the early church and apply it in the modern world using the very latest methods. Henry Holsinger even appeared in a photograph wearing his new-fangled rubber overshoes to prove that it could be done!

Love for the World

In attempting to carry out this ideal, Charles F. Yoder, after earning a Ph.D. degree and editing the-Brethren Evangelist, left this country in order to found a missionary work in Argentina. Many years and heartbreaks later, when it became necessary to reestablish that same work, Dr. Yoder - then past retirement age -set about to do the job.

This was love for the world, but not in the wrong sense. It was not love for the world that "is passing away and all the desires of it." No, this was true, proper love for the world, as when "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." In fact "In Christ, God was acting to reconcile the world to himself. That's what got the Progressive Brethren going a hundred years

ago. It was their loyalty to the gospel that made them Brethren; their love for the world made them Progressives.

When a theologian asked Jesus about this business of the great commandment and the second, he answered with the story of the good Samaritan. One analysis of that parable says that each of the bandits who beat the traveler and left him half dead was in effect saying, "What's yours is mine and I intend to take it." The priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side were saying "What's mine is mine, and I intend to keep it." And the Samaritan - hated half-breed that he was - declared "What's mine is yours, and you're welcome to it if you need it."

When Jesus finished the story, he turned the theologian's question around. The problem had been "Who is my neighbor?" but he reversed it, asking "Which of these was neighbor to the victim?", Our Lord laid the responsibility on his hearers to take the initiative by acting in a neighborly manner. He did not require needy outsiders to justify receiving aid. "What's mine is yours and you're welcome to it if you need it." As those who have become new creatures in him, we need no longer claim anything for ourselves - not even our life.

The existence God gives us is not ours but his, to be given away for the sake of the gospel and the world. Such was the spirit of former Progressive leaders like editor Henry Holsinger, evangelist Stephen Bashor, missionary Charles Yoder, theologian J. Allen Miller, brothers named Ronk and the inimitable Mrs. U J. Shively.

At the time of the American Revolution two famous print shops operated in Philadelphia, those of Benjamin Franklin and Christopher Sauer, Jr. A loyal member of the German Baptist Brethren, Sauer suffered personally and professionally during the war and its aftermath. Still he never lost sight of the motto placed in the shop by his father: "For the glory of God and my neighbor's good."

That's what the Brethren are all about. A faith to live by, a family to live with, certain forms to live out, and a future to live for - all to the glory of God and the good of our neighbors. That's why there's a church called Brethren!

THE CONCEPT OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE BRETHREN CHURCH

What Is Membership?

Church membership, as practiced by most denominations, is a logical and, we believe, correct inference from the concept of the church developed by Paul. His use of the "body" imagery (or, more specifically, the body of Christ) as a picture of how the church should function (see Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; Eph. 4:1-16) likens believers to "members" of a physical body who act in concert for the glory of God and the edifying of the body itself.

Paul makes an assumption in these passages that American Christianity fails at times to appreciate. Commitment to Christ includes commitment to His body, the church. The church here is not to be understood in an invisible or spiritual sense, but in the concrete sense of a local body of believers. Note in this regard 1 Corinthians 12:13 in which Paul indicates that baptism by the Spirit, which is the foundation for our salvation, incorporates us into the body of Christ. As Paul shows in the following context, he understands this body in very concrete terms.

Paul suggests therefore that two commitments are expected of every Christian: commitment to Christ, which is the basis of our salvation, and commitment to a body, which is a key means to our sanctification or growth in the Christian life. Though for purposes of definition, it is important to distinguish these two commitments, they actually should be thought of as a unit. Commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior should always lead us to commitment to His body as represented in a local body of believers. (We distort this Biblical truth when, in our presentation of the gospel, we fail to teach the new believer about the necessity – not for salvation but for Christian growth --of involvement in a local church.) The first commitment looks forward to the second as its practical fulfillment, the second looks back to the first as its presupposition.

What Are the Requirements for Church Membership?

In order to become a member of a local Brethren congregation, a person should fulfill several requirements:

1. The person must have made a commitment of faith to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. The prospective member should have been baptized by trine immersion or, in the case of an individual baptized in another denomination, by any form of believers' immersion.
3. There must be the willingness to recognize Christ's Lordship in all areas (failure here will inevitably lead to disruptions in the body). Membership should therefore include a commitment to regular participation in church services, proportional giving of one's resources, and living a life worthy of the Christian calling (fuller descriptions of these commitments can be found in "A Centennial Statement," pages 7 and 8).
4. Since local bodies as well as denominations have a right to order their lives within the limits of Christian freedom, the prospective member should be willing to accept the procedures and practices agreed upon by these bodies.

5. Because this is commitment to a body and not an institution, there should be a commitment to the other believers in the fellowship with the goal of mutual growth through encouragement, love, prayer, and correction.
6. The person should understand that failure to live up to these commitments will necessitate the loving admonition of the church with the possibility of disfellowshipping if a member fails to heed such admonition.

If these requirements were carried through consistently, there should be only one type of membership, active membership.

Membership, Discipline, and Restoration

One of the elements that caused the Brethren to break from both the established churches and Radical Pietists in Germany was the lack of discipline in these groups. What Franklin Littell has said with regard to the Free Churches is certainly apropos to the Brethren today: "That the Free Churches, whose original complaint against the establishments was precisely that they practiced no true Christian discipline, should have succumbed to such a degree is a scandal twice compounded." Our concept of membership must include the dimension of discipline; otherwise we are being neither Biblical nor Brethren. All too often, the development of an inactive membership is a "painless" way of dealing with members who have gone back on their membership vows, while roll revision, without confronting lapsed members before their names are taken off the rolls, amounts to "passive discipline." Ideally, there should be only one type of membership, active membership. Inactive membership is a contradiction in terms.

Two forms of discipline that fit very easily into Brethren practice. One is the covenant renewal approach in which all members renew their membership commitments yearly. Those not renewing their vows are dropped from membership, though the pastor or deacon should visit such people prior to removal from the membership roll in order to ascertain the reasons for failure to renew. A second form of discipline is the traditional yearly deacon visit. A deacon visits every member of the church once a year to mutually discern and encourage faithfulness to the membership covenant. If more Brethren churches developed such a practice, it would not only lead to a stronger, more committed church body, but it would probably also lead to a renewal among the deacons and deaconesses of many churches.

As intimated above, it should be a set policy in the church that no one is removed from the membership rolls without a visit by the pastor and/or deacon. This procedure could have several positive results. It could lead to a restoration of more lapsed members. It could acquaint the pastor with problems in the church that need addressed. It certainly would deepen the spiritual life of the congregation if people knew the pastor and deacons were taking the membership vows of their people seriously.

Basis for National Apportionment

This conference affirms basing national apportionments partially on membership. One of the reasons churches began to take a serious look at their membership rolls was because apportionments became linked to membership. We may cringe at the thought that finances are the goad to taking membership seriously, but the alternative, going back to the status quo with its undisciplined membership, certainly is worse. For consistency, however, all apportionments should be based on one factor. This should not be membership alone because of the continuing discrepancy in the way churches define membership. We affirm the Church Growth Index, the sum of membership, average Sunday School attendance, and average worship attendance divided

by three, as the best factor. In adopting a switch to the Church Growth Index as the basis for all apportionments, the actual revenues generated should be the same as under the former method -- what is referred to as "revenue neutral."

Membership As It Relates to General Conference Statistics

Each local church has the right to define what constitutes membership in that church, subject to the restrictions provided in the Manual of Procedure and based on a biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. However, it is important that local churches use a uniform method of reporting numbers to the General Conference. The standard for reporting an individual as a member of the local church for General Conference purposes shall be as follows:

1. Regular participation in church services
2. Faithful stewardship of one's resources: time and abilities, as well as money
3. Lifestyle worthy of the Christian calling.

The membership roll should be reviewed annually to ascertain the standing of each member. This review process should not be viewed solely in the formal sense of revising the role for statistical purposes, but should even more be seen as an opportunity to draw back into active fellowship all those who have lapsed in their commitments to the Lord and the church. No one should be removed from membership in the church without first being contacted by the pastor and/or the deacons of the church.

Legalistic standards for membership should be avoided. Each church is encouraged to take into account individual circumstances. It is far better to be inclusive when the spirit is right than exclusive when the standard is not met. To declare an individual out of good standing with the church is, in a sense, to say that that person is out of good standing with the Lord.

Churches should not discard the names of those who are not in good standing and who are not affiliated with another church. Churches should maintain a list of former members, including their address, year baptized, year became a member of the church, and year removed from membership in the church. Further, churches should maintain regular contact with these former members, when possible, through the church newsletter, annual visit by the deacons or others charged with spiritual care of the congregation, or any other means for maintaining the relationship. The goal should always be to restore a brother or sister to fellowship with Christ and His church (James 5:19-20).

Local practices ought to reflect as much as possible the definition of membership recognized at the national level.

Membership Promises (This replaces pages 16 -18 of The Brethren Pastor's Handbook, "Reception of Members")

(This is a suggested format for receiving new members)

In the Brethren Church, candidates for church membership present themselves before the gathered body of Christ to make public commitments to their fellow church members (much as we make a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ) and to receive commitments in return. These promises are solemn vows made before God and to one another. These are not to be taken lightly, either by the new members or by the present members of the congregation.

Candidates for membership are asked to listen to each question carefully, and if in agreement, to answer, "I do" or "I will"

In presenting yourselves for membership in the congregation:

1. Do you renew your profession of faith in Jesus Christ as your saving Lord and will you live, from this time forward in living and faithful obedience to His Word"? (I do.)
2. Do you understand and accept the faith and practice of this church? (I do.)
3. Will you continue in your own spiritual growth and encourage the growth of others through your regular participation in services of worship, study, and fellowship offered by this church? (I will.)
4. Will you support the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ through this church by giving of your time and money in the way the Bible teaches, and by using the abilities and spiritual gifts God has given you? (I will.)
5. Will you pray regularly for the life and ministry of this church, for its pastor, its leaders, and your fellow members? (I will.)
6. Will you seek to live in harmony with the fellow members of this church: will you support them with your prayers and your encouragement; and will you, in a spirit of love and submission, both give counsel to and receive counsel from your brothers and sisters in Christ? (I will.)

Members of the church are then asked to stand and make these commitments to the new members:

1. Do you, the members of the _____ Church, renew your commitment to Jesus Christ as your saving Lord, and do you renew your commitments to one as members of this church? If so, answer, "We do."
2. Do you enter into solemn covenant with these persons being received into church membership, and do you promise then your encouragement, your counsel, and your prayers? If so answer, "We do, by the grace of God."

The pastor then extends "the right hand of fellowship" -- a handshake -- and welcomes each person into the membership of the church. It is also appropriate to give a word of introduction of each new member to the church as a whole and to invite all church members to welcome each one into membership following completion of the service

Document History

1. Report submitted to the General Conference Executive Council and was recommended for adoption by General Conference (1987-1988).
2. The Polity Committee of the Brethren Church presented the report at Pastors' Conference. Though some concerns were expressed, it received generally favorable comments (1987).
3. Document approved at the 1988 General Conference of the Brethren Church.
4. Document published in the post-conference edition of *The Brethren Evangelist* (1988)

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STATEMENT ON ORDINATION OF DIVORCED PERSONS

This statement comes as a result of the National Association of Brethren Church Elders' desire to follow God's will in evaluating divorced persons for ordination. Nothing in this statement should be construed in any way as condoning divorce.

The National Association of Brethren Church Elders stands opposed to anything that fails to strengthen and support marriage and family relationships. We are very much concerned that pastors both teach and model the sanctity of marriage and God's opposition to divorce. At the same time, we recognize that all have sinned and fallen short of God's ideal in many areas of life.

The primary concern of the National Board of Oversight in the evaluation process should be to discern and clarify God's call on the candidate's life. Secondly, the NBO should examine the licensee according to scripture in regard to: A) present character and attitudes, B) gifts for ministry, C) fruits in ministry. It should be understood that no church should pass on a candidate to the Regional Leadership Team or the National Board of Oversight unless that church is convinced of that person's calling to and qualification for ministry.

In regard to the issue of ordination of divorced or divorced and remarried persons, the National Board of Oversight should consider each case on an individual basis. The evaluation should take into consideration the following:

1. What is the candidate's divorce history? How much personal willfulness was involved in the individual's divorce proceedings? What events precipitated the separation? In what ways and how diligently did the individual seek reconciliation? Did the divorce occur before conversion to the Christian faith? How long ago did the divorce occur?
2. Once the divorce occurred, what form of forgiveness and restoration has the candidate undergone? Who has the candidate counseled with and has there been an experience of forgiveness? What has the person learned and has there been growth through the experience?
3. How does the candidate's personality reflect issues that may have created difficulties not only in the failed marriage but also in the performance of ministry?
4. What is the candidate's present marital status? How long has the person been remarried? What is the quality of the current marriage? Is it healthy? How does the candidate's spouse view the quality of the marriage?
5. What is the candidate's current view of divorce and remarriage? What are considered justifiable reasons for divorce? What is the candidate's rationale, based on Biblical interpretation, for the remarriage of divorcees?
6. Because of the pain of divorce, is the candidate more likely to encourage reconciliation of marital difference and discourage divorce or will there be a tendency to teach and model a less than Biblical view of marriage?

Having considered all factors mentioned above, the National Board of Oversight should determine the candidate's suitability for ordination. Divorce or divorce and remarriage will not automatically disqualify a candidate for ordination. All candidates should be evaluated in the light of the first two priorities. The National Association of Brethren Church Elders calls all who aspire to ordination to live a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus.

Document History

1. Document developed by National Ordination Council at the request of the National Association of Brethren Church Elders.
2. N.A.B.C.E. accepted the resultant document from N.O.C.
3. Document updated to reflect transition from NOC to National Board of Oversight (NBO)

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A Historical Overview of the Issue of Ordination of Women in the Brethren Church

Dale R. Stoffer

Recent events in the Brethren Church have again raised the issue of the ordination of women. There have been requests from several different constituencies in the church for a study that provides an overview of the history and present status of this issue. In this paper, I will present a brief historical sketch of the issue to make available some background for this discussion.

Historical Overview of the Ordination of Women

The German Baptist Brethren of the 19th century extended women remarkable rights in comparison to other Christian groups. For example, women had the same vote as ordained elders in the council meetings of local Brethren congregations. However, in certain areas of church life, women did not have the same privileges as their male counterparts, notably preaching, serving as an elder or deacon, and the breaking of bread and passing of the cup during communion.

By the 1830s questions about the traditional positions regarding women began to be raised. A remarkable woman, Sarah Righter Major, challenged the historic restriction against a woman preaching. Her gifted proclamation of Scripture, coupled with a respectful, humble attitude, resulted in many invitations to preach in Brethren meetinghouses, beginning in the 1830s. Twice Annual Meeting (1834 and 1859) ruled that women were not to preach, based on 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12, though the 1859 decision allowed women to prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5 is cited). Curiously, no explanation of what prophecy involves is given. These decisions did not silence the irrepressible Sarah Righter Major. Queries were also brought to

Annual Meeting in 1849 and 1857 to give women the freedom to break bread among themselves (women were seated separately from men and the presiding elder would break the bread with and give the cup to each sister). In both instances Annual Meeting affirmed the traditional practice.

Significant changes occurred in these practices after the Brethren Church organized in 1883 following the disfellowshipping of Henry Holsinger and his supporters at the 1882 Annual Meeting. Almost immediately, women were given the right to break bread and pass the cup among themselves. The office of deaconess was authorized during the 1890s.

Most notable was the church's support of the right of women to preach and be ordained. The earliest official statement of support apparently was the Michigan district conference's declaration in 1890 that "Women are eligible to the office of minister or deacon from the following scriptures: Acts 2:18; 8:1-4; 15:32; 18:26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Cor. 3:17." (The citation of the Acts 8 and 15 passages seems problematic.) Other districts quickly followed suit: Indiana (1891), Illiokota (1891), Pennsylvania (1892), and Ohio (1894). General Conference likewise gave its support to women to preach and be ordained. In 1892 the conference extended "to the sisters all privileges which the brethren claim for themselves." This was followed the next year by General Conference's affirmation: "Resolved, That this convention recognizes and appreciates the force of the expression in Holy Writ: 'There is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ.'" Note the use of the Pauline declaration of the equality of male and female in Christ, based on Galatians 3:28.

From the 1890s to the present the Brethren Church has recognized approximately forty women as ministers by ordination and/or by allowing them to serve as pastors without formal ordination. The majority of these women served between 1890 and 1920; only one woman was ordained in the church during each of the decades of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In the quarter

century following 1957, no more women were ordained in the Brethren Church, even though two women did serve Brethren congregations during the 1960s.

In 1974 General Conference went on record as encouraging “women and men to engage in team ministry as ordained persons or as lay persons.” Since this time two women were ordained in the Indiana district; two were refused ordination (Southwest and Indiana districts), with gender being the main issue in the latter district; and one woman has been commissioned as a pastor (Pennsylvania district). There are presently two women pastoring Brethren congregations, one each in Indiana and West Virginia.

Some Observations about these Trends

Before I discuss deliberations about the ordination of women that have occurred over the last twenty years, I want to make some observations about the data I have summarized above. Both sides of the issue have sought to defend their stance based on Scripture. Though I do not want to get into the hermeneutical issues involved in this discussion, I do want to reinforce that the issue of the ordination of women is **not an issue of biblical authority; it is an issue of biblical interpretation**. Both sides build their case on a biblical foundation.

From a historical viewpoint, theological and social trends have played almost as large a role in this discussion as biblical evidence. This is a point that both sides may be somewhat reticent to admit, but it is necessary to be honest about this if true dialogue is to occur. During the 1880s and 90s, those who advocated an equal status for the sisters of the church recognized that their cause was framed within the broader women’s movement in America. The progressive outlook of the Brethren Church certainly made the church more open to view women as equal partners with men in all aspects of the work of the church. In addition, the willingness of women to serve the needs of many of the smaller churches in the denomination and to answer the

escalating call to work on foreign fields caused them to become important partners in the advance of the church from the 1890s to the 1920s.

This more open and progressive period of Brethren history was followed by a period in which fundamentalism came to play an increasing role in the church. The role of women came to be restricted to the home and, in the context of the church, to teaching children, though there was willingness to allow women to assume leading roles on the mission field. Though the emerging Grace Brethren were the most influenced by these trends during the 1920s and 30s, the Ashland Brethren were still impacted by the fundamentalist movement as can be seen by the large number of Ashland Brethren who adopted a dispensational form of eschatology and who shared the conservative ethical convictions of fundamentalism. Though the Ashland Brethren seem to have retained some commitment to the heritage of women in ministry, the newer pattern and example of restricting the roles of women in the church caused a virtual disappearance of the practice following the division with the Grace Brethren in 1939.

As Jerry Flora has observed, “Only with the external stimulus of the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s did some individuals in the denomination become interested once more in the possibility that women might be ordained or serve as pastors” (Flora 1987, 439). Since the early 1980s, however, a conservative evangelical response to this more open perspective on women in ministry has adopted the position taken by the fundamentalists of previous generations: the primary calling of the woman is in the home and she should not aspire to having authority over men in the church.

I share these historical, sociological observations not to discredit either side of this discussion but to remind us that we are all, to some extent, products of our culture and time. This places a heavy responsibility on all of us to continue the historic Brethren practice of

returning to Scripture to discern the Lord's mind on this as well as any other issue that confronts us.

Our Present Situation

Since the early 1980s the Brethren elders have maintained an on-again, off-again discussion of the ordination of women. The renewed interest in calling women to ministry in the latter 1970s and 80s led to the preparation of a series of papers on the issue beginning in 1982. The Brethren elders discussed these papers both in district and national gatherings over the next two years. In 1983 the National Brethren Ministerial Association, which oversees issues related to ordination in the denomination, formed a Task Force on Women's Ordination that was to bring a recommendation to the 1984 gathering of the elders. The six-man task force was composed of three members who were opposed to the ordination of women and three who supported it. At the 1984 meeting of the association, the task force brought a recommendation (appended to this paper) that sought to deal with the issue based on historic Brethren polity, with guidelines spelled out for dealing with the ordination of women at the local, district, and national levels. The proposal was defeated by a vote of 39 for and 45 against.

The 1984 action of the elders needs to be properly interpreted. It is not to be understood as a rejection of the ordination of women (people voted against it for varying reasons). The elders rejected the policies outlined in the report for dealing with an issue for which there was and is no theological consensus. Since 1984 there has been ambiguity about the procedures related to the ordination of women, primarily at the district level. In reality, the recommendations from the 1984 proposal related to the local and national levels (National Ordination Council) are in force. The right of a congregation to call people, including women, to ministry was not overruled by the decision, because this is a historic right of the local church

granted by General Conference. In the early 1990s the National Ordination Council (NOC) went on record that they would not refuse to examine a candidate for ordination on the basis of gender. That statement was unanimously reaffirmed on May 7, 2002, at the NOC meeting in Ashland. (The NOC is composed of representatives of all nine districts, the Ashland Theological Seminary representative, and the Director of Pastoral Ministries.)

In a sense we are back to the situation we faced in 1984. We do not have theological consensus on the issue of the ordination of women and the vote taken at the 2001 meeting of the National Brethren Church Elders not to reopen discussion of the theological issue means that this impasse will continue. What especially is needed in the current situation is some consensus about what should happen when a district refuses to examine a woman who has been duly called by a local congregation. Since local churches have the right to issue such a call (under our polity this local right supercedes the rights of the district unless General Conference [it was General Conference and not the ministerium that originally granted this right] and the districts collectively rule against the ordination of women) and since the NOC has indicated its willingness to examine women for ordination, there needs to be agreement on how to handle the case of women called in districts that refuse to examine women for ordination.

It is not the purpose of this paper to resolve the theological or even the polity issues that have arisen regarding the ordination of women. But I do hope to have focused the attention of the elders specifically and the church generally on those problems that must be resolved in order to do things “decently and in order” in the church. I pray that we will all seek the wisdom of the Lord on these issues and practice loving patience and forbearance toward those with whom we disagree. The body of Christ is too precious to be broken by disunity over an issue that is not a fundamental of the faith.

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RECOMMENDATION ON THE SUBJECT OF THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

Recognizing that there is no theological consensus among the Brethren concerning the ordination of women, we feel that this issue can best be resolved through the avenue of polity. We should at all times conduct ourselves according to the counsel of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:3 - "Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Therefore, we recommend, based upon Brethren polity as outlined in the Manual of Procedure for The Brethren Church, that:

- A. Each local congregation reaches a consensus on the ordination of women through a study of pertinent Scriptures and/or other resources from the attached bibliography. The local church is ultimately responsible for the calling, licensure, and ordination of candidates for ministry. It should review these policies periodically.
- B. Each Regional Leadership Team shall examine candidates for licensure and ordination recommended to them by local congregations. It is the responsibility of this RLT to examine candidates in the areas of personal life, theology, ethics, and personal habits. Therefore, the sex, race, and nationality of the candidate shall not be criteria for approval or rejection.
- C. The National Board of Oversight should remain neutral on the sex, race, and nationality of candidates referred to them.

Individuals and local churches should be aware that some of our local churches may never call a woman to ordination in the Brethren Church. In Brethren polity a local church has an autonomous right to call whomever it desires. Therefore, individuals and churches should be aware that there will be differences in practice on this issue, and that mutual respect should be upheld by all the Brethren.

Respectfully submitted,
Special Task Force on Women's Ordination in the Brethren Church

Document History:

- 1983 – Six-person task force formed to present document
- 1984 – Document presented to National Brethren Ministerial Association at the 1984 General Conference, where it was defeated by a vote of 39 for and 45 against.
- 2001 – Issue of ordination reopened by National Association of Brethren Church Elders (N.A.B.C.E.)
- 2002 – Document re-submitted for consideration and approved by majority voice vote at the N.A.B.C.E. meetings held at the 2002 General Conference.
- 2018 – Changes made to reflect transition from Districts and NOC to Regions and NBO

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GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL ETHICS

Adopted by General Conference August 7, 1987
(From *Manual of Pastoral and Congregational Procedures*)

PREAMBLE: In order to establish and promote better working relations between the Brethren, note the following guidelines for pastoral and congregational ethics.

Pastoral Ethics

1. The pastor should live in a manner that testifies to the message proclaimed and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The pastor should promote all the programs and goals of The Brethren Church.
3. The pastor should maintain proper dignity in all relationships within the church and in the community.
4. The pastor should grow in Christlikeness and should be involved in continuing educational opportunities to increase effectiveness in ministry.
5. The pastor should abide by the terms of the agreement with the church.
6. The pastor should never measure service by financial considerations.
7. The pastor should care for the parsonage as though it were personal property.
8. The pastor should not allow outside interests to deprive the church of efficient service.
9. The pastor should recognize the value of long-term pastorates and should build the kind of relationships that make this desirable.
10. The pastor should not consider a call from another church whose pastor has not resigned.
11. The pastor should not bargain between churches or negotiate with more than one church at a time.
12. The pastor should give serious attention to keeping physically and emotionally fit.
13. The pastor should minister to the entire congregation.
14. The pastor should be frank, courteous, and cooperative with other pastors.
15. The pastor should manage personal financial affairs with dignity and honor.
16. The pastor should not interfere in the affairs of another congregation.
17. The pastor should guard all confidential information very carefully.
18. The pastor should recognize the sanctity of the pulpit.

19. The pastor should, when leaving a pastorate, encourage total support of the new pastor by the entire congregation.
20. A pastor should not return to a former congregation to visit members or perform services, either weddings or funerals, without first contacting the current pastor.
21. A pastor should have a wholesome relationship with the district board of oversight.

Church Ethics

1. The church should demonstrate in the lives of its members that Jesus Christ is Lord of all life.
2. The church should promote all the programs and goals of The Brethren Church.
3. The office of elder is a holy calling and should be respected and esteemed.
4. The church should desire and help the pastor to grow in ability to serve Christ and His church, and should encourage and make possible continuing educational opportunities for the pastor.
5. The church should develop a clearly stated contractual agreement with the pastor and abide by it.
6. The church should recognize that the pastor is entitled to an adequate salary and should take the initiative in providing it.
7. The church should provide an adequate and well-kept parsonage for the pastoral family, or an adequate housing allowance.
8. The employment agreement should apply only to the pastor, not to the pastor's family. The pastor's family should assume the role that is expected of any other family in the congregation.
9. The church should recognize the value of long pastorates and should encourage the kind of relationship which makes this possible.
10. The church should extend a pastoral call only after contacting the Director of Pastoral Ministries and making a careful investigation of the candidate.
11. The church should negotiate with only one pastor at a time.
12. The church should develop a budget which promptly meets all its obligations, including those to the pastor.
13. The church should expect the pastor to minister to the entire congregation.
14. The church should realize that hostile or unfriendly criticism of the pastor is unchristian and should take steps to eliminate such criticism.
15. The church should only lend money to the pastor by written agreement.

16. The church should provide sufficient maintenance help so that those tasks do not become the responsibility of the pastor.
17. The church should avoid criticism of a former pastor and the comparing of former pastors with the current pastor.
18. The church should encourage its members to involve the new pastor in all functions (e.g., funerals, weddings, etc.) related to the pastoral office as soon as that role in the congregation is assumed.
19. The church should understand the pastor's need for periods of recreation, vacation, and rest.
20. The church, through its officially designated representatives, should have a wholesome relationship with the district board of oversight and the Director of Pastoral Ministries. The church should feel free to contact them if needed.