

# WELCOME IN

A WELCOME & INTEGRATION GUIDE FOR  
NEW PASTORS IN THE BRETHERN CHURCH





## **Welcome**

Pastor, welcome to the Brethren Church! We are glad you have joined us on this journey. This manual you hold is a tool intended to help inform and point you in the right direction as you begin your ministry within the Brethren Church. It likely won't answer every question you'll have, but it should help direct you to someone who can, or the place to go to find the information you need. Know that we're both praying and cheering for you, your ministry and your church. We look forward to ministering alongside of you as together we advance the Kingdom of Christ in this world!

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## **Who Do I Call?**

While this guide has good information within, if you have any questions at all, BrethrenChurch.org likely has the information you're looking for. If you're looking to connect with a person, your first call should always be another pastor in your region, or your Regional Resource Coordinator (RRC). A list of these leaders can be found at BrethrenChurch.org, under the "Who We Are" tab.

## **The Brethren Story**

The Brethren Church began in Schwarzenau, Germany in 1708 with the first baptisms of a small group, including Alexander Mack. The chosen mode of trine immersion (Three times forward in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit) symbolized a desire to be faithful to the way of Jesus found in the Gospels.

Brethren theology is a blending of two seemingly dissimilar ways of following Christ: Anabaptism and Pietism. Anabaptism stresses the importance of Christian community and peoplehood lived out in the witness of the church. Pietism stresses the need for a personal experience of Christ. Together, a lived, dialectical theology (derived from two seemingly opposing ideologies) is formed around mind and body, Word and Spirit, communal and individual, catholicity and reformation.

In contrast to the state churches of the day that killed those they found to be enemies (or heretics), the early Brethren desired to radically follow Jesus by separating church and state since faith and coercion are mutually exclusive, to love one's enemies since Christ modeled peace to all, and to be a corporate witness that serves as an alternative to the fallenness of the world.

The Brethren story has been marked by splits (like countless other Protestant groups). Our first split came in the 1880s as our branch, known as the "Progressives" broke away from the Old Order. Another split came in 1939 as the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches separated from the Ashland Brethren.

Today, the alternative witness is best captured in the Brethren threefold communion service, which is celebrated at least twice a year. This service consists of foot-washing, a love feast, and the taking of the Eucharist. This practice, more than any other, reveals the eschatological nature of the Brethren community—a pilgrim people, living as family, existing for service to the world, desiring to be faithful to the example of Jesus.

Throughout our history, the Brethren witness has been one of relationships, humility, and hospitality lived out through the following values:

- 1.** The New Testament serves as our only creed with emphasis placed on the Gospels and words of Jesus. While the historic creeds of the Church are relevant to Brethren, our source of authority is each generation, gathered around the text of Scripture, discerning the instruction of the Holy Spirit.
  - 2.** The Anabaptist-Pietist tension of the Brethren is lived out in our Word-Spirit centrality in worship. Word and Spirit in tension call us to greater obedience to the Living Word, Jesus Christ.
  - 3.** Brethren believe that God has always desired a people for himself. Today, the church, locally and globally, is that people through whom God continues to tell his story of redemption and reconciliation.
  - 4.** Leadership and vision are understood communally. Communal interpretation through consensus ensures that both majority and minority opinions are heard and respected.
  - 5.** The operating plan of Brethren is discipleship understood as a lived theology of head and heart. Discipleship is holistic as the redemption of Christ is for mind, body, and spirit.
  - 6.** Brethren faith is committed to simplicity and not extravagance in our quest to simply follow Jesus and take him at his word.
  - 7.** A life of obedience to Christ is a commitment to peace. Brethren seek creative alternatives to violence and coercion.
  - 8.** Central to Brethren faith is a love of God and a commitment to our neighbor's good manifested in a life of service.
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## National Ministries Overview

### **We Develop Leaders: Brethren Leadership Development**

Brethren Leadership Development, or BLD as it's often referred to, is positioned and focused to assist Brethren leaders; both pastoral and lay leaders of all ages, in continuing to develop their leadership in a distinct Brethren way. BLD targets three key areas within the life of a leader: assisting leaders to know themselves, know their call, and know their mission.

Employing a wide variety of tools, such as assessments, conference opportunities, online learning courses; as well as books and curriculums, BLD provides a wide range of development opportunities for our leaders. We believe the present and future success of the Church is dependent on the strength of its leaders advancing the Kingdom forward.

### **We Strengthen Churches: Church Vitality**

A network of Brethren leaders and partners work to help Brethren ministries increase their capacity to make more disciples and make a visible Kingdom impact in their communities. These efforts assist teams and congregations seeking to cultivate greater health and fruitfulness in their ministries. Developing a clear sense of your church's mission, vision, values and unique context helps congregations continue their journey of advancing the Kingdom of God. Our Ministry Transition efforts provide language for understanding what a healthy change in pastoral leadership looks like, as well as guidance in navigating those changes. We can connect pastors, leaders, teams and congregations with the coaching, guidance, information and best-practice resources that can help address the barriers they face in ministry. Our desire is to see every Brethren ministry reach their God-intended potential for the sake of His Kingdom. These resources are available to every Brethren congregation.

## **We Start Churches: Brethren Church Planting**

Our vision is to develop a sustainable Brethren church multiplication movement with regional focus. To this end, regional church planting teams, along with the Brethren Church National Office, develop resources, partnerships and systems for discipling, training, equipping and sending Brethren church planters and multi-site leaders. Sustainable movement happens best locally, and the approach of this ministry has been to mobilize the gathered resources of the greater Brethren Church to serve and resource local and regional leaders in their mission of starting new Brethren churches for the sake of the world.

## **We Serve Globally: Brethren Global Partners**

Global Partners is the International arm of the Brethren Church tasked with several vital missions:

1. Establish, encourage, and supervise sustainable church planting outside of the United States.
2. Develop communication pathways for our international partners in order to better understand their cultural context, helping them develop strategies to move from singular mission points to self-sustaining ministries who are multiplying.
3. Develop communication pathways to engage North American Brethren Churches on large and small international projects.
4. In conjunction with Brethren Leadership Development, help congregations and individuals explore a call to cross cultural ministry through short-term mission trips and internships.

## **Brethren Relief**

Following the three stages of relief as laid out in *When Helping Hurts* by Corbitt and Finkert, the Brethren Church follows a pattern of relief, rehabilitation & development when crisis strikes. Brethren Relief is a fund that is held by the National Office for disbursements for relief funds (shelter, food, & clothing following disaster), rehabilitation funds (rebuilding after disaster), and development funds (breaking the cycle of poverty).

Brethren Relief dollars are used for Brethren ministries and are available upon grant request and are also distributed to organizations such as World Relief. Churches are encouraged to give generously to this fund to help provide support in times of need. Grant applications are available on the Brethren Church website, [www.brethrenchurch.org](http://www.brethrenchurch.org).



## Brethren Resources

### **Brethren Witness for the 21st Century**

Written in 2013, this book was created to help recapture the values of the Brethren Church in modern language. While our ideals have been unshakeable since 1708, how each value gets expressed in modern life has evolved. This book was written to energize our redemptive imagination for our communities today. **This is a must read for any leader in The Brethren Church.**

### **Brethren Primer**

Developed in 2015, the Brethren Primer created experiential activities to help youth and adults put their faith and belief into action, all centered around the values written about in *Brethren Witness for the 21st Century*. Instead of just reading about what the Brethren believe, the Primer gives practical ways to express each value.

### **Brethren Discipleship Guide**

Written in 2016, this discipleship guide takes a unique look at how the Brethren Church Loves God, Loves Others & Make Disciples. This guide can be utilized on a one-on-one basis or in a group study. This guide is a great way to get the heart of the Brethren and begin discussion about being a disciple of Jesus.

As a new pastor or potential church planter, we'd highly encourage you to pick-up these three resources to help explore the Brethren journey. Contact The Brethren Church National Office for special pricing for new pastors, church staff & church planters.

## Denominational Information

### **Statistical Report**

Annually, the Brethren Church Nationally requires a report of your church statistics for reporting to the greater church at General Conference. Reporting information typically includes attendance, baptisms, financial giving, etc.

Statistical reports are mailed out near the first of the year. Churches who keep regular attendance and giving records will have no problem completing this report.

Completion of this report determines the number of voting delegates each church is able to send to General Conference, the governing body of the denomination.

### **General Conference**

General Conference is the annual gathering of the Brethren Church. While the primary purpose of this gathering is to hold the annual business meetings, there is a wide array of reasons to come to General Conference from fellowship, resourcing, training and opportunities, to receiving first hand updates on what is happening in the denomination.

Most churches in the denomination cover the delegate fees for each of their delegates. Most Brethren Churches also typically pay the cost of registration for their pastor and delegates, but churches have been known to share these costs with the individuals, or put the financial responsibility solely on the individual. As a new pastor, you should inquire with your church regarding how this has been handled in the past, and whenever possible, remove barriers (including financial) for your delegates to come and participate at General Conference.

It is generally expected that as a Brethren pastor, you would attend General Conference each year.

## **Brethren Retirement**

As a full or part-time staff member in the Brethren Church, these individuals are eligible to take part in the 401(a) Retirement program offered by the Brethren Church. This program is similar to a 401(k), but has the unique benefit to include a housing allowance even in your retirement years. It's never too early to start to think about retirement and how your church can take care of you well past your pastoral days. For more information, the Brethren Retirement Board contact information can be found at [www.brethrenchurch.org](http://www.brethrenchurch.org).

## **Giving to the National Church**

Just like the local church, the National efforts of the Brethren Church are only possible through the contributions of others. Local churches, regions and individuals join together to make the efforts of leadership development, church health, church planting and global partnerships possible. While some churches may have the means to provide all the services that a national church can offer, we are always better together. Together, the body is made complete, and we provide better overall expressions of Christ in our world today.

Beginning in 2017, the General Conference asks that 10% of offerings received by a local church be given to the national church toward our united Brethren work. Of the monies received from the churches, 80% of these funds go toward National Church mission and vision, 10% of these funds are designated for Ashland University's Brethren Connection and the final 10% of these funds are designated for Brethren students at Ashland Theological Seminary.

Churches also have the option to designate specific dollars to certain areas of ministry. While an undesignated gift is always preferable, some churches have specific passions for ministry partners or certain aspects of the Brethren Church. All donations to the Brethren Church should be clearly marked for its intended purposes. The Brethren Church can not assume donor intent, thus any undesignated

or labeled gift is received as a gift for the overall mission and vision of the Brethren Church.

The Brethren Church National Office also reserves the right to refuse restricted gifts or designated gifts that are not in alignment with its mission and vision. While uncommon, these donations are returned to the church or donor with an explanation of why the funds can not be received.

## Becoming an Ordained Elder in The Brethren Church

Ordination in The Brethren Church is a multi-step process, but in to summarize in general, those steps are as follows:

1. After a congregational and board vote at the local church level, affirming the call of the pastor or candidate, the applicant applies for licensure through their Regional Leadership Team.
2. After an initial examination, the RLT may approve a candidate for licensure.
3. After licensure, a candidate has 5 years to complete either a) a seminary degree, or b) a reading program. In addition, each candidate must take the three required Brethren courses in Polity, Doctrine and History
4. A candidate, upon completion of all other requirements will go through both a regional and national examination process, finalizing their candidacy for eldership.

Information on this process is best found through your Regional Resource Coordinator, as well as [BrethrenChurch.org](http://BrethrenChurch.org)

## **Brethren Courses**

The Brethren Courses meet the requirements for individuals participating in the licensure and ordination process within their region, and are comprised of the following three courses History, Doctrine, & Polity. Each course is offered in a ten week, online cohort, meeting every other week via video conference for teaching and discussion (5 online meetings). The cost to register for a course is \$250, which can be paid in part/full by the individual or church. There are also scholarships available through The Brethren Church National Office. Detailed information of the courses, including meeting dates can be found at [brethrenchurch.org](http://brethrenchurch.org). It is required that History be taken prior to an individual taking either Doctrine or Polity.

## **Manual of Procedure (MoP)**

The Manual of Procedure is a detailed document providing guidance for the organization of new Brethren churches, as well as the continued order of established Brethren churches. Adhering to a limited congregational form of governance, the Brethren Church recognizes the right of each local congregation to order its own affairs but seeks a common commitment on matters of faith and practice at the regional and denominational levels. A complete copy of the MOP can be obtained from [brethrenchurch.org](http://brethrenchurch.org).

## **The Transition from Independent Districts to Cooperative Regions**

At the 2015 Meeting of the General Conference of the Brethren Church, the denomination voted overwhelmingly to move to a model of cooperative regions at the mid-level of its organizational structure in order to better serve and connect with local churches. This new system will allow for greater clarity of vision and policy and a stronger emphasis on relationship across denominational levels. The transition process, is expected to be largely completed by the end of 2020. During this time of transition, we ask for patience, as we fine tune the implementation of the new system, and encourage feedback so we can quickly learn what is working and what

isn't. There are four key changes that are important to understand about this new polity:

### **1. The Regional Leadership Team (RLT)**

This group is the place to go when you need guidance on denominational matters, need an outside arbiter to assist in settling disputes in the church, or just need help in general. They are responsible for the relational and organizational connection of the denominational structure to local churches. They provide oversight for pastors and churches within their region, as well as help churches connect with each other.

### **2. The Regional Resource Coordinator (RRC)**

This person is a member of the RLT who is employed – usually in a part time capacity – by the Executive Director of the Brethren Church, with consultation from the RLT. This person gives the RLT both someone who has dedicated hours to give to the work of the region, and a direct connection to the national level of the Brethren Church.

### **3. Camps**

District camps were a vital part of some of the old districts in the Brethren Church. In addition to running their own camping programs, many districts owned and operated their own campgrounds. With the transition to regions, these campgrounds are each becoming their own religious 501(c)3 organizations. As part of that change, most of these camps are setting up systems that will still give the Brethren churches of their regions control over the new organization. Depending on which region you are a part of, your church may have some responsibilities to support a camp. The Brethren camping programs have served as an important piece in helping to shape our Brethren culture and train our churches and leaders, especially some of our younger members, in what it means to connect with Jesus in a deep and meaningful way.

#### **4. National Board of Oversight (NBO)**

The NBO will serve two primary functions. First, they will replace the current National Ordination Council in giving the final examination and denominational approval for candidates for ordination to be ordained by their local churches. Second, they will serve as arbiters for disputes over major actions taken by RLTs. In addition to these primary tasks, the NBO will also work with RLTs to maintain a national list of ordained Elders.

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#### **Conclusion**

If you are a new pastor/leader in our movement and have yet to speak with someone at the National office, please call **(419) 289-1708**. We would love to get to know you and to answer any questions you might have. Along with this guide, The Brethren Church has created a *Brethren Pastor's Handbook* that outlines a number of services and processes common to The Brethren Church. You can download the handbook at [brethrenchurch.org](http://brethrenchurch.org).

Again, we are glad you have accepted a call to serve the Kingdom through the Brethren Church, and it's our prayer that your time spent in this work is fruitful. We look forward to getting to know you better through the various outlets shared here, as well as additional opportunities that arise for us as Brethren to connect together. You're encouraged to bookmark [brethrenchurch.org](http://brethrenchurch.org), as news and information regarding life in the Brethren Church is regularly posted there. In addition to the website, we invite you to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.





