

MISSION, VISION & CORE VALUES
of THE BRETHREN CHURCH



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Dear Brethren,

I want to take the opportunity to tell you about a significant change in our vision for the Brethren Church. For more than ten years we have been living into the “New Day” vision that asked us to living into the transformation of our leaders, congregations and communities.

This vision has led us to a new season in the life of our Church. The Executive Board, with the leadership of the executive director, is responsible for examining and casting a unified vision for The Brethren Church. In October 2016 our Executive Board worked hard to evaluate all of the statements we have written over the years and determined that the church has entered a new season and in need of a new vision moving forward.

As we lead into this new season of The Brethren Church, the national staff will continue to serve our churches by helping our churches and regions plant new churches, develop leaders at all levels, and work to increase the Kingdom impact of The Brethren Church.

If you have any questions regarding these new statements, please feel free to contact me or anyone of your national Executive Board members.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Cole", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steven Cole
Executive Director
The Brethren Church

The Brethren Church was formally organized at Dayton, Ohio, June 6th and 7th, in 1883. The Brethren movement from its beginnings in 1708 had always avoided a formal creed, fearing that it would limit the work of the Holy Spirit in shedding new light on Scripture. The Dayton Convention reaffirmed this historic position that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our all-sufficient creed and rule of practice.

Each generation of Brethren must struggle under the Spirit's guidance to discern the meaning of Scripture for its life. Such a process has several important benefits: it can give renewed purpose and direction to the church, it can bring the church to greater unity in thought and practice, and it assists the church in declaring its fundamental beliefs to the world. It is, however, a significant responsibility. To ensure that the unique expression of our Christian identity as Brethren remains active in the world until Jesus' return is to demand that we each, in whatever generation we find ourselves, partner in passing it on.

What follows is in no way a creed; it is, rather, a milestone on our journey together as Brethren, and ought to be considered an articulation of what we believe is most true about ourselves in this time and place in the world.

THE MISSION OF THE BRETHERN CHURCH

is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who, united in Christ, embrace and reflect God's love and live in the transforming presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

A 5-YEAR VISION FOR THE NATIONAL BRETHERN CHURCH:

Est. 7/2017

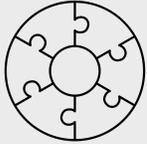
We will be a movement of regionally organized vibrant congregations fulfilling our shared mission.

We will accomplish this vision by:

1. Establishing Healthy Regional Structures
2. Improving Organizational Relationships
3. Providing Equitable Care for Leaders and Congregations
4. Developing Leaders at All Levels
5. Establishing New, Sustainable, Healthy Congregations
6. Continuing to Nurture Our Global Partnerships

The Six Core Values of The Brethren Church

CONTEXTUAL BRETHREN LIFE



We are guided by traditions and values that shape our identity as The Brethren Church, but we seek to apply these traditions and values in ways that fit our context.

INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY



Just as God's reign was ushered into the world by God becoming one of us (John 1:14-18), so we also practice ministry by immersing ourselves in the contexts to which God has called us. Such incarnational ministry is articulated in Paul's statement, "I have become all things to all, in order that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b).

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP



We recognize our responsibility to act as stewards of all that God has given us as The Brethren Church. The ultimate goal of our stewardship is to bear witness to God's Kingdom throughout creation. This commitment to stewardship extends to all areas of our shared life together.

INTENTIONAL KINGDOM WITNESS



We recognize that we are called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God to our neighbors and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7). We understand that we should be actively pursuing opportunities to advance the Kingdom in all the places we find ourselves: locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. As Brethren led by the Spirit, we join together to extend the Brethren witness through the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP



We understand leadership to be the ability of a person or group to influence others toward achieving shared goals. Following Jesus' example, leaders in The Brethren Church consider themselves servants of both God and the people around them. We identify and promote the development of leaders at all levels of the church, both lay and ministerial.

BIBLICAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION



We are committed to being transformed into the likeness of Jesus through submission and obedience to Scripture and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The Six Core Values of The Brethren Church

CONTEXTUAL BRETHREN LIFE



We are guided by traditions and values that shape our identity as The Brethren Church, but we seek to apply these traditions and values in ways that fit our context.

There are traditions and values that The Brethren Church has that shape our identity, our understanding of God, and our practices. This “Brethren Life” is fundamental to our way of being God’s Church in the world. The Brethren movement was born in Germany in 1708 out of the Anabaptist and Radical Pietist reform movements of the 16th through the 18th centuries. To be “Brethren” is to recognize that God has made us “brothers and sisters” of one another; such a belief marks our fundamentally relational nature as a church (Heb. 2:9-11). Some of our most basic Brethren practices are Trine Immersion Believer Baptism and Threefold Communion (which includes the Lord’s Supper or Love Feast, the Eucharist, and the Service of Feetwashing). We refer to these practices as “ordinances;” that is, those practices that the Church was “ordered” to do in the New Testament. Other ordinances the Brethren hold include confirmation by the laying on of hands and anointing the sick with oil.

We maintain a commitment to making decisions through the difficult, yet worthwhile, process of consensus. We also hold to the non-creedal position that marks The Brethren Church. Rather than a creed, we attempt to be faithful to “the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible” as we live out our lives of Christian discipleship. We do this knowing that this book is best understood within the context of Spirit-led Christian community.

There are also historically Brethren values, drawn from the Bible, that are no longer universally held by Brethren, such as non-resistance, non-swearing of oaths, and non-conformity to the world. Although we may not agree on how to apply these values, we do take them seriously and support the practice of these disciplines by our brothers and sisters. We celebrate our Brethren history and heritage, and seek to promote our unique way of following the Lord, which we believe is one of our great strengths, and a gift for both the world and us.

We recognize that our Brethren Life is played out in many different contexts, not only in North America, but also throughout the world. We promote a contextual application of our Brethren identity that is sensitive to issues of culture, gender, class, race, language, and age. We don’t easily give up our traditions or practices, even as we seek to adapt them for the place and time our congregations and members find themselves. We attempt to translate our traditions into the idioms and needs of the day. (For example, our congregations may organize their governing structures in a way that is functional, rather than “historically” Brethren, or we may include practices in our congregational worship that aren’t historically Brethren, even as we frame them in Brethren theological language and practice them with a Brethren posture.)

As noted in the Preamble to our Philosophy of Ministry, we recognize that our non-creedal practice as The Brethren Church demands what we call the “Generational Mandate.” That is, what it means to be Brethren is not encapsulated in creedal assent, but in our shared, contextualized practices. Our theology is a “lived theology,” taught, learned, and embodied through disciplined and determined practice. Our Brethren way of life is only “Brethren” if it is lived out. It is up to each generation of Brethren to ensure that those who follow us pass on this way of life in ways that are understandable, persuasive, clear, and embodied. Ultimately, it is up to each generation of Brethren to commit to themselves that they will not be the last, but will do all they can to pass on our Brethren way of following God.

INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY



Just as God’s reign was ushered into the world by God becoming one of us (John 1:14-18), so we also practice ministry by immersing ourselves in the contexts to which God has called us. Such incarnational ministry is articulated in Paul’s statement, “I have become all things to all, in order that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22b).

Just as God’s reign was ushered into the world by God becoming one of us (John 1:14-18), so we also practice ministry by immersing ourselves in the contexts to which God has called us. Such incarnational ministry is articulated in Paul’s statement, “I have become all things to all, in order that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22b).

For The Brethren Church, “incarnational,” as an adjective, speaks to both our ministry ethic and our ministry practice.

Ethically, we seek to “become like Christ” (Rom. 8:29) to those around us and toward each other. As our congregations relate to one another, we seek to live up to the example of humility and service set by Jesus for us. We strive to be “one in spirit and of one mind,” avoiding “selfish ambition or vain conceit” even as we “value others above [ourselves], not looking to [our] own interests but...to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:2-4). We recognize that it is our love for one another, which is energized and enabled by God’s love for us, which bears witness to God in the world (John 13:35). This same others-oriented love is played out not just in our interactions as congregations who make up The Brethren Church, but also in our engagement with others. We recognize that acting with selfless concern for others is part of Jesus’ highest demand on our lives (Rom. 13:8-10).

Practically, we affirm that we minister best when we embody the realities of the places we are in. Just as God sought to restore His relationship with humanity by becoming human, so also, as we seek to take part in God’s continuing restoration work, we must become like those whom we are trying to bless (John 1:14). Just as Jesus knew himself, and so was able to engage with those to whom he was sent (John 13:3), we likewise follow his pattern and encourage all our

congregations to have a strong sense of identity, mission, and vision. Certain practices and postures follow from this Core Value:

- We take a posture of humility, avoiding patriarchal and demeaning assumptions about the places we seek to serve.
- We believe often the best places our congregations can minister are often whatever places they already find themselves.
- We emphasize short cultural distances between those involved in vocational ministry (church planters, pastors, missionaries, etc.) and the people to whom they minister.
- We enable highly contextualized congregational expressions for ministry effectiveness, even as we seek to be “of one mind” as Brethren (1 Cor. 1:10).

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP



We recognize our responsibility to act as stewards of all that God has given us as The Brethren Church. The ultimate goal of our stewardship is to bear witness to God’s Kingdom throughout creation. This commitment to stewardship extends to all areas of our shared life together.

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- We attempt to wisely steward our gifts—those supernatural resources God gives to everyone who follows Jesus—as well as the skills, aptitudes, and talents that we have gained through our life experiences. To this end, we encourage and provide training in how to maximize our capacities, seek to learn from others who are more skilled than we ourselves might be, and celebrate the way God uses our stewardship for His glory.
- We consider our material possessions and financial resources as things that should be used in light of God’s concerns, rather than just our own. In light of this, we seek to generously support the efforts of The Brethren Church in achieving its mission and vision in the world with whatever resources we have at our disposal.

- We attempt to wisely use the time we have, knowing that our lives are limited and we cannot add length to them (Matt 6:27). To this end, we seek to collaboratively partner with like-minded brothers and sisters in God's work now, we try to pass on our expertise to new generations of Christians through mentoring and coaching, and we work at leaving a blessing-filled, constructive legacy at our deaths. Such practices are as true of The Brethren Church as an institution as they are true of us as individuals.

We believe that our stewardship practices are meant to enable experiences of the Kingdom of God, and we pray that this might be so (Matt. 6:10). This means that the values and principles that relate to our stewardship are not based on our own wants and needs, or drawn from market economics, but are based on the values and principles of the Kingdom of God. We turn to scripture, one another, wise partners, and the Holy Spirit in order to discern these principles as we strive to steward the assets that we have been given as a church. We do this both individually and corporately in our efforts to bear witness to God's Kingdom.

We recognize that good stewards do not simply maintain what they have been given charge over. Instead, they try to increase it, so that God can use it in Kingdom-building ways (Matt. 25:14-30). Just as God's Kingdom is merciful, peaceable, and life-giving, we want our stewardship to promote a more full and peaceful life for all those in all the places The Brethren Church serves. We pray that those whom we serve choose to enter into God's loving Kingdom, and we are reminded that it is through our intentional actions on their behalf that we make "neighbors" out of those who have been strangers to us (Luke 10:25-37). Just as we try to thankfully and cheerfully receive what God entrusts to us as a church, we strive to cheerfully and thankfully offer our denominational resources to those who need them (2 Cor. 9:6-15).

INTENTIONAL KINGDOM WITNESS



We recognize that we are called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God to our neighbors and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7). We understand that we should be actively pursuing opportunities to advance the Kingdom in all the places we find ourselves: locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. As Brethren led by the Spirit, we join together to extend the Brethren witness through the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches.

We recognize that Jesus' earthly mission in the world was driven by his concern to preach the "good news of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 4:42-44). The nature of our service to others in the name of Jesus Christ is also characterized by our desire to bear witness to the Kingdom of God. We understand the ministry we do as something that both brings glory to God and expands in both breadth and depth God's reign and ruling power throughout the world. Thus the nature of our ministry is something qualitatively different from social services or humanitarian aid—though we are in support of both.

Our witness-bearing is modeled after the same selfless, loving concern Jesus showed for all humanity, which has changed our lives (Phil. 2:3ff, Rom. 5:8). It is fundamentally concerned with living up to Jesus' charges to his Church: That we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, act as witnesses to Jesus in places close to us—culturally and geographically—places further away, places we'd rather not go, and throughout the world (Acts 1:8). Recognizing the presence of Christ with us, we "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] has commanded [us]." (Matt. 28:19-20).

We are reminded that that our willingness to offer aid and comfort to one another is both a test and marker of the transformation we Brethren have experienced (James 2:14-17, 1 John 4:20-21). Our witness bearing includes the drive to offer compassion to all those who "are like sheep without a shepherd" and bless them in whatever ways we are able, wherever we find them (Mark 6:34). We believe that God has invited us into the intimacy that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share (John 14:18-20), that he has adopted us as children (Rom. 8:12-17), and that he has given us all the rights and responsibilities that come with being part of God's people (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Because of these blessings, we try to model the same hospitable spirit to people all over the world, both those near us and, as we are able and called, to those far away. One primary way to understand God's work through Jesus is declared by Paul when he states that "God was, in the Messiah, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). This reconciliatory effort is an ultimate act of hospitality, in which God works to invite us back into a relationship that sin and evil had broken, and so we embody the same reconciling character in the places God has us.

These statements highlight a basic quality of our witness-bearing: Its intentional nature. We don't simply wait for our faithfulness to be called upon, but seek to be proactive in bearing

witness to God's character, power, and work. We understand that we should be actively pursuing opportunities to advance God's Kingdom in all the places we find ourselves: locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. As Brethren led by the Spirit, we join together to extend the Brethren witness across all cultures through the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches in intentional ways.

More generally, we position ourselves as a church to be able to provide compassionate aid to whoever might ask. We strive to develop safe, trusting relationships with one another as Brethren, and with others as congregations and individuals, so that we all might feel the freedom of an open invitation to ask for one another's help in doing God's Kingdom work. We are not coercive in our attempts to bear witness to God's love for the world, but we do articulate our willingness to do so, and follow through when that offer is vulnerably received.

As The Brethren Church, we provide and promote structures, programming, and resources that help us live up to this Core Value. Such structures range from the efforts of The Brethren Church National Office and our national programming, to our denominational structure, which positions us for equitable communication and help in doing the work of God. We receive the help of our partner organizations nationally and internationally, and we celebrate all the ways God uses us to bear witness to His Kingdom. We dedicate time, treasure, and resources at all levels of The Brethren Church to intentionally do the work God has called us to do. We love our Brethren global partners as ourselves, and seek to bless them as they bear witness to God's Kingdom in their unique cultural contexts in ways we, though their brothers and sisters, cannot.

In many ways this offering of our lives to one another, and receiving each other with grace and commitment, is a characteristic of all we do as Brethren who take on Jesus' principle of living his life for the Kingdom of God. It is ultimately the practice of "loving your neighbor as yourself," (Mark 12:29-31) and "doing to others as you'd be done to" (Matt 7:12) no matter the situation. At base, we bear witness to the Kingdom of God in intentional, strategic, respectful, and Christ-like ways because it reflects to the world the intentional, strategic, respectful, and Christ-like love that God has for everyone. This love was ultimately revealed through Jesus and is still being revealed to the world through the church and the witness of the Holy Spirit. As we pursue the God who is love and work to become like Jesus who "loved us and gave himself for us" (Eph 5:2), the practice of bearing witness to God's Kingdom of love naturally flows out of us. This becomes our greatest witness to those who are not yet followers of Jesus (John 13:34-35), and one of our greatest sources of strength as we together pursue "the upward call of God" in our individual lives and our life together as The Brethren Church (Phil. 3:14).

Lastly, our ultimate allegiance is not to any "kingdom" on earth or any political body, but rather, the Kingdom of God, of which we're citizens (Eph. 2:19; Acts 5:29). This commitment has wide impact on how we live our lives while we have them (Gal. 2:20).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP



We understand leadership to be the ability of a person or group to influence others toward achieving shared goals. Following Jesus' example, leaders in The Brethren Church consider themselves servants of both God and the people around them. We identify and promote the development of leaders at all levels of the church, both lay and ministerial.

Leadership in The Brethren Church is markedly different from society's view of leadership. Leaders in society often claim power and use power for self-serving ends; we reject the belief that leaders should cling to power. Instead, we say with Jesus, "whoever wants to be first must be last" and "whoever wants to be great must be the slave of all" (Matt 20:25-28). Rather than protect their own power, our leaders seek to have their leadership tested and critiqued within the context of safe, loving relationships that honor the work God has done through them on behalf of the church.

Jesus, whom we seek to follow, took up voluntary slavery on behalf of others. Leaders in The Brethren Church do the same. They do not seek to build their own kingdoms or bring glory to themselves, but like Jesus, build God's Kingdom and bring glory to God. If we are called to positions of leadership in The Brethren Church or our various congregations, we consider ourselves to be servants of both God and the people around us. We act as advocates for others by meeting their needs, ensuring their well-being, and doing what we can to bless and build their lives. This approach to leadership is highly relational. To be a leader in The Brethren Church is to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) in difficult circumstances, rather than avoid conflict or enable it.

Our view of Leadership takes into account both the Generational Mandate of The Brethren Church, and our concern that we steward well our resources, gifts, and times. Following this, leaders do what they can to help people "fan into flame" the gifts God has given them to build God's Kingdom (2 Tim. 1:6). We mentor, teach, and preach in a way that is mindful of potential future leadership needs in the church, as well as the needs of the present.

We also recognize that servant leaders are empowered by God. We believe that God has equipped those who make up the body of Christ with particular gifts. We believe that it takes the entire church, working with the gifts that God has given each member, to achieve the full intentions God has for us. No one individual can carry out the work God has for his people (Ex. 18:13-27; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 2:8-10; 4:11-16).

BIBLICAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION



We are committed to being transformed into the likeness of Jesus through submission and obedience to Scripture and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Biblical and spiritual formation is the process by which a Christian looks more like Jesus over time. It is the growth of a Christian from an “immature” faith to a “mature” faith. This process of formation is never accomplished; there is never a moment in the life of a Christian when a person has “arrived.”

There are no one-size-fits-all programs for growth into Christ-likeness. There are, however, clear biblical mandates that aid in the spiritual formation of the Christian. These spiritual disciplines include practices such as learning and reflecting upon scripture; praying; offering sacrifices of time, treasure, talents, or thanksgiving to God; fasting; meeting together with other Christians; and participating in the life of the Church (1 Tim. 4:6-16; Matt. 6:1-21; 2 Cor. 9:7; Heb. 10:25).

Our emphasis on the “biblical” component of our spiritual formation highlights the fact that the primary story with which a Christian aligns his or her life is the story of God’s work in history contained in the Bible. The Bible tells the story of God’s interaction with the world: God’s attempts to restore creation, deal with evil and sin, and draw humanity back to himself after we broke relationship with God and were held in bondage to sin and evil. It is the Bible’s authoritative witness to Jesus’ life—the one who calls Christians to be transformed into his likeness—that gives credence to its own authority over the life of the Christian. It is also the life of Jesus, as seen in the Bible, to which we hope to conform. The Brethren have historically referred to the Bible as God’s “outer word.”

Calling this process spiritual does not mean that we emphasize the intangible, non-physical aspects of ourselves, but that we emphasize the agent who is responsible for Christian growth: the Holy Spirit. As Brethren, we believe that we have been blessed with the Holy Spirit so that we might live as Jesus lived, and be conformed to his likeness (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 3:16; John 14; Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit enables transformational growth through the bearing of virtuous “fruit” in our lives as we spend time cultivating a relationship with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26). The Spirit comforts and counsels Christians as they walk with God, and reminds them of Jesus’ life and teachings (John 14:15-17, 25-26). The Spirit’s presence in the life of the Christian encourages him or her in faithfulness and the pursuit of Christ-likeness and love (1 John 3:23-24; 4:13). Without the Holy Spirit, our efforts are exhaustible and limited. With the Holy Spirit, we can do things even greater than Jesus did (John 14:12). At all levels of The Brethren Church, we desire to do everything through the empowerment and leading of the Holy Spirit, from the most structured event to the most spontaneous time of praise or service. The Brethren have historically referred to the Holy Spirit as the “inner word.”

The end result of this biblical and spiritual formation is that we become a community of people who, as new creations ourselves, take part in the new creation that God began in Jesus. We have our inner and outer lives conformed to Jesus' own, and, as Brethren, we are able to say with Paul that "it is not [we] who live, but Christ who lives in [us], and the life [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who has loved [us] and has given himself for [us]" (Gal. 2:20). In the end, the "outer word" and the "inner word" work together to shape us into the "living word," Jesus Christ.



A RESOURCE OF THE BRETHREN CHURCH