

Your Official Board has asked me to include information in *The Quill and Scroll* and other places about the new Covenant Brethren Church fellowship of congregations. Initial information was shared in a congregational gathering on December 1, 2019. Recent developments have advanced further the Covenant Brethren organization.

--Pastor Myers

### What is the Covenant Brethren Church?

The Covenant Brethren Church began in a meeting at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania on July 27, 2019. After much prayerful discussion, and after numerous sessions with Annual Conference leadership and Mission & Ministry Board (the Church of the Brethren leadership board), it was agreed that the Brethren Prayer and Worship Summit committee and the Brethren Revival Fellowship Committee call a meeting of seasoned, mature COB leaders. This meeting included about 50 Standing Committee members, District Executives, and prominent pastors from 13 Districts. This meeting was to *pray* and *ponder* what could be done to heal the COB of its recent ills, which consist

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

After several hours of vigorous discussion and earnest prayer, the group nearly unanimously agreed to “explore the process to separate from the denomination” over these three primary concerns:

1. The need to provide a haven for congregations who are making the decision to leave, but want to *retain* their Brethren values, and do not want to be independent.
2. The failure of the denomination to stand strong on Biblical Authority.
3. The recent Compelling Vision process that completely skirted around the homosexual issue and will likely do little, if anything, to bring closure to this major point of division.

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

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

At Antioch Church in November 2019, the name Covenant Brethren Church was adopted, and the location of an office in Northcentral West Virginia was agreed to. Previews of the Statement of Faith and Bylaws were considered. The Statement of Faith contains a *strong* endorsement of Biblical authority *and* Biblical marriage, as well as *affirming the historical understandings of the Brethren*.

On February 1, 2020 at Fairmont, WV, the larger CBC leadership team again met with COB General Secretary David Steele and Annual

Conference Moderator Paul Munday for amicable discussion and sharing. At the conclusion of those talks, CBC leadership agreed to continue the development of the new group. The Statement of Faith received final approval, as did the CBC Bylaws. After final review by an attorney, Covenant Brethren Church was incorporated in West Virginia on May 22, 2020.

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

The CBC is committed to *maintaining a high view of the Scriptures*, an *unwavering affirmation of marriage between a man and a woman*, and a *strong commitment to the New Testament doctrines and practices* that have marked the Brethren from their beginning in 1708.

Further information on the Statement of Faith and Bylaws will be available in future editions of *The Quill and Scroll* and as handouts at church.

Please pray about these efforts, and the possible future role of Blue River in the Covenant Brethren Church.