

The Brethren Church



Manual of Pastoral and Congregational Procedures

2008 Edition

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
The Message of the Brethren Ministry	6
The Calling, Licensing, and Ordination of Pastors in The Brethren Church.....	7
Introduction.....	7
I. The Pastoral Calling	7
A. Definition	7
B. Procedure.....	7
II. Licensure in the Brethren Church	9
A. Purpose of Licensure.....	9
B. Definition of Licensure	9
C. Authority of Licentiates	9
III. Ordination in the Brethren Church	10
A. Standards and Qualifications	10
B. Procedure.....	10
C. The Pastor’s Conference Standing.....	11
D. The Duties of a Brethren Pastor.....	11
IV. Status of Non-Brethren Pastors in the Brethren Church.....	12
A. Licensed or Ordained Pastors	12
B. Non-Brethren Pastoral Candidates	13
V. Commissioning for Special Ministries.....	13
A. Special Ministries.....	13
B. Commissioning Procedures.....	13
C. Authority of Those Commissioned	13
D. Standards and Qualifications	14
Report of the 1986 Ordination Study Committee	15
Introduction.....	15
A Theological Overview of Ordination	15
A Definition of Terms.....	16
A Model for Brethren Ministry.....	16
Pastoral Search Committee Procedure.....	20
Guidelines for Pastoral and Congregational Ethics	23
Pastoral Ethics.....	23
Church Ethics.....	24
Guidelines for Congregations in Pastoral and Congregational Relations.....	26
Open-End Calls	26
Pastoral Relations Committee	26
District Board of Oversight.....	27
The Pastoral Care Committee in the Local Church	28
Discipline of Pastors	31
Prologue	31
Membership and Standing	31
Procedure When Action Appears Necessary	33
Possible Actions.....	34
Unfrocking a Pastor	34

Problems Which Could Lead to the Unfrocking Process	34
Addendum.....	35
Discipline of Church Members.....	36
Concept of Membership in The Brethren Church.....	37
What Is Membership?.....	37
What are the Requirements for Church Membership?	37
Membership, Discipline, and Restoration.....	38
Basis fro National Apportionment	38
Membership as it Relates to General Conference Statistics	39
Membership Promises.....	39
Statement on Ordination of Divorced Persons.....	41
Recommendation on the Subject of the Ordination of Women.....	43

INTRODUCTION

This publication is a compilation of documents relating to pastoral and congregational relationships and procedures. “The Message of the Brethren Ministry” was adopted by the National Ministerial Association of The Brethren Church (now known as the National Association of Brethren Church Elders) in 1921 as a summary statement of Brethren teaching. The “Report of the 1986 Ordination Study Committee” was adopted for implementation by the association in 1987. The section on pastoral and church ethics was adopted by General Conference in 1987. The remaining sections were adopted by the association in 1976 and appeared in a publication entitled “Ministerial Examining Procedures of The Brethren Church.”

As has been common in our Brethren heritage, many of these documents were developed to answer particular needs in the church at the time. At times they appear to conflict with one another. They cover issues which perhaps should be addressed in a more systematic and comprehensive manner. Until such a document is authorized, these historic documents are being reissued for the guidance of Local church pastors, local church boards and congregations, district boards, and the National Ordination Council.

In preparing this republication, an effort has been made to standardize language. For example, the separate documents in their original form used a variety of references of the examining and overseeing bodies. Herein, such references have been standardized as “board of oversight” to give some continuity. (Discontinuity still exists from district to district. Hopefully the reader will be able to identify the appropriate district body.)

In addition, special effort has been taken to bring all documents into conformity with current capitalization, punctuation, and spelling usage. Also, the documents were revised to use inclusive language in such a way as not to change the meaning of the original document.

Because we live in an imperfect world, no one procedure is perfect for every situation. These documents are offered as guidelines for working in an orderly and Christian manner. May the Holy Spirit guide our relationships with one another to bring praise and honor to our Triune God.

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2003 EDITION

In the spring of 2003, the 1991 edition was updated so that it could be made available in an electronic format. A section on pastoral care committees replaced the previous section on pastoral relations committees, and additional documents, approved by the National Ordination Council, General Conference, and the National Association of Brethren Church Elders was added. These additional documents each include their own histories, with dates of adoption.

It is hoped that this updated edition continues to provide guidance to the church, while making the individual documents even more readily available to all Brethren.

Dr. G. Emery Hurd, editor
2003 edition

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THE MESSAGE OF THE BRETHREN MINISTRY

Adopted by the National Ministerial Association, 1921

The message which Brethren pastors 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 Brethren Church, 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 beliefs 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 Scriptures of the 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:
 - A. The pre-existence, deity and incarnation by virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - B. The fall of all people, their consequent spiritual death and utter sinfulness, and the necessity of their new birth;
 - C. The vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ through the shedding of His own blood.
 - D. 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.
 - E. Justification by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of which obedience to the will of God and works of righteousness are evidence and result; the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the world and the life everlasting of the just;
 - F. The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit who indwells the Christian and is a personal comforter and guide;
 - G. 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 wait, watch and pray;
 - H. The Christian should "be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of the mind";
 - I. The Christian should observe, as a 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 bread and wine; (e) the washing of the saint's feet; and (f) the anointing of the sick with oil.

This declaration of faith shall be used only as the message of the Brethren Ministry and not as a creed for the denomination.

THE CALLING, LICENSING, AND ORDINATION OF PASTORS IN THE BRETHREN CHURCH

Adopted by the National Ministerial Association, August 13, 1976

Introduction

The Brethren Church recognizes five stages, or degrees in its pastors:

1. The Pastoral Student
2. The Licentiate
3. The Ordained Elder
4. The Superannuated Elder
5. The Special Ministry

I. The Pastoral Calling

A. Definition

“Now I hold with profound conviction that before a man selects the Christian ministry as his vocation he must have the assurance that the selection has been imperatively constrained by the eternal God. The call of the Eternal must ring through the rooms of his soul as clearly as the sound of the morning-bell rings through the valleys of Switzerland, calling the peasants to early prayer and praise. The candidate for the ministry must move like a man in secret bonds. ‘Necessity is laid’ upon him. His choice is not a preference among alternatives. Ultimately he has no alternative: all other possibilities become dumb: there is only one clear call sounding forth as the imperative summons of the eternal God.” (John Henry Jowett, The Preacher, His Life and Work.)

B. Procedure

The call to pastoral ministry originates with the local church in which the prospective pastor holds lay membership.

1. When a local church deems that one of its members evidences interest in, and capacity for, pastoral ministry, it may call such a member by the following procedure. Or, should a worthy member sense the Spirit’s leading into preparation for pastoral ministry and the church does not realize this leading, that person may ask the church to consider calling him or her.
2. The church may, with previous announcement in a regular church business meeting, or in a special meeting, vote upon extending the prospect a call. The vote is to be taken by ballot and may be the same as that necessary to elect church officers. It is recommended, if possible, that a member of the district board of oversight be invited to preside.
3. Should the vote cast indicate a call to pastoral ministry, the presiding officer may notify the district board of oversight of the church’s action using the proper form. Included in the notification form is a petition asking the district board of oversight to authorize the church to license for one year.

4. The candidate also shall make application to be examined, using the proper form.
5. Upon receipt of these forms from the church and from the candidate, the district board of oversight shall arrange a suitable time and place, for the candidate to appear before it for questioning.
6. At the district board of oversight's examination, it shall use a NOC approved questionnaire. The chair of the board shall ask the questions of the applicant and encourage discussion of points that are not clear. The candidate should fill out such a questionnaire in advance.
7. When the district board of oversight approves the candidate's licensure or ordination, the following procedure is recommended:
 - a. The board shall, if its decision is ready, inform the candidate verbally at once, and later in writing.
 - b. Also, the board shall notify the church requesting the examination of its decision. Upon approval of licensure or ordination, the board shall so authorize the church, using a form approved by the NOC, and keep a copy for its own files.
 - c. Upon receipt of authorization from the board, the local church shall formally license. This may be done according to the local church's preference, at a regular or special business meeting. This meeting may be held in connection with a regular worship service. It is recommended that a member of the district board of oversight be present.
8. When licensure is to be renewed, the following procedure is recommended:
 - a. Either upon the local church's own initiative, or at the request of the licentiate, the church shall decide by vote whether it desires to ask the board for authority to license for another year. If the decision favors renewal, the church may ask the board for the form to petition for authority to renew the license, execute it, and return it to the board.
 - b. If the board approves, it shall so notify the church, keeping on file a copy of the authorized form. With the authorization, a copy of the form may be sent upon which the church attests the fact of renewal.
 - c. The local church will formally renew the license as an act of public knowledge, fill out the proper form, and return it promptly.
9. The conference permits four renewals of a license, making a possible five-year tenure. If after five years of licensing the church has not seen fit to petition the board for authority to ordain, it shall be considered the licentiate is deemed not to be suitable for pastoral ministry.
10. No license is recognized by the General Conference which has not been authorized by the district board of oversight.

II. Licensure in the Brethren Church

A. Purpose of Licensure

1. Ordination in the Christian Church is an action of such serious import that, besides laying down a complete standard of qualifications, the Holy Spirit safeguards the whole matter against haste and carelessness with three definite commands. First, the Apostle Paul advises, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (I Tim 5:22 NIV). Second, the bishop or elder in particular must in no case be a "recent convert" or "novice" (I Tim 3:6). Third, all candidates before ordination must first be "tested" or "proved" (I Tim 3:10).
2. The purpose of the church in licensing pastoral candidates for a limited period of time, therefore, is to fulfill those three Biblical conditions; namely, to avoid the ordination of candidates "hastily," to afford them some experience in the work of pastoral ministry so they may not be "novices" when ordained; and to give them opportunity to "prove" themselves worthy and fitted for the high office to which they aspire.

B. Definition of Licensure

1. A license is issued only to a candidate for ordination to the eldership. The pastoral license is a means whereby the candidate may serve a church for a probationary period in order to gain experience and to give proof of fitness for full ordination.
2. A licentiate, upon the recommendation of the district board of oversight, will be issued a "Certificate of Licensure" by the said board and the church issuing a call to pastoral ministry and shall have such authority as set forth under "C." below.

C. Authority of Licentiate

1. Certain authority and prerogatives are reserved for the ordained elder. However, it is recognized that many rights of the elder may be properly cared for by the licentiate in fulfilling the duties of a pastorate.
 - a. Licentiate shall have the right to perform the following without supervision:
 - 1) To preach and teach the Gospel
 - 2) To pastor a local church and do related preaching
 - 3) To solemnize marriage where state law permits
 - 4) To conduct funerals
 - 5) To consecrate infants
 - 6) To hold conference offices
 - 7) To conduct other pastoral duties except as in b and c
 - b. The following may be performed under the supervision of an ordained elder of The Brethren Church:
 - 1) To baptize
 - 2) To confirm

- 3) To conduct communion
 - 4) To anoint the sick (In special cases, the anointing of the sick may be cared for in the absence of an elder, but only when an elder is contacted and specific instructions are given by telephone, letter, or in person. In the event an elder cannot be reached the service may be conducted with immediate notification of circumstances as above.)
- c. Only ordained elders shall ordain elders, deacons or deaconesses.
2. Each licentiate shall have assigned an ordained elder as an advisor by the district board of oversight. This elder, or another elder who is available, shall give supervision in the services in which the licentiate is limited, at the request of the licentiate. This advisor shall provide encouragement and support to the licentiate.

III. Ordination in the Brethren Church

A. Standards and Qualifications

1. The educational qualifications which shall be considered as prerequisite for authorization by the district board of oversight shall be:
 - a. Completion of a Master of Divinity degree at Ashland Theological Seminary; or
 - b. The completion of work prescribed by the district board of oversight at Ashland Theological Seminary, as a special student.
2. The district board of oversight shall review the requirements of those who do not meet the standards as outlined above, in order not to discourage any whom the Lord may call.
3. The criteria for ordination. Only those people should be ordained who are biblically qualified, have the requisite training, are pastoring a congregation, and have been recommended for ordination by a local church, district board of oversight, and the National Ordination Council.

B. Procedure

1. It is required that the ordination of pastors occur after at least one year of service in a Brethren church.
2. When the local church believes its candidate is prepared for ordination, which must be at least one year following the issuance of a license, it may so vote, notify the district board of oversight, and petition for authority to ordain.
3. The district board of oversight then shall recommend the candidate to the National Ordination Council for ordination examination. No one will be examined without a written recommendation by the district board of oversight.
4. Upon receipt of this recommendation, the National Ordination Council shall send a list of requirements and oral interview questions. The National Ordination Council shall also inform the candidate of the time and place of the examination.
5. The local church shall work with its candidate for ordination and be responsible for planning the ordination service, shall provide for proper programs and publicity, shall provide for the ordination speaker, and further shall arrange for and provide for the reception to follow.

6. It is recommended that a representative of the district board of oversight be present to assist in the ordination service.

C. The Pastor's District Conference Standing

1. Every resident pastor serving a church or churches in the district shall place and hold church membership in the church being served. If serving more than one church, the pastor may choose in which church the letter rests.
2. When a Brethren pastor moves into another district conference to become a pastor of a church or churches or to supply, he or she shall bring written evidence of membership and good standing in the former district conference.
 - a. This written evidence may be whatever form the issuing conference has adopted, such as a statement from the district board of oversight or from the conference secretary or a conference pastoral membership card.
 - b. Before the district board of oversight of this conference approves the incoming pastor as a member of the district conference, it shall request such evidence for its own protection.
 - c. The district board of oversight shall present the incoming pastor's credentials to the district conference credential committee.
3. In case of necessity, when a pastor is not properly supplied according to the above with evidence and/or credential, the district board may provide a pro-tem credential, if it sees fit.
4. The conference secretary shall issue annually, at the close of conference, a card to every elder, whose credentials were approved by the district board of oversight, stamping it with the seal of the conference.
5. When a pastor moves out of a district and lifts his or her church letter of membership, a letter of standing shall be granted by the district board of oversight.
6. To be in good standing, the local church in which a pastor's church letter of membership rests and which issues a credential must also be in good standing in the district conference.

D. The Duties of a Brethren Pastor

1. To preach and teach the Gospel with a view to:
 - a. Feeding God's flock;
 - b. Exalting the Lord Jesus Christ;
 - c. Winning souls.
2. To administer the ordinances of the Body of Christ.
3. To counsel and oversee the subordinate and auxiliary groups.
4. To visit the people, members and others, from house to house and be devoted to the care of the aged, the poor, the sick and dying.

5. To administer government and exercise discipline with tact and mercy.
6. To support without prejudice the organizations, institutions and goals of the Brethren Church, distribute Brethren publications, and support the decisions of the district and General Conference.
7. To keep a careful record of the work, as to additions, losses, funerals, weddings, pastoral calls, attendance, and participation by the pastor and church in various activities, that such data may be supply the district mission board and district conference.
8. To cooperate, as far as possible, as the church may desire, and as the community may be benefited, in religious, social, civic, patriotic, educational, fraternal, musical, recreational, and other community activities, to the glory of God.
9. To leave to a successor a comprehensive list of the members and families of the church's constituency, relationship, and addresses.
10. To seek to adorn the high calling of pastoral ministry in holy living.

IV. Status of Non-Brethren Pastors in the Brethren Church

A. Licensed or Ordained Pastors

1. Licensed and/or ordained pastors of other than The Brethren Church may serve as pastors, supply preachers, and evangelists, at the invitation of the local Brethren church. However, they may not administer the ordinances except under the supervision of a Brethren elder. The district board of oversight shall see that this is carried out.
2. Should a licensed or ordained pastor of another denomination desire to become a member and an elder in The Brethren Church:
 - a. That person shall receive baptism by triune immersion, unless furnishing evidence of having been baptized by believer's baptism. He or she shall become a member of the local church which administers or accepts the baptism and church letter of membership.
 - b. In the case of the licensed pastor from another denomination, the local church may vote to request that the district board of oversight consider licensure in The Brethren Church for one year. Upon approval of the board, this may be granted. The regular licensing procedure shall be followed.
 - c. In the case of the ordained pastor from another denomination, the local church may vote to request that the district board of oversight approve that person as a licensed pastor for one year, during which a Brethren elder serve as an advisor. Following the successful completion of this period of probation, the church may vote to issue a call to Brethren pastoral ministry and proceed with the ordination process as outlined in this manual.

B. Non-Brethren Pastoral Candidates

1. A layman of another denomination who unites with any local Brethren church shall not be eligible to apply for licensure until the expiration of one year from the time becoming a member of a Brethren church.
2. Should the church or the candidate desire, at the expiration of one year, application may be made according to the regular procedure for licensure and ordination as outlined in this manual.

V. Commissioning for Special Ministries in The Brethren Church

A. Special Ministries

We consider special ministries to be:

1. Director of Christian Education
2. Minister of Music
3. Director of Youth
4. And other fields of Christian work not normally considered pastoral.

As there are not various forms or varying degrees of ordination, ordination per se is not valid for other than those entering the pastoral field. Therefore, a candidate for a special ministry will be set apart for that specific field rather than ordained. If later ordination to pastoral ministry is desired, the procedures outlined in this manual shall be followed.

B. Commissioning Procedures

Procedures for commissioning shall be the same as for licensing and ordination (see I.B).

C. Authority of Those Commissioned for Special Ministries

1. Each local church which calls someone to a specific ministry will, no doubt, make specific assignments to that person in the area of the calling (for instance, directing the youth program of the church, supervising the total music program of the church, or organizing and administering the program of Christian education).
2. Limitations on functions of the church and the ministry of the person set aside for one of these specific ministries other than of the designated field of service:
 - a. To preach and teach the Gospel (a function which is actually the responsibility of every born-again believer). This should be done under careful supervision of the ordained elder.
 - b. To receive the confession of faith of converts.
 - c. To assist in conducting communion services (at the discretion of the elder).
 - d. To conduct funeral services.
 - e. To do pastoral calling, as instructed by the ordained elder.
 - f. To counsel those with problems, questions, etc., if qualified and trained to do so.

D. Standards and Qualifications

The educational qualifications which shall be considered as prerequisite for authorization to be set apart by the district board of oversight shall be:

- a. The completion of a standard high school course, or its equivalent.
- b. The completion of a course of study in a recognized institution or institutions in the specialized field for which the candidate is to be set apart.

REPORT OF THE 1986 ORDINATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Adopted for Implementation by the National Ministerial Association

August 4, 1987

Introduction

Since 1970 the National Ministerial Association has commissioned no less than four major studies of the issues related to licensure and ordination. Though each of these studies has resulted in further refinement of ordination procedures, the recurring discussions indicate the need to reconsider the meaning of ordination itself. At its 1986 General Conference meeting, the National Ministerial Association authorized the appointment of a committee “to make a thorough biblical and theological study of Brethren ordination.” This committee met three times during 1986 and 1987 and offers the following report regarding theology and practice.

A Theological Overview of Ordination

It is important to realize that our English word “ordination” comes from a Latin rather than a Greek word. In the early fifth century Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate translation used the Latin word ordinare (to set in order, arrange) as a synonym for the Greek cheirotoneo (to appoint, choose; used twice in the New Testament: Acts 14:23, 2 Cor. 8:19). The English word “ordain” was later used by the King James Version to translate 24 different biblical words. We therefore face two problems with regard to the word “ordain.” (1) The English word has so many shades of meaning that there is no direct one-to-one correspondence between the Hebrew and English and Greek and English words. (2) In using a Latin word to describe the technical practice, we may import connotations from Roman Catholic usage. The solution to both problems is to go back to the original Hebrew and Greek words to understand what is meant by the English word “ordain.”

In the Old and New Testaments the practice of ordination is most generally connected with the rite of laying on of hands. This rite was used on a number of different occasions and had several important purposes. In sacrificial settings, the laying of hands on an animal conveyed the idea of atonement for sins and substitution through the transference of sin and guilt (this becomes a type of Jesus’ sacrificial death). The laying on of hands is used in the context of passing on a blessing (Gen. 48:14; Matt. 19:13, 15). In the New Testament it is frequently connected with healing by Jesus and His disciples. Reception of the Holy Spirit is commonly (though not necessarily linked with the laying on of hands in Acts. Finally, in both testaments hands are laid on people when they are consecrated or set apart for a special service or function. This variety should caution us about too narrow a definition of ordination, for a person could have several “ordinations” (as in the case of Paul in Acts 9:12, 17; 13:3).

In the more technical usage of ordination, the laying on of hands seems to have a threefold significance with past, present, and future implications. As confirmation, the act looks backward as a formal recognition of a person’s calling and gifts for service. As consecration, the act serves as a present setting apart of the person for God’s service. As commissioning, the act looks forward as a charge to carry out the function and responsibility of a particular office.

In every Old and New Testament case, there is a link between the act of laying on of hands and some gracious work of God. Laying on of hands is not a “naked” symbol in the sense that it has no connection to God’s grace. Nor, however, is it a means of grace in the sense that God’s grace is conveyed in the act (a sacramental view). What can be said is that the act participates in the process as a testimony of faith and commitment. The faith and commitment demonstrated in the act are the “active ingredients” which make God’s grace operative. In ordaining a person for

a special function, the act promises that God will grant to the faithful recipient the gracious gifts needed to fulfill a particular calling.

Ordination possesses both divine and human aspects. It is a formal recognition of God's call in a person's life and affirms both that those spiritual gifts needed for a special calling are present and that God promises grace to fulfill the responsibilities of the task. But ordination also includes human components. It assumes that God's calling must be ratified by human witnesses as well who can testify to the evidence of the divine call. The act of laying on of hands is also performed by persons with the appropriate authority who can likewise vouch for the person's character and integrity. In the ordination process, God and human beings cooperate to provide the best possible leadership for the further advance of God's kingdom purposes.

Because ordination in the technical sense is always linked to the performance of a special task or function, the implication is that the authority and responsibility recognized in ordination should cease when the function ceases.

A Definition of Terms

We felt it necessary to define several terms more exactly.

1. Calling

Calling, like ordination, has a broader usage in Scripture than the way we customarily employ it. Calling frequently refers to God's appeal or invitation to salvation (1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 4:1, 4; 1 Thess. 2:12). Only rarely is it used in the narrow sense of a personal commissioning to a special office or function (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; cf. Acts 20:28). In both usages the stress is upon God's initiative in the matter. The human aspect of the process is in reality a response to this initiative. Thus the congregation affirms the divine call while the elders confirm it, and they jointly set apart the individual for God's service. It should be stressed that a call implies a task.

2. Office and Function

It is appropriate to keep these two terms together for they are related as noun to verb. Office tends to be more static in nature while function conveys the idea of activity.

While office can be conceived apart from function, we need to beware of attaching unique status or authority to the office of elder itself. The Brethren are not in the Catholic tradition in which special status is given the priest by virtue of ordination to this office. Rather we are in the Protestant tradition in which our authority as elders derives from our administering the Word of God to our people (note that early Brethren elders were called "Servants of the Word").

The word "function" is used by the NASB and NIV translations in Rom. 12:4 to refer to the activity each member of the body has within the church. The context provides an important reminder for us. Paul uses a dynamic, living analogy when dealing with these concepts--the analogy of a body whose members are functioning in God-given ways in order to achieve the divine goals of edification of the body, glorification of God, and service to the world (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). We must therefore remember that structure should always be the servant of our goals and needs.

A Model for Brethren Ministry

Based on the above findings, we would suggest the following model for Brethren ministry.

I. Who properly should be termed an elder?

We endorse the continued use of the term elder to refer to the ordained leadership of the church. Not only does it have biblical and historical roots, but it also has less “baggage” and ambiguity than words like minister, bishop, and overseer and is a bit broader than the word pastor.

The primary sense of the word elder should be to designate those who have been ordained and are pastoring in a local church. Additionally, the title elder should be extended to the following special cases (only if they have previously been ordained):

- (1) Those retired from pastoral ministry
- (2) Those serving in the national offices
- (3) Those serving in Ashland Theological Seminary or the religion department of Ashland University
- (4) Those serving in a church-related position recognized by the Director of Pastoral Ministries and the appropriate district board of spiritual oversight

II. Distinguish between the words “ordain” and “commission”

We recognize that there is little actual difference between these two words. Both denote the setting apart of someone for a particular task or function. Nevertheless, for practical purposes ordination should be reserved for setting apart elders for at least two reasons: (1) historical precedent and (2) proper recognition of the office of elder/overseer/bishop as the Servant of the Word and overseer/shepherd of God’s flock. Commissioning should be the term used in other cases.

A. The criteria for ordination

Only those people should be ordained who: (1) are biblically qualified, (2) have the requisite training, (3) are pastoring a congregation, and (4) have been recommended for ordination by a local church, appropriate district board, and the National Ordination Council.

B. The usage of commissioning

Commissioning can have broad usage within the church at large. We suggest the following as examples. There are some who gain their livelihood from the church but do not meet other qualification for ordination (those in music, youth, Christian education, and counseling). These would receive commissioning only. They could be called “Minister of _____,” “Director of _____,” etc. A church should feel free to develop any appropriate title providing the concept is understood. These persons would appear before the district boards of examination but not the National Ordination Council. (The IRS recognizes commissioned Christian workers.)

Commissioning is appropriate when a particular ministry is limited with respect to time. Short-term missionaries should thus be commissioned. Further, if elders move from the pastorate to some other form of ministry to the church (denominational executive, professor, evangelist, etc.), they should be commissioned to this task, though they still would retain the designation “elder.”

III. What about elders who leave the Brethren ministry?

A. Those that go to other denominations and want to return

When elders leave the Brethren ministry for service in another denomination, the ethical procedure should be for them to move their membership to that denomination as well. The unofficial practice of dual membership for elders and dual recognition of their office as elder should be discontinued. This means that when elders leave The Brethren Church they should no longer be recognized as elders by their former district and the national organization. If at some point they desire to return to Brethren ministry, their case will be handled in the same way as any other non-Brethren minister seeking a Brethren pastorate with the exception that they must bring a letter of recommendation from the district board of oversight of the district in which they formerly served if they seek a pastorate in another district.

We suggest the procedure adopted by the Ohio District in such cases:

Article VIII, Section 5 of the Ohio District Constitution

Any ordained minister of another denomination, including those who have formerly served as elders in The Brethren Church, may be called tentatively as a pastor, with the authority of a licensed minister, provided that prior to his initial appointment, the Ministerial Examining Board shall approve his employment. Such approval of the Ministerial Examining Board, however, shall be interpreted as tentative for the year subsequent to the approval. If the member so received and tentatively approved shall have proved himself worthy during the year, and followed a study outlined by the Ministerial Examining Board, the Board may, upon written request of the minister and the local church which he serves, either recommend him to the National Ordination Council for final consideration, or outline further steps to be taken to qualify, or reject his application. When the application is approved by the National Ordination Council, the local congregation may proceed with a public service, setting him aside to the Brethren ministry and reaffirming his ordination.

B. Those not functioning in an eldership role

The following categories would provide a helpful distinction.

1. Leave of absence

For those elders who feel they need a period of rest or special study, we suggest a leave program with certain stipulations. The elder should have an agreement with the appropriate district board¹ before leaving pastoral service and appear before the district board¹ upon desire to return to active service. During the leave, the elder should be required to be under the supervision of a Brethren elder and communicate annually with the appropriate district board of oversight. We further suggest that the leave be two years with renewal at the discretion of the district board¹ and that the elder serve in some church or service ministry (teaching, supply preaching, service programs) though not necessarily with The Brethren Church. After two years, if not approved for renewal, the person will be placed on the inactive list. This procedure should also be followed by those elders who desire to pastor in The Brethren Church but cannot find a church immediately.

2. Inactive elder

Those elders who leave pastoral ministry without requesting leave of absence will automatically be placed on an inactive list by their district board of oversight after one year of inactivity. When this occurs, no elder credential is to be issued by their district. In order to be

reinstated to the elder roster, they must go before the district board of oversight of the district in which they served. After three years of inactivity, the person's ordination will lapse.

IV. Special considerations

A. Lay pastors

We encourage the use of lay pastors in interim situations and in our smaller churches. Such lay pastors do not need ordination but should be authorized by the district board of oversight and commissioned for this work.

B. Deacons

Given the mixed practice in our churches regarding the tenure of deacons, we would suggest that the term "commissioning" be used, though in those churches which set apart deacons for life the term "ordain" might be appropriate.

V. Relationships between the various¹ district boards of oversight

A. All minutes and decisions of district boards of oversight should be forwarded to the National Office.¹ This procedure will provide greater continuity and understanding throughout the denomination.

B. Whenever an elder moves from one district to another, pertinent records should be forwarded to the appropriate district board of oversight.

C. All district boards of oversight should develop common terminology and procedures for ministerial examination and oversight.

Recommendations by the committee to the National Ministerial Association

1. We recommend that a committee of three be formed to revise the present ministerial procedures to include the changes in this report. We suggest that the members be Bill Kerner, Dale Stoffer, and the new DPM.

2. We recommend that the DPM develop a program for implementing these procedures by the districts and the National Ordination Council.

Committee members: Jerry Flora, Bill Kerner, Terry Lodico, Charles Lowmaster, Brian Moore, Jack Oxenrider, Ken Sullivan, Dale Stoffer, Chairman

PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

Adopted by the National Ministerial Association, August 13, 1976

- A. Contact the District Board of Oversight.¹
- B. Arrange meeting with the District Board of Oversight¹, to assist in the procedure.
- C. Do the following:
 1. Appoint a search committee if not already done.
 2. Complete a congregational survey (Helps develop the type of pastor that the Lord would have you call)
 3. Review resumes of available people from the National Office, and develop a list of possibilities.
 4. Interview candidates (committee is responsible for expense).
 5. Negotiate terms and recommend one candidate at a time for consideration by the congregation. (Note: If more than one is presented to the congregation at one time, you will tend to divide your church, and good pastors will not consider your call.)
 6. Congregation votes on recommendation of search committee.
 7. Notify candidate of decision immediately.
 8. Announce decision of candidate to congregation.
 9. Invite district representative to installation of new pastor.
 10. Keep District Board of Oversight¹ advised of progress of search committee.
 11. Additional explanation of procedures:
 - a. The pastor search committee should carry on negotiations with only one pastor at a time. Pastors do not want the indignity of being thrust into competition for a pastorate. Most of them will withdraw their names if they learn of its being done. Dissension in the church often results from a split vote over two or more candidates. The pastor then faces a faction at the start, and will have to overcome the opposition thus set up. Get a vote of “yes” or “no.” If the first pastor is rejected by the ballot, proceed to negotiate with another.
 - b. It is best not to invite a pastor for a “trial sermon.” Such procedure is unfair to both congregation and pastor. Many pastors do not feel at ease and cannot do their best in the pulpit while facing an evaluating audience. A trip by members of the search committee to hear the prospective pastor in the present church is helpful. If the person under consideration is unknown to most of the congregation, invite the candidate and family for an informal get-acquainted visit, with a fellowship supper. Such an informal setting is more suitable for casual conversation with the family and personal comments to the group, leading to a better appraisal by both pastor and people.

- c. Information a church should know about a prospective pastor:
- of study
 - Proven skill in counseling
 - Pays bills promptly
 - Holds to Brethren faith and practice
 - Keeps confidences
 - Standing in community
 - Any damaging gossip about prospective pastor
 - Possesses the strengths a congregation needs
 - Standing in present district
- d. Questions a pastor should consider about a prospective church:
- Is the membership in the habit of picking at its pastor and finding fault?
 - Can salary be expected regularly?
 - Does the congregation pay other bills when due?
 - Do they pay all their denominational assessments?
 - Do the members consider the parsonage the private home of the pastor and family and respect that privacy as any other home?
 - Is the pastor accorded due consideration as the spiritual leader, or just as a preacher and secretarial choreboy?
 - Is there disunity and are there factions in the church?
 - Are members willing to work (calling on prospective members) or is the pastor expected to do it all?
 - The church and pastor should discuss their respective responsibilities on the basis of concrete guidelines.
- e. There are searching and personal questions that require frankness on the part of both the pastor and search committee. Once a complete understanding is reached, the future relationship of church and pastor will tend to be pleasant. Note: The District Boards of Oversight¹ will be very helpful at this point of the process in providing information about both church and pastor.
- f. Then an agreement on terms must be reached with the prospect. Be specific on all items: salary, parsonage, utilities (electricity, gas, water, sewage, telephone), car allowance, conference expenses, health and accident insurance, retirement insurance and Social Security, moving expenses, length and time of vacation, evangelistic privileges, Sundays allowed as sick leave without salary penalty, secretary and office help, etc. Let every congregation use the recommended salary scale for the current year and seek to participate in denominational insurance and retirement plans.
- g. When the conditions of the agreement are mutually established by the pastor and search committee, the committee will then present it to the official board for consideration and recommendation to the congregation. The congregational meeting may be a regular session, or a special session called according to the congregation's constitution and by-laws. If the recommendation of the official board is approved by the congregation, the search committee can proceed to issue the formal call to the pastor and notify the District Board of Oversight¹ of the action taken.
- h. Upon the acceptance by the pastor, it is suggested that a written agreement be made out, with all above items spelled out, with the date of beginning and duration of agreement. The agreement should also include the time of advance notice to be given by either pastor or

congregation for termination of the agreement. Each time a new call is issued, the agreement should be reviewed.

- i. If the pastor is from another district, clearance from officials of the former district conference is needed before being seated in the new district conference. The search committee may write to the secretary of the former conference, or ask the pastor to provide clearance as specified in the Manual of Procedure.
- j. In the event an ordained pastor from another denomination is being considered, before there have been any negotiations, the district board of oversight shall be notified. They will examine and approve the candidate.
- k. These steps are necessary for all ordained pastors of other denominations coming into the Brethren Church: they shall be given the same status as a licensed pastor for a period of one year, and shall be under the care of a regularly ordained Brethren elder and the District Board of Oversight¹ for that period. At the end of the year, they shall appear before the district board of oversight for recommendation to the National Ordination Council.

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL ETHICS

Adopted by General Conference August 7, 1987

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.

GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONS IN PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL RELATIONS

Adopted by the National Ministerial Association, August 13, 1976

In order to promote harmony and more fruitful ministry we recommend the following discipline for Brethren churches:

- I. That the church gives a pastor an “open-end call.”
 - A. An open-end call is one in which a call is given to the pastor to serve as pastor for an indefinite period of time. (For instance, the call would not be for a “one-year, two-year, or three-year” term.)
 - B. The main reason for an “open-end” contract is that the pastor and the congregation can plan for a more wholesome, long-range growth program for the church. This will give stability to the church as it removes the uncertainty and sometimes unrest which occurs when the time nears for recall of the pastor.
 - C. The pastor shall continue to serve until such a time as he or she resigns, under the provision of item “D,” or until such time as the congregation decides to terminate his relationship as pastor as defined in item “E.”
 - D. If the pastor desires to terminate a relationship with the congregation as pastor, notification in writing of those intentions shall be given to the moderator. Services to the congregation shall continue for a three-month period until the resignation is effective or for such a period of time as may be agreed upon by the pastor and congregation.
 - E. Should a motion be made at any regular meeting of the congregation that the services of the pastor be terminated, and said motion is seconded, it shall not be put to a vote by the moderator at this meeting, but shall be referred to the official board and the District Board of Oversight¹ for their consideration and recommendation and shall be acted upon at the next properly called business meeting of the congregation.
 - F. If the majority of the votes are in favor of the motion to terminate the services of the pastor, fulfillment of pastoral duties shall nevertheless continue as usual for a three-month period or for such a time as may be agreed upon by the pastor and the congregation.
 - G. The pastoral contract’s financial provisions--base salary plus allowances (i.e., housing, utilities, retirement, health insurance, travel, books and magazines, etc.) and vacation time--should be reviewed for updating annually by the congregation.
- II. Support of the District Board of Oversight
 - A. Each Church shall invite their assigned district oversight person into their church to speak and counsel if needed at least once each year.
 - B. All Brethren should be continually aware of the help available from the district board of oversight.¹

THE PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The following proposal from the Leadership Care Study Group of the Congregational Ministries Council is intended to help local churches in the process of providing more intentional care for the pastoral household. The following ideas are primarily suggestive. We present this model to encourage intentional pastoral care within congregations and consistency among congregations. Each local church is free to adapt this document to suit its particular situation. This document has been prepared in light of the growing need to encourage and strengthen pastoral households in local churches.

1. We recommend the creation of a Pastoral Care Committee in each local church. We further recommend that the Pastoral Care committee replace the Pastoral Relations Committee. The Pastoral Care Committee bears no formal relation to what has been known as the Pastoral Relations Committee (or other similar technology). Pastoral Relations Committees have traditionally been responsible to deal with the conflict issues between pastors and individuals within the congregation, as well as to present financial recommendations to the congregation or administrative board. We feel that such an arrangement could foster an unbiblical approach to conflict, violating the guidelines set forth in Matthew 18:15-17. The Pastoral Care Committee will not be directly involved in conflict resolution.
2. The Pastoral Care Committee exists to promote the care of the pastor and the pastor's family in the following areas: physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, relational and financial.
3. The method of operation of the Pastoral Care Committee will be a relational rather than a business model. A business model is more formal and less personal in nature.
4. We recommend that the pastor selects committee members with the affirmation of the congregation or administrative board. Representation from other boards, committees, ministries, etc., within the church is not necessary. Neither should there be any ex-officio members of the committee. The Study Group suggests a membership of three persons, each serving a three year term on a rotating basis. The person with the longest tenure could be the chairperson. Since the committee is relational in nature, limiting tenures is not necessary (i.e., an outgoing member could be reappointed).
5. The Pastoral Care Committee may make reports and / or recommendations to the congregation or administrative board when necessary.
6. Guidelines for the Pastoral Care Committee to follow in exercising its role:
 1. Be an advocate for the pastor and family.
 2. Discuss with the pastor and mutually agree upon a policy of confidentiality with exceptions.
 3. Educate the congregation on sensitivity to pastoral family needs.
 4. Practice creative encouragement.
 5. Communicate with District personnel at least quarterly to report activities and to use them as resource person.

6. Be prepared to invite a crisis-intervention team or a transition team to the church in the event of conflict, retirement death, or other forms of departure of a pastor from the church. Conduct this process in cooperation with the appropriate district and national personnel.
7. Plan for and expedite Pastor Appreciation Day (or month) each year. (Focus on the Family, 1-800-232-6459, has a Pastor Appreciation Kit available for a nominal fee.)
8. Meet possibly monthly, or at least quarterly, or at the call of pastor or chairperson.
9. Develop a separate Pastoral Care Committee for each staff person in a multiple staff situation.
10. Use written materials available in a Pastoral Care Committee packet available from The Carpenter's Shop (419-289-0325). This packet currently includes the following titles (a brief synopsis of each appears at the end of this presentation):

McIntosh, Dr. Gary L. and Dr. Robert L. Edmondson. It Only Hurts on Monday: Why Pastors Quit and What You Can Do About It. Carol Streams, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998.

Rediger, C. Lloyd. Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

Roberts, Wes. Support Your Local Pastor: Practical Ways to Encourage Your Minister. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995.

The books can be used as resource material in the following ways:

>Individual members read each volume in order to educate them on issues relating to pastoral care.

>Use a volume as a basis of discussion during committee time. Chairperson could lead discussion or leadership could be rotated.

>Pastor read and bring relevant issues to the committee

IT ONLY HURTS ON MONDAY by Dr. Gary L. McIntosh and Dr. Robert L. Edmondson. This is a book about pastoral pressures and expectations which have been significant in the lives of over 60 ex-pastors and their churches. It is a research-based book which draws frequently upon the survey results which preceded it. Is especially helpful to Pastoral Care Committees because each chapter, after discussing the particular problem, contains a "You Can Help!" section with practical suggestions to deal with the problem in question. The book is down-to-earth and quite useable.

CLERGY KILLERS by G. Lloyd Rediger. This book is the most clinical of the three, relying heavily upon the discipline of psychology for its insights. It packs a hard punch, even if one does not find the familiar evangelical-church clichés and Bible quotations one might expect. The

process of identifying clergy killers is scrupulously guided, lest one should be guilty of false accusation. Not every troublemaker or negative person in the church is a clergy killer! But clergy killers are real and must be dealt with in stern ways (something most congregations scrupulously avoid!) Rediger repeatedly insists that clergy killers must be rendered inoperable in local churches. This is not an easy book to digest because it deals with analysis and strategies, but it issues a mandate to churches to come to terms with phenomena which debilitate pastors and congregations. The final three chapters provide a welcome relief because they discuss positive factors in the life and health of pastors and congregations. But the preceding chapters are imperative because of the problem issues in many churches. There is a chapter on Killer Clergy, as well, lest one think that the problem is strictly one-sided. A Pastoral Care Committee will have plenty to discuss if this book becomes a basis of discussion!

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL PASTOR by Wes Roberts. Wes Roberts' ministry is to Christian leaders and his book reveals his familiarity with the issues. The introductory chapter, "Loving Our Pastors Well" is the objective of the Leadership Care Study Group. The concluding chapter, "Who Can Help us Care For Our Pastors?", provides the names, addresses and phone numbers of forty-one ministry agencies devoted to caring for pastors and their families. Between these chapters the other chapters are filled with practical suggestions and ideas for a Pastoral Care Committee to implement. This is the most suggestion-laden book of the three and will prove valuable in helping to encourage the pastor and his family.

All of the above-recommended books seek to help create pastor / congregation relationships which will make pastoring that particular local church an exciting and fulfilling adventure. We are trying to create an atmosphere in the Brethren Church which communicates that pastoring is a wonderful calling and that our churches are wonderful places to pastor. We are hoping the Brethren will become a model of pastoral care so that others might emulate us in the care for their pastors.

The Congregational Ministries Council
G. Emery Hurd, Chair

The Leadership Care Study Group
Brian H. Moore, Chair

DISCIPLINE OF PASTORS

Adopted by the National Ministerial Association, August 13, 1976

Prologue

We believe that any group which organizes and provides procedures for receiving of members into its group, has the authority and responsibility to discipline its members if and when it becomes necessary. This authority and responsibility belongs to the district board of oversight.

We have several intentions:

1. In the light of increased liberty and permissiveness in all areas of life, we intend that the sacredness and high calling of ordained pastors shall be maintained according to scriptural standards.
2. Our primary concern is the Church as the Body of Christ. The pastor, as recognized spiritual leader, needs to be constantly disciplined in the scriptural standards for that office. If the pastor does not do that personally, then it becomes necessary for the district board of oversight to do it.

Membership and Standing

Since pastors serving Brethren churches in the districts usually hold their membership in the church(s) being served, and since good standing as a pastor rests with the provision of a credential to the district conference from the local church, this automatically brings them under the jurisdiction of the Brethren conference of the district.

As the district board of oversight must approve all applications for licensure and ordination of potential pastors holding their church membership in the district, and since all pastors moving into the district from other Brethren districts must present credentials signifying being in good standing in the district from which they came, it signifies that such potential and incoming pastors come under the jurisdiction of the district board of oversight.

Thus, we understand that membership in this group is composed of those pastors who now hold their membership in a Brethren church in the Brethren conference districts, whose credentials as ordained elders in The Brethren Church have been approved and accepted by the district board and in the case of the licentiate, a current year's license.

We understand the responsibilities and code of ethics, for the pastor, to be that as outlined in scriptural passages such as I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-11, and as outlined in Guidelines for Pastoral Ethics. We include a summary as follows:

The Bible set the standards for those who wish to live as Christians:

1. Approve excellent things ...without offense Phil. 1:10
2. Conversation (life) that becomes the Gospel Phil. 1:27
3. Harmless and blameless Phil. 2:15
4. Walk worthy of the Lord Col. 1:10
5. Called to holiness not uncleanness I Thess. 4:7

6. Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from all appearances of evil I Thess. 5:21, 22
7. Remove yourself from a brother that walketh disorderly II Thess.3:6,7,14
8. Be holy as God is holy I Peter 1:15,16
9. Be holy and blameless Eph. 1:4
10. Walk worthy of vocation (Christian life) Eph. 4:1
11. Don't walk like other Gentiles Eph. 4:17
12. Fornication not even to be named among the saints Eph. 5:3,4
13. Walk circumspectly Eph. 5:15

When these standards were broken in Corinth, Paul commanded the fornicator to be cast out of the church (I Cor. 5:1-12). When, however, repentance was observed, he commanded the church to restore that person to membership (II Cor. 2:6-11). A sinning colleague is to be led back to fellowship through repentance by those who are spiritual (Gal. 6:1). Jesus gave the method of dealing with someone who has sinned (Matt. 18:15-20).

However, even higher standards are set for those who desire the office of bishop (elder or pastor).

In Titus chapter one:

1. Blameless
2. One wife
3. Faithful children not accused of riot or of being unruly
4. Not self willed
5. Not easily angered
6. Not a wine lover
7. No striker
8. Not given to filthy lucre nor covetous
9. Lover of hospitality
10. Lover of good men
11. Sober
12. Just
13. Holy
14. Temperate
15. Sound in doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers

And in I Timothy chapter three:

16. Vigilant
17. Of good behavior
18. Apt to teach
19. Patient
20. Not a novice
21. Good report of them without
22. Examples to the flock I Pet. 4:17
23. Keep selves pure I Tim. 5:22
24. Give no offense lest the ministry be blamed II Car. 6:3,4

A pastor is to be blameless
of good behavior
of good report among the lost
an example to the flock
without spot, above rebuke.

Our “liberty” in the Gospel dare not be the cause of a weaker believer to give in to temptation (I Cor. 8:9.13). Peter says it is time for judgment to begin at the house of God (I Peter 4:17). We must “Contend for the Faith” says Jude. John says, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”

Procedure When Action Appears Necessary

Realizing the occasional, but definite need for discipline, the following shall be recognized as binding upon the pastor involved:

1. When complaint is brought to the district board of oversight concerning one of our district pastors, the board shall hear the evidence as presented.
2. The board shall carefully weigh the evidence as presented in the complaint.
3. If there appears to be evidence of misconduct, the board shall conduct the investigation by:
 - a. Counseling with the particular pastor involved and explaining the charges which have been made, what the rights and privileges are, and what can happen if definite action becomes necessary. Those visiting the pastor shall endeavor to pray with and for that person and for those who have brought the complaint, in an effort to work out the problem at this level.
 - b. Counseling with those issuing the complaint against the pastor. Seek to get the facts, times, dates, specific instances, etc., rather than hearsay, personal prejudice, etc., and seek to pray with the complainant(s) for all involved in the matter (see I Tim. 5:19).
4. After the investigation is completed, the board shall meet, and after a session of prayer for the pastor and others involved, including the complainant(s), the board shall determine what action, if any, should be taken against the pastor and or the complainant(s). The board in this session shall seek to determine whether the accusations are valid.

The board at this session shall also seek to contact the pastor and set a time when pastor and board can meet together for a sharing time on the charges.

If the earlier meeting with the pastor (see item 3a above) reveals that he or she appears to be free of the charges brought, and if the board feels that the pastor is speaking the truth, then this feeling shall be reported to the one(s) who filed the complaint. It may then be necessary to conduct a meeting at which the complainant(s) and the pastor shall appear, to discuss the charges together. The findings of this meeting shall be reported to the full board. If the pastor is free of guilt and the complainant(s) push the issue and disrupt the pastor’s ministry, then the complainant(s) are to be disciplined even to the point of revoking their membership if necessary.

If guilt is apparent, the board should then seek to arrange a meeting with the pastor, at which time a reviewing of previous proceedings shall take place. An effort shall be made to find a way of making things right by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If the pastor denies any guilt, wrongdoing or transgression and asserts that the charges are false, the board will then need to meet in closed session to determine their action.

Possible Actions

1. Clear the pastor of all charges, and so notify him or her and the complainant(s). When things go this far, it possibly would be well to recommend that the pastor change pastorates.
2. Recognize that the charges indicate beyond a reasonable doubt, a measure of guilt and transgression on the part of the pastor. In less severe charges, a reprimand to the pastor, and a prayer for amnesty on the part of the complainant(s), is in order. The pastor will then be asked to seek guidance and counsel from the District Board of Oversight¹, or to seek professional counseling, to help put things into proper perspective. Counseling with the local congregation would also be in order if it were the source of the charges. The congregation should be warned against the legal danger of slander or libel.
3. In situations where gross guilt is in evidence and there is no sign on the part of the pastor to change, the unfrocking procedure shall take place.

Unfrocking a Pastor

At this time it is understood that this action shall be between the district board of oversight and any pastor as defined above as being an ordained elder of the Brethren Church holding membership in a Brethren Church.

1. By resolution or recommendation, the district board of oversight shall declare that the privileges of the eldership have been removed from the pastor.
2. The pastor shall be informed in person and/or by registered mail of the action of the board ; namely, that he or she is no longer privileged to act in the capacity of an ordained pastor in the Brethren conference of the district or in any of the district churches as a pastor. That person shall cease to use the title of “pastor,” “elder,” “reverend,” or “minister” or any related titles.
3. Letters of the action of the board and its meaning shall be sent to the officials of the congregation (a) where the person was pastoring; and/or (b) where that person holds his membership.
4. The District Executive Committee, the General Conference Executive Board, the National Ordination Council, and the National Association of Brethren Church Elders, shall be notified in writing of the action of the board in this matter.
5. The District Board of Oversight will notify all other district boards of the action taken in unfrocking a pastor.
6. No church shall grant a letter in good standing to an unfrocked pastor.

Areas of Problems Which Could Lead to the Unfrocking Process

1. Moral deviation, such as living in adultery, sexual misconduct with any woman or man in or out of the pastor’s congregation. This would include any form of sexual deviation. It would also include language, conversation, and sermons or counseling which would teach or promote immoral or sexual practices not in keeping with the standards of scripture as to be exemplified in the Christian life.

2. Doctrinal deviation where it is causing division in the church. This includes deviation from the cardinal doctrines Of the Christian faith, or the abuse of minor doctrines. It also includes heresy of the spirit, or those sins of the spirit which are characterized by attitudes of self-righteousness, censoriousness, isolationism, or exclusivism.
3. Other conduct unbecoming a pastor as defined in I Timothy 3 and other related passages and in codes of ethics.

Addendum

Failure of the pastor to respond to directives of the board to appear and answer charges made shall be deemed sufficient evidence for the unfrocking procedure to take place.

In all cases the unfrocked pastor shall have the right of appeal to the National Ordination Council.

DISCIPLINE OF CHURCH MEMBERS

from *The Brethren Pastor's Handbook*, 1974 edition, page 7
published by authority of the National Ministerial Association

The New Testament church, our divine model, is a very democratic organization. The will of the majority, honestly expressed, is its law. All transactions, thus expressed, therefore must be respected. Members, who, for any cause, refuse to peacefully abide by the will of the majority, place themselves in a rebellious attitude and in bad standing. Their Christianity may well be questioned, if they persist in placing their own judgment above the will of the majority in the church. No one manifesting such a rebellious spirit should ever be given a church letter. "Study the things that make for peace, and things with which one may edify another" is a piece of inspired counsel that ought to disarm the few bent on "rule or ruin." If the majority has made a mistake, that mistake can be rectified in time. Let those who are sure such a mistake has been made manifest the spirit of Christ and abide the time until such disagreement may be removed. They will, if there is any desire to do right, so do.

Let all cases of this nature, as well as those immoral cases that sometimes unfortunately arise, be committed by a vote of the congregation to the Official Board for adjustment. It would be better to commit to the same body the work of revising, or keeping revised, the membership lists. Paul's advice to the Ephesian elders would warrant such a procedure (Acts 20:28-31).

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 I 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 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 have 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 them 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 Ordination Council in the evaluation process should be to discern and clarify God's call on the candidate's life. Secondly, the Council 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 district examining board or the National Ordination Council 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 Ordination Council 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 Ordination Council 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.

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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 district ministerial examining board shall examine candidates for licensure and ordination recommended to them by local congregations. It is the responsibility of this board to examine candidates in the areas of personal life, theology, ethics, and personal habits. Therefore, the sex, color, and nationality of the candidate shall not be criteria for approval or rejection.
- C. The National Ordination Council should remain neutral on the sex, color, 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 [districts do have the responsibility, however, of examining all candidates prior to their hiring]. 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.

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¹ Adopted by NABCE at 2008 General Conference to replace references to a National Director of Pastoral Ministries