

Brethren in Christ Church of North America

General Conference 2012

July 6–9, 2012 · Ontario, Calif.

A full and formal report of business actions at the 2012 General Conference will be available in the official minutes, which are projected to be printed by November 1. In the meantime, this is a summary of General Conference action on the recommendations in the business sessions.

1. **Approved:** Relationship between the Canadian Conference and the General Conference

The governing boards of Canada and the General Conference had requested that a task force review the relationship between the Conferences. It unanimously recommended acknowledging that the relationship was moving toward two autonomously-governed national church bodies within the global framework of the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA). Both General Conference Board (GCB) and the Canadian Leadership Team (LT) reviewed and approved the task force's report. Therefore, the LT and the GCB recommended to their respective governing bodies, the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Canada and the General Conference in the United States, that the BIC Church in the United States and the BIC Church in Canada be recognized as separate General (national) Conferences, both belonging to IBICA and committed to nurturing a common identity and mission within the global community of the Brethren in Christ. This governance change would become effective upon approval, but issues of ongoing collaboration would be implemented in phases. Any provisions in the *Manual of Doctrine and Government* (MDG) that reflect the prior relationship are suspended and will be modified accordingly, with the details of the ongoing relationship to be described in a memorandum of understanding to be presented for approval by the 2014 General Conference (U.S.). In sponsorship, it was noted that the Canadian AGM had already approved this recommendation.

The following decisions relate to the entity formed by approval of this initial recommendation, the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S.

2. **Approved:** Review of Congregational Polity

The 2010 General Conference approved a review of the sections of the MDG pertaining to congregational polity, with the goal of applying to a wider range of congregational sizes and styles within a conceptual framework that (1) is based on the Core Values, (2) assures internal order for effective ministry, and (3) provides for consistency of values and flexibility in application. The Leadership Council appointed a task force and in reviewing the ensuing report identified two especially significant issues: (1) whether church membership is primarily a commitment to the local congregation or to the Brethren in

Christ Church, and (2) whether the MDG should continue to recommend that the pastor should be chair of the church board. GCB wanted input from General Conference on these issues. These issues were discussed in small groups. Though no action was taken, input from these discussions will go back to the Leadership Council for consideration in preparing by-law changes related to congregational polity.

3. *Approved:* Changes in the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*

Church practices have been in a gradual process of change in recent years in various areas. Changes in the legal environment require adjustments from time to time, and some aspects of organizational practice have not been adequately clear. GCB sought legal counsel to provide insight on adjusting the MDG in light of these needed changes. Therefore, GCB recommended several amendments to the MDG. There was not time to take action on all of them. The following items were brought to a vote:

- A revised rotation of the location of meetings of General Conference
- A revised process of the appointment of the denominational treasurer
- An update of material related to real estate and property
- Adjustments in the personnel, duties, structure, and evaluation of the General Conference Board, and the duties of its Finance Committee
- A simplification of material related to the BIC Foundation

4. *Approved:* Name-change study

At the 2010 General Conference, the Canadian Conference brought a recommendation to initiate a process to consider a new denominational name to be brought to the 2012 General Conference. GCB created a study group charged with the task of determining the perspectives of our various constituencies. On the basis of a survey of constituents across North America, to which more than 3,000 people responded, the study group unanimously recommended that the process be discontinued as there was support from less than one-fourth of the people who responded for changing the name. Indications of greater interest among younger and newer constituents for name change demonstrate the value of monitoring constituent viewpoints from time to time. Therefore, GCB recommended that the name change study be concluded, and that a study group be convened at least two more times, at four year intervals, to consider whether a name change should be pursued, using the 2011 survey as a baseline for comparison.

5. *Approved:* Structural adjustments

A convergence of circumstances and challenges created incentive and opportunity to review the configuration of leadership roles in the Church. GCB concluded that the action to take, in the absence of increased funding from congregations, is to combine, reduce or not fill leadership positions. The purpose of these adjustments is to provide an interim solution within current financial constraints for the coming biennium as a new leadership team is

selected. We anticipate that, with the new team in place, the Church will continue the restructuring conversation and consider whether broader organizational and structural changes are appropriate. Therefore, GCB recommended the following structural adjustments for the coming (2012–2014) biennium:

- When the current general secretary concluded his current term as scheduled on July 31, 2012, this position would not be filled. One General Church Leader will cover the core responsibilities of both positions.
- The current full-time position for executive director of finance will be reduced to half of a full time equivalent (.5 FTE) position.
- A vacant half-time position for executive director of congregation relations will be discontinued and these duties will be permanently reassigned.
- With the oversight of the Leadership Council, the Southeast Conference Board of Directors will collaborate with the Great Lakes Conference in developing a plan for joint administration and shared services among non-Spanish-congregations across regional boundaries.
- The Allegheny, Atlantic, Southeast, and Susquehanna Conferences will receive funding for a regional bishop at .75 FTE. The Great Lakes Conference will share a bishop (.65 FTE) with non-Spanish-speaking congregations in the Southeast Conference (.35 FTE). The Midwest (.50 FTE) and Pacific Conferences (.50 FTE) will share a bishop. Funds will be allocated for a half-time administrative assistant for each regional bishop.
- The aim of this transitional period over the coming biennium (2012-2014) is to achieve a leadership configuration of 7½ (FTE) general church administrators with optimal assignments of essential services as soon as possible after August 1, 2012.

We will take proactive steps to encourage additional giving, which will include:

- Devise a clear, simple presentation of the CM spending plan; encourage congregations and Conferences where there is opportunity for fuller engagement in CM with a goal of all congregations meeting the expectation of at least a 10 percent contribution.
- Direct 1/3 of congregational giving to BIC World Missions, and work with BICWM to develop a formula for team-based funding that advances our shared mission and communicates clearly to our constituency

We recognize that a new configuration of leadership assignments and financial initiatives will create pressures on all involved, both at General and Regional Conference levels. Current patterns and expectations may need to change significantly. The Church will be called to practice cooperation and exercise forbearance as church administrators apply the principles of continuity, flexibility, and creativity to assure the highest possible level of spiritual leadership and administrative oversight.

6. *Approved:* General Church Leaders

In the multi-year process of considering leadership restructuring, it became apparent that the timing of the transition to a new structure would benefit from a one year acceleration of the transition to the next general church leader, rather than adopt a new structure and have an outgoing leader oversee its implementation. The current term of the moderator, Warren Hoffman, which was scheduled to conclude July 31, 2014, instead will conclude on July 31, 2013, and he will provide other full-time service to the Church under the direction of the new general church leader for that subsequent year with compensation and benefits continuing as they would have. This schedule will give the General Conference Board adequate time to conduct an effective search for a new general church leader, to obtain General Conference approval of a candidate for the position, and to make it possible for the new general church leaders to start on the August 1, 2013 date. The candidate to be the next general church leader will be recommended by General Conference Board to the voting delegates (U.S.) of the 2012 General Conference for confirmation by electronic ballot in 2013 so that the new general church leader can begin service on August 1, 2013. Therefore, GCB recommended approval of these proposals and the suspension of relevant by-laws to permit these actions and the implementation of the Proposal for Structural Adjustments during the biennium until the 2014 General Conference.

7. *Approved:* Covenant with Messiah Lifeways

Messiah Home was founded by the Brethren in Christ Church in 1896 as a church-owned institution, later expanded into a retirement community, changed its name to Messiah Village and, again in transition, is diversifying and adopting a new name, Messiah Lifeways. A joint task force of GCB and the Board of Messiah Lifeways met to review, clarify and celebrate the mutual affiliation. The outcome of the joint task force was to recommend that GCB and the Messiah Lifeways Board transition from a “church institution” to a “covenant” relationship; and a covenant was approved accordingly. Therefore, GCB recommended that the General Conference confirm the transition of Messiah Lifeways from a church institution to a covenant relationship with the Brethren in Christ Church and the action of GCB to approve the covenant that will govern this relationship.