

## BIC U.S. Leadership Summary, May 2017

During the month of May (May 8–11), the Commission for World Missions (CWM), Leadership Council (LC), and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine (CMD) met for their spring leadership meetings. The following is a summary of some of the conversations and decisions from these meetings.

### Leadership Council (LC)

“The Leadership Council shall provide leadership of BIC U.S., subject to the General Conference Board” (2016 Amended & Restated Bylaws, Article 4.1).

1. **Purpose statement.** The current purpose statement for BIC U.S. in the bylaws states that “the purpose of the Brethren in Christ Church is to foster a fellowship of believers whose objective is to worship and obey the triune God and to proclaim his gospel to all people.” It was agreed that this is a helpful statement. However, the emphasis on proclaiming the gospel does not reference the Great Commission to “make disciples” of Jesus Christ.

There was discussion on how some people use the words “purpose” and “mission” to mean separate and distinct things, whereas others use them interchangeably.

Discussion centered on important aspects of BIC identity and life. For example:

Our Anabaptist and Pietist roots, and the Wesleyan and Evangelical streams of influence.  
 Our commitment to the Bible, to community, and to being followers of Jesus who live lives of reconciliation and peacemaking in the world.  
 Our commitment to the Great Commandment (to love God and others) and the Great Commission (to make disciples of all people).

After good discussion, it was agreed that making disciples of Jesus Christ is the *purpose* of the Church — the global Church, denominations, and local congregations. We exist to partner with God in the ministry of reconciliation, so that people become disciples (followers) of Jesus Christ.

LC agreed that a helpful way to express this self-understanding could be something like *we exist to be, and to help others become, people who know, love, and follow Jesus.*

We will need to develop strategic priorities to best fulfill our stated purpose. These strategic priorities will be for the denomination, including the regional conferences. We will also help congregations as they seek to accomplish this purpose in their local communities.

2. **Manual of Doctrine and Government (MDG) and updated bylaws.** LC discussed the ongoing revisions to the MDG and bylaws. They discussed the continued work of the governance committee of General Conference Board (GCB) as this committee prepares recommendations for the General Assembly 2018. LC discussed the need for early and effective communication of any

bylaw changes in the hope that the bylaw updates do not consume all the time and energy of General Assembly, so that more time can be given to other strategic missional discussions.

LC recommended a short video be made that explains the need for each congregation to vote to repeal the current Constitution contained in the MDG.

3. **Honor the Past: Build the Future campaign.** There was discussion about the ongoing progress of this campaign. LC continues to be deeply thankful for the donors who have stepped forward with a promise to match \$1.4 million in donations received for the campaign. Significant discussion regarded how we can effectively encourage congregations and individuals to consider making generous donations to the campaign. Concern was expressed that we do not want congregations to confuse the needs of the campaign with the desire that all congregations give 10 percent of their tithes and offerings to the Common Ministries of the Church — the ministries the Church family has in common and does together.

LC was greatly encouraged that if we can raise \$1.4 million and, therefore, receive the matching funds, we will meet the first goal of the Honor the Past: Build the Future campaign (which is to meet the needs of the defined BIC Pension Fund); second, we will be well on our way toward the second goal of the campaign — to raise \$1.8 million for Church multiplication.

LC agreed that the Grantham office should develop a marketing piece that will communicate the needs of the campaign. Regional conference bishops are also asked to communicate the campaign in the congregations in their regions. We also want to identify and approach individuals who may be able to donate to the campaign.

4. **Covenant agreements and Memorandums of Understanding.** LC reviewed General Conference Board's decision from the February 2017 meeting to only have covenant agreements with organizations the BIC U.S. started and owned at one time. With other organizations, we will develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) if a strategic missional purpose exists between us. The covenant agreements with Messiah College and Messiah Lifeways are being updated, and the Mechanicsburg office is working with other organizations to determine the need for an MOU. We are currently drafting an MOU with MCC.
5. **Joining the BIC U.S.** LC discussed the need to have clear processes for congregations potentially seeking to join BIC U.S. One major issue congregations address when looking to become Brethren in Christ is that BIC U.S. will acquire their building and properties. Perhaps, this is something that needs to be reviewed. A longer "dating" process with congregations may need to occur between congregations and BIC U.S. before this issue is discussed. LC will continue to consider this matter and will revise the document that outlines the process for congregations seeking to join the BIC U.S.
6. **Separation from the BIC U.S.** LC discussed the best practice of walking alongside a congregation seeking to leave the BIC U.S. Currently the MDG does not allow for the congregation to retain its property or other assets as they are owned in community with the regional conference. Is this

something that should be revised? And if so, under what circumstances could a congregation that dissociates retain ownership of its assets? LC will continue to consider this matter.

7. **Financial reporting.** LC discussed that regional conferences do not use the same format and terminology in their regional financial reports. Also, some terms regional conferences use may no longer be used by the denomination. We desire that all regions use correct and consistent terms. The Mechanicsburg office will provide a financial reporting template for all regional conferences. In addition, the Mechanicsburg office is currently working with the Great Lakes Conference to provide all necessary bookkeeping, accounting, and reporting support, so that the bishop and regional board of directors have what they need to make appropriate financial decisions. If this trial with the Great Lakes Conference is successful, the Mechanicsburg office will work to make this service available to all regions. This will be another way that the Mechanicsburg office can serve and support the regions in their ministry. This will help in providing consistency across all regions; it will alleviate some of the responsibilities of the volunteer treasurers in each region, and yet, importantly, full control and decision-making authority for regional conference funds will remain with the bishops and board of directors of the regions.
8. **Open theism discussion.** LC, in conjunction with CMD, discussed the recommendation that has come from the Midwest Conference regarding the question of whether an open theism perspective on the foreknowledge of God is consistent with the BIC U.S. Articles of Faith and Doctrine. The Midwest Conference has asked for this question to be brought to the 2018 General Assembly. LC and CMD (with some GCB members joining) had good conversation on this matter. It was agreed that the next step will be for Perry Engle (bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences) and Alan Robinson (national director of BIC U.S.) to present the topic while they are in Kansas in September 2017 for the 130th anniversary of the Zion congregation in Abilene, Kansas.
9. **Egalitarian position.** LC discussed how they can continue to support and strengthen the egalitarian position of BIC U.S. The egalitarian position is that women may serve in any ministry or leadership role in the local congregation and in the denomination. While this position has been discussed and supported at several past General Conferences, the denomination needs to have an updated statement articulating the Church's position on the matter of women in Church leadership. Bishop Perry Engle will begin work on this statement and will co-opt the help of others as necessary.
10. **Accents and Issues brochures.** LC and CMD agreed that it is necessary and helpful to have documents that outline the views and positions of the Church on a number of theological and pastoral/societal issues. To that end, the Accents and Issues brochures need to be reviewed and updated. This work had begun, and the revised brochures will be brought to CMD and LC for approval before being released.

### **Commission on Ministry and Doctrine (CMD)**

“The Commission on Ministry and Doctrine shall serve under the authority of and on behalf of Leadership Council by overseeing the equipping and credentialing of ministers of the BIC U.S. and by

seeking to preserve the doctrinal integrity of the Church” (2016 Amended & Restated Bylaws, Article 5.2.1).

Following their joint meeting with Leadership Council, the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine met for their regular meeting. The following topics were involved in CMD discussions and decisions:

1. Reviewing changes to the documents and processes used for credentialing.
2. Reviewing the training and education opportunities provided by the Church.
3. Reviewing financial aid available to seminary students.
4. Discussing potential topics for the 2018 Impact Seminar.
5. Discussing open theism, the recommendation from the Midwest Conference, and the best way to further the conversation in the Church.

### **Commission for World Missions (CWM)**

“The Commission for World Missions shall serve under the authority of and on behalf of Leadership Council by overseeing the cross-cultural outreach of the BIC U.S” (2016 Amended & Restated Bylaws, Article 5.1.1).

The Commission for World Missions (CWM) meets twice per year, currently has four members, and is in the process of adding additional members.

1. **Internship opportunities.** During the CWM meeting, the mobilization administrator shared exciting new internship possibilities that missions hopes to offer in 2018. During the commission’s joint meeting with Leadership Council, bishops were able to offer their input on this initiative, which was helpful in the conversation. We also discussed the increasing interest in long-term deployments, with four individuals hoping to deploy within the next 12 months.
2. **New position.** *Member care administrator* is a newly created role in an effort to maintain health and minimize attrition in our global workers. This position is supported by a member care team made up of individuals with specific expertise in areas of spiritual and emotional health, as well as cross-cultural experience.
3. **Special projects.** The CWM discussed special projects facilitated by the missions department. These projects provide an opportunity for partnership across the international BIC community. Currently, more than 15 countries are engaged in relationship through these projects. The commission is reviewing how to steward these diverse initiatives in a way that is honoring to all involved, as well as true to our purpose of educating and equipping the Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ across cultures and around the world.
4. **Teams.** World Missions is currently developing greater clarity in our expectation of “teams,” a group of missionaries working in the same region and typically among the same people group. We have talked with larger agencies who have a good track record with fruitful teams. We celebrate the reality that many of our global workers are serving side by side with national

leaders or near-culture “missionaries.” We also acknowledge as a sending agency part of our responsibility is to help our global workers to collaborate well with others from our organization. Our staff around the world are working in very diverse contexts, and our goal is to develop expectations that have enough flexibility to be helpful around the world.

5. **Name.** World Missions, as a department of the BIC U.S., has been seeking to clarify our official name. *BIC World Missions (BICWM)* once stood for the binational missions engagement of the U.S. and Canada. Today we can celebrate the efforts of many who have invested in Church growth across cultures, with at least six national BIC conferences strategically engaged in missions initiatives around the world. A name that reflects this reality has been on the heart of staff and the commission for some time. We asked global workers and others to respond to a survey that presented several options, but there was not a clear consensus. After discussing these results with the communications director, the commission made the recommendation to use the name BIC U.S. World Missions.
6. **Cross-cultural ministry opportunities.** During the joint meeting of the CWM and Leadership Council, each bishop had the opportunity to share about missions initiatives in their specific conferences. As bishops shared with the commission and missions staff, we all acknowledged that in the United States we are increasingly given the opportunity to minister cross-culturally through the significant number of immigrants making their home here. It was encouraging to hear of the many ways that local BIC congregations and individuals are finding to share the gospel, both within the U.S. and internationally. One bishop suggested that elements of the Missionary Development Program become the curriculum of the Church, so that we can all be educated about how to minister effectively cross-culturally.
7. **Mission.** Increasingly, local BIC congregations are reaching out directly to partner with international BIC communities around the world. World Missions is available to advise and assist as these partnerships are formed. In addition to relating to established BIC conferences, one of the priorities as reaffirmed in these meetings was that BIC U.S. World Missions is to be a prophetic voice for the needs of unreached people groups around the world.