

BIC U.S. Leadership Summary, September 2017

During the month of September, Leadership Council (LC) and General Conference Board (GCB) met for their fall leadership meetings (September 11-15). The following is a summary of 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. **Sharing and updates.** Leadership Council (LC) members shared about their various regions and departments. Each member shared areas of encouragement and also matters needing prayer.
2. **Identity/Purpose/Mission.** LC continued their ongoing discussion on the identity/purpose/mission of BIC U.S. Our historic roots of Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism continue to be important to our identity. There was discussion on how best to express these roots and values (in addition to what has already been written in the BIC Core Values and other documents). Discussion also centered on whether having statements on our identity is beneficial for people today. After much discussion, the following statements were considered as potentially helpful to outlining our BIC identity, purpose, and mission:

Identity

- Above all, we are followers of Jesus: a family transformed by his grace, guided by the Spirit, and committed to sharing God’s love.
- Above all, we are followers of Jesus: transformed by his grace, guided by the Spirit and committed to sharing God’s love.
- Followers of Jesus, we are a family transformed by his grace, guided by the Spirit, and committed to sharing God’s love.

Purpose

- We are a family of local congregations dedicated to supporting and encouraging individuals and families in developing deep, transforming relationships with Jesus.
- We are a family of local congregations dedicated to encouraging and supporting individuals to grow in life-changing relationships with Jesus.
- We are a family of local congregations walking alongside individuals and families who are growing in life-changing relationships with Jesus.

Mission

- We partner with Jesus in his work to restore and renew relationships in our congregations, communities, and world.
- We join with Jesus in extending the Kingdom of God to the world.
- We partner with Jesus in his work to restore and renew relationships and all of creation.
- We join Jesus in his work of reconciliation and restoration in our neighborhoods (or local congregations), communities, and world.

- Locally and globally, we partner with Jesus in his work of reconciliation and restoration of relationships and all of creation.
- Helping people to know, love, and follow Jesus.

LC agreed that more conversation will be necessary across the whole Church before we bring suggestions to the 2020 General Assembly for revised statements of identity, purpose, and mission to be included in the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*. It is anticipated that we will find ways during the next two years to continue this conversation at all levels and in all regions of the Church, as well as at General Assembly.

3. **General Assembly 2018.** LC discussed plans and agenda for General Assembly 2018 to be held at Messiah College, July 13-16, 2018. The theme was confirmed as “to know, love, and follow Jesus.” General Assembly will seek to balance both equipping/resourcing opportunities, sharing of what God is doing in us and through us, and also business. The primary business item will be proposed changes to the *Manual of Doctrine and Government* and the repeal of the Constitution.

Regarding the proposed changes to the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*, it was agreed that significant opportunity for discussion and interaction should be offered before General Assembly. This will be done via webinars, and each regional conference can decide to arrange gatherings to provide opportunities for sharing and discussion.

Finally, during General Assembly, a number of seminars will be offered covering a variety of topics. Beyond resourcing sessions offered throughout General Assembly, we are excited to invite the BIC family to two events being held before and after General Assembly:

- **Friday, July 13 — afternoon:** Awaken: BIC Network for Women in Ministry will be offering a seminar highlighting women in ministry. This event will be open to everyone — both men and women.
- **Tuesday, July 17— all day:** The Commission on Ministry and Doctrine is hosting a study conference regarding the relationship between God’s knowledge and sovereignty and man’s free will.

Pre- and post-General Assembly seminars count toward continuing BIC education for persons licensed by BIC U.S. Further details regarding each event are forthcoming.

4. **Impact Seminar 2018.** In light of the decision to include resourcing as part of General Assembly — including the pre- and post-General Assembly study days — LC has decided that an Impact Seminar will not be offered in 2018.
5. **Congregations wishing to join BIC U.S.** LC discussed ways to provide a clear and helpful process for congregations that express interest in joining BIC U.S. It is important that these congregations understand our identity and mission as well as matters of polity, especially related to property ownership. LC will continue to refine the process and the written documentation that explains and supports it.

6. **Common Ministry.** LC discussed ways to continue to promote understanding and support for Common Ministry. It is important that we understand and communicate that Common Ministry is what we *do together*; it is not what we *give*. While congregations and individuals give financial donations to fund Common Ministry, Common Ministry is the ministry activity that we do together. It is similar to a local congregation's ministry — *ministry* is what the congregation does together; tithes and offerings *support* the ministry of the congregation. It is important that we continue to tell a clear story of Common Ministry as what we do across the U.S. and around the world. It was suggested that perhaps a two-to-three minute video may be helpful.

7. **Week of Prayer and Fasting.** The 2018 Week of Prayer and Fasting will be January 7-14, 2018. The theme: constant, faithful obedience to the example and teaching of Jesus in a world that changes quickly and often demands or expects quick responses and statements. What does it look like to faithfully follow Jesus for the long haul, and how does this obedience look in a world that highlights issues like terrorism, violence, security, materialism, greed, racism, etc.?

8. **Women in Ministry Leadership.** LC reviewed and discussed some responses to the recent statement on women in ministry leadership. Many people and congregations have responded with thanks for this clear statement reflecting the decisions of the Church in 1982 and 1992. A few people have expressed disagreement with the Church's position on this subject. LC concurred that it is helpful to have a current and clear statement on the Church's position so that interested persons can be aware of it. LC also discussed how we must always be mindful of the fact that a minority may always exist who disagrees on this matter and possible other matters too. The question, then, becomes what the Church expects or asks of those people who hold different views from the decision(s) of the Church.

LC met with Pauline Peifer, national director of Awaken: BIC Network for Women in Ministry. Discussion centered on the work of Awaken and how LC can be helpful. There was conversation about holding a gathering highlighting women in ministry the day before General Assembly 2018.

9. **Social Media.** LC discussed the ways in which social media can be helpful and also unhelpful to the work of the Church. What should and should not be communicated — and who should communicate on behalf of the Church — on social media. There was also discussion on how we should respond (or if we should respond) to posts by BIC individuals, especially if they are licensed ministers and are expressing views different from the Church in either position or posture. It was agreed this is going to be an ongoing, challenging issue.

10. **Brethren in Christ Foundation.** LC met with staff from the Brethren in Christ Foundation. There was discussion on the continued ministry of the Foundation relative to loans to congregations and pastors. Members of LC were deeply appreciative for what the Foundation does to encourage and support the work of our congregations. We encourage all congregations who may need financing to support their facility purchases and/or expansions/renovations through the Foundation.

11. **BIC U.S. staffing levels and morale.** Leadership Council discussed the reduction in staffing levels in the Mechanicsburg office (a reduction of approximately 45 percent in staff work hours in the last 4-5 years) and how this reduction has impacted the workload and general morale of the staff. While these reductions were mainly driven by the desire to match expenses to available revenue, there has been significant impact on what staff are expected to do and numbers of tasks are no longer possible in the time available. In spite of these changes, staff morale continues to be very good and a great sense of oneness exists among the staff.

General Conference Board (GCB)

“The General Conference Board (the “Board” composed of “Board Members”) is the board of directors of BIC U.S. ...” (2016 Amended & Restated Bylaws, 3.1).

1. **Regional conference and ministry department reports.** GCB received written reports from each bishop/regional conference and reports from the director of World Missions and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine. A number of reports shared encouraging information, as well as challenges. The Commission for World Missions reported the home in London that used to accommodate BIC missionaries in London has been sold. The Commission recommended 10 percent of the sale’s proceeds be donated to the Honor the Past: Build the Future ministry campaign and that the remaining 90 percent should be used for ongoing World Mission’s ministry. GCB approved this recommendation with thanks to the Commission for World Missions.
2. **GCB committee reports.** Reports were received from the executive committee, governance committee, and finance committee.
 - Governance.
 - i. The governance committee, chaired by Adam Forry, has continued its work on the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*. Proposed amendments primarily address the MDG’s structure and order rather than changing the content. The proposed changes will be shared across the Church in fall 2017 and early months of 2018. GCB will be asked at their February 2018 meeting to make a final recommendation for General Assembly.
 - ii. The governance committee has also worked on creating evaluation documents and processes for GCB members and researching nominations for GCB members. Three current GCB members will reach their maximum terms of service at the 2018 General Assembly and cannot continue to serve. Others have an end of term but can return for a new term. The governance committee will ask all LC members to suggest names for GCB members and, as necessary, to approve the names of persons eligible for a new term of service.
 - Finance. The finance committee report highlighted a number of encouraging statistics:
 - i. 20 congregations giving to Common Ministry in 2017 had not previously given.
 - ii. 95 congregations had increased their giving in 2017 compared to 2016.

- iii. 70 congregations were flat (or had a small decrease) in their giving. The year-to-date giving indicates that we should end 2017 very close to the projections that were used for budget planning.

GCB discussed the fact that regional conferences do not use the same financial reporting procedures of chart of accounts. This makes it difficult to assess the financial operations across the seven regions. The BIC U.S. Mechanicsburg office is working to help regions with financial accounting and reporting so that each region has appropriate financial controls and protections for their treasurer and staff. The regional conference will maintain control of their finances, but the BIC U.S. Mechanicsburg office can assist with standardized “back-office” accounting and reporting. GCB supported this plan.

3. **Open theism.** GCB received a report on the ongoing conversation about open theism. A meeting was scheduled in the Midwest Conference for September 25 and Bishop Perry Engle and National Director Alan Robinson were to be present at the meeting. A report from that meeting will be brought to the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine, Leadership Council, and General Conference Board.
4. **Other reports.** GCB received reports on the following items: General Assembly 2018; relationships with other organizations/agencies through covenants and memorandums of understanding (MOUs); regional conference boundaries and oversight.
5. **General Conference Board serving as trustee of Pension Fund.** One of the responsibilities of GCB is to serve as trustee for the Pension Fund, which provides retirement plans to BIC U.S. employees and missionaries. When GCB meets as trustee for the Pension Fund, the meeting is separate from the general GCB meeting.

The Brethren in Christ Foundation serves as administrator for the Pension Fund. Jim Reynolds, Dave Strausser, and Mitch Martin, Brethren in Christ Foundation staff members, presented a series of reports to the General Conference Board:

BIC U.S. provides two retirement plans — (1) defined benefit plan (BIC Pension Fund), which is now frozen to new applicants; and (2) defined contribution plan (BIC 403(b) Plan), which is open to eligible employees.

Defined benefit plan. The defined benefit investment report, asset roll-forward report, and audit report from McKonly & Asbury were received.

Defined contribution plan. General Conference Board approved a recommendation to contract with PenServ to provide the appropriate documentation to ensure the plan continues to comply with IRS regulations. General Conference Board confirmed Dave Strausser as plan administrator and thereby authorized him to sign all legal documents related to the plan.