

BIC U.S. Leadership Summary, May 2019

From May 14-17, Leadership Council (LC) and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine (CMD) met for their spring leadership meetings. The following is a summary of conversations and decisions from these meetings.

Leadership Council (LC) – Regular meeting, May 14-16; joint meeting with CMD, May 16

“Leadership Council shall provide leadership of the BIC U.S., subject to General Conference Board” (*2018 Manual of Doctrine and Government*, Bylaw Article 4.1).

LC approved the minutes of their meeting held on February 5 – 7, 2019.

LC approved the minutes from their Zoom meeting on March 4 and email vote finalized on March 14, 2019.

1. Important continuing conversations

Leadership Council had previously identified three important areas of denominational life for discussion at this meeting. These were (1) financial matters related to BIC U.S. common ministry; (2) church multiplication; and (3) denominational credentialing and education processes and programs.

(1) Funding our common ministry

Leadership Council discussed the fact that in 2018 21% of BIC U.S. congregations did not provide any financial contributions to support the common ministry of the Church, and 47% contributed less than the 10% (of the congregation’s undesignated tithes and offerings) that is requested. LC discussed why some congregations do not meet the needs/requests of the Church. Is it because of the perceived value of these contributions? Or that the congregations are in financial stress? Or have congregations overextended themselves in other areas of their budget? Or perhaps some other reason(s)?

LC discussed how we can help those pastors, church boards, and congregations to understand that the Brethren in Christ have chosen the 10% request for contributions from congregations as the primary model for funding common ministry—the ministry that we all do together. Pastors are made aware of this in the credentialing and assigning processes but some who made commitments to the 10% model have not followed-through on their commitments. Some church planters and church plants have received significant financial help from BIC U.S., yet they do not “pay it forward” by contributing their 10% so that other church plants and other ministries can be supported.

LC affirmed the 10% congregational contribution as the primary model for the support of common ministry and will work toward greater support from congregations. LC, in conversation with the

General Conference Board at the September meetings, will develop and implement strategies for carrying this out.

(2) Church multiplication

LC discussed the various ways that BIC U.S. has grown and multiplied ministry over the last couple of decades. It was agreed that we need renewed commitment to help existing congregations become healthy and vibrant so that they can multiply and grow. It was also agreed that we need to consider current methodologies for the planting of new congregations.

It was acknowledged that financial challenges at the denominational level can make it difficult to invest in new church plants and other new initiatives. Some regional conferences do have financial resources, and they are working to use those for healthy leaders, healthy congregations, and new church planting efforts. LC will continue to give priority to these matters and will look for additional resourcing in terms of ideas and strategies that others may be using and also the financial resources to support increased efforts for multiplication.

(3) Credentialing and education

LC discussed the importance of the theological and cultural identity of BIC U.S. It is important to develop and recruit leaders who understand and are committed to our theological identity and who are also called, gifted, and trained for ministry in our ever-changing world.

LC reviewed the current practices and policies for the recruitment, screening, and credentialing of ministers. It was agreed that further work needs to be done so that our processes and practices meet the needs of the Church and the needs of ministers. There was significant discussion on the growing movement toward online educational programs. This review will continue and, in conversation with the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine, changes will be made to improve these critically important aspects of the work of the Church. There was agreement to continue the process of standardizing documents across all regions, especially the “pastoral agreement” documents.

2. General Assembly 2020

LC continued the planning for General Assembly to be held in Salina, Kansas, in July 2020. LC affirmed the work of the communication team concerning the general theme and communication items. It was confirmed that Tara Beth Leach, senior pastor of Pasadena Church of the Nazarene, California, will be one of the speakers.

3. Open theism

LC discussed feedback from the regional conferences concerning the report that was brought to each conference regarding the continuing discussion on open theism. LC agreed to continue with the initial plan developed in 2018 to work toward a statement to be brought to the 2020 General Assembly (with a draft brought to the annual meetings of regional conferences in 2020). LC identified a team of five

persons to begin work on drafting the statement: Alan Robinson (National Director), Jonathan Lloyd (Director of World Missions), Rob Patterson (Bishop of the Allegheny Regional Conference), Ron Bowell (CMD member from the Midwest Regional Conference), and Zach Spidel (CMD member from the Great Lakes Regional Conference).

4. Meeting with the leadership team from a BIC U.S. congregation

The leadership team from a BIC U.S. congregation located in Pennsylvania had previously written to the Leadership Council requesting that the congregation be allowed to have a relationship to BIC U.S. that was a covenant relationship like other institutions with whom BIC U.S. has covenant or memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements. LC had declined this request and stated that the Manual of Doctrine and Government (MDG) of the Church defines the relationship of congregations to BIC U.S. The leadership team from the congregation appealed this decision and met with LC to discuss their appeal. Following the meeting with the congregation's leadership team, LC unanimously affirmed its previous decision that this congregation would remain under the authority and polity of the BIC U.S. found in the MDG.

Leadership Council and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine - Joint meeting, May 16

“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” (*2018 Manual of Doctrine and Government*, Bylaw Article 5.2.1).

Approximately once every year, the Leadership Council and the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine meet in a combined session. The purpose of this combined session is to review the way in which both leadership groups work together and make decisions to better help the Church.

Together LC and CMD discussed the normal agenda items of the various screening, credentialing, and educational programs of the Church. LC shared its discussion on these various items, and CMD provided helpful feedback and suggestions.

LC and CMD discussed the continuing process of conversation regarding open theism. LC reported to CMD its recommendation to continue the process that was agreed and communicated in 2018, i.e., a report to the 2019 annual meetings of each regional conference, and a draft statement to the 2020 annual meetings of regional conferences and the 2020 General Assembly. CMD affirmed this process.

In addition to the normal agenda items, LC and CMD met (separately) with two pastors whose BIC minister's credentials had been revoked in March 2019 because they had expressed they no longer affirmed the BIC theological statements on human sexuality as outlined in the Articles of Faith and Doctrine. (Note: Continued credentialing as a BIC minister is based, in part, upon a person affirming theological and doctrinal compatibility with the BIC U.S.). Both pastors had appealed the decision to revoke their credentials. LC and CMD met with each pastor, and there was cordial and detailed conversation about the theology of the Church and the beliefs and views of the pastors and why they

had appealed the decision to revoke their BIC U.S. minister's credentials. Following the meetings with the pastors, Leadership Council voted unanimously to uphold their original decision from March 2019 to revoke the BIC U.S. minister's credentials. In a separate motion, CMD voted unanimously to uphold their decision from March 2019 to affirm the decision of Leadership Council.

LC and CMD agreed that the current cultural climate and direction regarding matters of human sexuality is an important matter for the Church, for pastors, congregations, families, and individuals. Because of this, the Church should consider ways in which BIC U.S. can provide help that will be clear in our understanding of biblical teaching and compassionate to every person. LC and CMD members were asked to consider what the Church could do toward this end and will bring their suggestions to the fall leadership team meetings.

Regular Meeting of Commission on Ministry and Doctrine – May 17

1. Impact Seminars and General Assembly 2020

It was decided there will be no Impact Seminars in 2020. Lifelong BIC Learning credit will be given for General Assembly 2020, as there will be breakout sessions and educational opportunities.

2. Position papers

The topics of future position papers were discussed, a paper was in the process of being edited, and a position paper on Fraternal Orders was approved.