**MUSIC**

Cornerstone Christian, Lebanon, PA, led music to open the 2026 ANE District Conference.

**CALL TO ORDER**

At 8:30 am, on October 3, 2026, the 57th Annual District Conference Business Session, of the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren, was called to order by Moderator, David Sollenberger. He reminded attendees that only delegates can vote, but anyone can speak to the conference body. The hope is that all will be informed, inspired, and blessed by the proceedings. Dave introduced those at the head table and introduced some of the individuals who will be presenting to the conference body later in the day.

**CONFERENCE OFFICERS**

David Sollenberger, Moderator; Kay Weaver, Treasurer; Sheri Johnson, Clerk; Karen Hackett, Moderator-Elect

**CONFERENCE PERSONNEL & DISTRICT OFFICE STAFF**

Paul Liepelt, Parliamentarian; Pete Kontra, District Executive; Kelly Bernstein, Office Administrator; Marianne Fitzkee, Communications & Events Specialist; Philip Johnson, Timekeeper

**BUSINESS ITEM #1 – Adoption of Agenda**

A motion was made to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded. There was no discussion. The agenda was adopted by show of hands.

**WELCOME**

Mark Clapper, Executive Director of Legacy Planning & Engagement at Elizabethtown College, welcomed attendees to Elizabethtown College on behalf of the president of the college, Dr. Elizabeth "Betty" Rider. Dr. Rider will retire June 30, 2027 and the college is conducting a search for a new president. The college is in the process of raising money to support signature learning experiences. The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies is 40 years old this year and the college is proud of the reach of the Young Center - locally, nationally, and internationally. Next Saturday is an open house to celebrate this milestone anniversary and all are invited to attend.

**DISTRICT EXECUTIVE REPORT**

Pete Kontra, District Executive, reminded attendees that his report is in the conference booklet on pages 12-15. Pete asked attendees if everyone had the proper amount of coffee and enjoyed the video that Kelly and Marianne had put together. He mentioned that we all get weary at times (and coffee cannot always fix that), but the apostle Paul tells us in Galatians to not become weary in doing good. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus so we can see the work we are called to do. Keep pressing on, as it says in Phillipians. Later today, we will be hearing from 3 congregations in our district who are doing creative things in their communities. We will hear from the Deportation Defense Response team to hear how they are impacting lives of our immigrant brothers and sisters. From across our district we have great stories of individuals and groups pressing on and doing the work of Jesus Christ. Pete gave many examples of how congregations are thriving. He challenged attendees to discover what God has in store for them.

**DISTRICT BOARD REPORTS**

Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, Board Chair, presented the report on pages 16-17 of the conference book. He thanked the district staff for their work, and the delegates and the congregations they represent for supporting the district in many ways. He hopes that attendees will be inspired to take what they have learned today back to their congregations. Jim discussed radical discipleship and what that means for our district and our congregations. How are each of us feeling called to the ministries of the district? What do you have to offer to make the district a better place?

**BUSINESS ITEM #2 – Disorganization – Conewago Church of the Brethren**

District Board brings this business item to District Conference. Jim Grossnickle-Batterton invited attendees to lament the separation of this congregation with the district. This has been a lengthy process and we want to bless the congregation as they continue in their ministry. Karen Hackett led the conference body in prayer. The motion passed by show of hands.

**COMMISSION REPORTS:**

In place of an oral report from each commission, a nine minute video was played showcasing what the district and the commissions do as part of their ministry. Written reports from each commission are in the conference booklet on pages 19-37. A video was also shared highlighting some experiences from National Youth Conference.

**GIFTS DISCERNMENT TEAM**

Jeff Glisson, Co-Chair of Gifts Discernment Team, spoke about the process of seeking individuals to serve on district commissions, committees, and other leadership positions. The Gifts Discernment Team is seeking names that will be presented at the 2027 district conference, to begin their service in 2028. In addition, a letter is sent to each congregation each year requesting names of individuals who are recommended for district positions.

**TABLE DISCUSSION**

An opportunity was given to allow tables to brainstorm names of individuals who might be a good fit for district positions. Tables were also encouraged to think about ways the district can help congregations and ways congregations can help the district.

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

ANE Standing Committee Members, Brian Messler and Paul Liepelt, highlighted their report on pages 52-53 in the conference packet. They discussed their role of Standing Committee and shared some important and memorable conversations and reports that were held during the week of Annual Conference, held in Fort Wayne, IN this year. The conference theme, “Imagine,” provided a framework to picture a future in the Church of the Brethren.

During and question and answer time, Jim Eikenberry, Cornerstone congregation, asked about the future of the denominational offices and if they are going to sell the property in Elgin. Response - This is a possibility and the denomination is exploring different options.

**BREAK**

Attendees were reminded to visit the Networking Expo tables. You are encouraged to learn one thing from one of the agencies represented in the Expo that you did not know before.

**DEPORTATION DEFENSE RESPONSE**

Pete Kontra and Founa Badet, Director of Intercultural Ministries, This ministry was started in 2025 to care for our siblings and neighbors under threat of immigration-related detention and deportation. The presentation began with a video showcasing the work of DDR. Founa joined the conference via a remote connection and shared recent updates. When this team was originally started, it was thought it was going to be just a 6 month project and $100,000 would cover the costs. At the end of July, Haitian immigrants had their temporary protected status removed. We currently have 27 Brethren who are detained, 6 released, and 14 deported. To date, 39 congregations have been affected. People are depressed and anxious. We are now looking to raise $500,000 and more than $300,000 has been raised. A prayer gathering has been started, meeting weekly on Zoom, to pray for immigration issues. There is also a pastoral care support group that meets bi-weekly. There is additional information in the conference packet and a QR code will be available to donate.

**CONGREGATIONAL SHARING: Alpha & Omega, Hatfield, Mountville**

**Alpha & Omega** – Since 1987, Alpha & Omega ministries has had an impact in people’s lives. This includes the church and the community center. The youth program draws 35 young people to their

ministry. They also have a ministry focusing on marriage and families. They are reaching people outside the church and many times, those couples and families become part of the church. Their food bank, which is open twice a month, benefits more than 100 families each time. Many of the people that have been helped through Alpha & Omega ministries have joined in worship on Sundays. According to Joel Pena, pastor, sometimes a sermon is a box of food, or a smile, or a kind word. Alpha & Omega wants people to find hope and love and community.

**Hatfield** – Lynne Allebach, pastor, shared that they are a church plant from Indian Creek congregation and have just 22 members on their roles. Even though small, this congregation enthusiastically supports district and denominational programs. The church established Friendship House Day Care center in 1974. It is a non-profit organization and accepts funding for low-income families. They currently have 39 children enrolled. Staffing is their biggest challenge. The church also has a food pantry that is open four times a month, currently serving 150 families (or 630 individuals) with food insecurity. They are a recipient of a grant from Everence Financial and another from the ANE district. They additionally offer baked goods, produce, and most recently clothing, in addition to other food items.

**Mountville** – Angela Finet, pastor, shared that since June 2021, they have had a group meet for "scripture chat." They read out loud in many translations, the scripture for the next Sunday's sermon text. They talk about questions and nudgings. This discussion helps direct the sermon. Additionally, Christmas caroling is livestreamed to anyone in the congregation and friends. This past year, more than 100 connections heard 20 minutes of music in their own home. They are able to reach many more people this way. The church also has a "garden of release" that encourages individuals to pick up a stone and name it with their burden, and lay this stone at the foot of the cross. There is also a prayer box, where messages can be left for the congregation to pray. They email these requests out to their faith community. The church also hosts two free community concerts and provides space for the library and other community organizations to hold events. The church supports Lancaster General Hospital with comfort heart pillows for those undergoing mastectomies and other fabric projects to benefit other groups of individuals.

Hopefully these stories have provided some great ideas for you and your congregation to find ways to connect to your community and rejuvenate old ideas.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Dave dismissed us to lunch with prayer.

**LUNCH BREAK, FELLOWSHIPS, NETWORKING EXPO**

Attendees were encouraged to visit, fellowship, and visit the Networking Expo with the following organizations: ANE Shalom Team, Brethren Disaster Ministries, Eder Financial, COB-Mission & Ministry, COBYS, ANE Historical Committee, Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center, and Bethany Theological Seminary. Multi-vocational pastors are invited to attend a meeting during lunch.

**HYMNS**

We gathered back to business by joining in song together.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Kay Weaver, Treasurer, An updated Treasurer's report is on the green sheet in the conference packet. The Ministry Investment Plan was reviewed, including total liabilities and net assets.

**BUSINESS ITEM #3 – 2027 District Ministry Investment Plan**

Adam Swartz, Director of Finance, presented the Proposed Ministry Investment Plan for 2027, representing about a 2% increase from 2026, primarily cost of living increases for staff. There was no discussion. The motion passed.

**BUSINESS ITEMS #4 – Approval of the 2027 Fair Share Giving Amount**

The 2027 Fair Share Giving Amount proposed is $55/member, which is the same it has been for the past few years. A question was asked about the Seeds of Faith and Camp Swatara. The giving for these organizations is not included in the Fair Share Giving Amount. Jeff Keller, Lebanon congregation, spoke to increasing the fair share amount, since it is apparent that the challenge budget did not seem to have an effect on the giving from congregations. Congregations are always welcome to give more than the fair share amount.

Jeff Keller made a motion for an amendment stating that the Fair Share Giving Amount be increased to $65/member. Motion was seconded. There was some discussion about the amount already being more than many congregations can afford. More discussion centered around the fact that some congregations are not giving the suggested Fair Share Giving amount. If congregations would support the district at the already prescribed amount, our deficit would be reduced.

A motion for an amendment to the amendment was made stating that the Fair Share Giving amount be increased from $55 to $60/member. Motion was seconded. Amendment to the amendment failed by vote of hands.

Amendment failed by vote of hands.

Question about what the long term plan looks like since we continue to have a deficit each year. The response was that often our deficit decreases at the end of the year, but we continue to operate in a deficit. The Stewardship Commission is looking at alternate ways to meet the ministry investment plan. There was also some discussion about inconsistent reporting for membership numbers. Each congregation interprets their numbers differently. After all this discussion, the motion passed.

**PRESENTATION OF THE 2027 SLATE**

Jeff Glisson, Gifts Discernment Co-Chair, thanked the Gifts Discernment Team and presented the 2027 Slate. In addition to the biographical information for the open positions listed on pages 46-50, we have the following addition: Stewardship Commission – David Hosler. There is an open position for Nurture Commission. The Executive Committee will be affirming the individual for this position at a later meeting. There is no update on the open COBYS position.

**BUSINESS ITEM #5 – Affirmation of 2027 Slate**

Delegates were directed to mark their slates found in their conference packet. (See Slate Presentation Report for results of vote).

**MISSION & MINISTRY BOARD REPORT**

Nancy McCrickard, Interim Co-Director of Mission Advancement, began her presentation by a District Conference Pep Rally – T – O – G – E – T – H – E – R! Nancy brought greetings from the Mission & Ministry Board. From age activities (Christian Citizenship Seminar, National Youth Conference, Junior High Conference, National Older Adult Conference), to Brethren Disaster Ministries, to Children Disaster Services, to FaithX trips, to Brethren Volunteer Service, the Global Food Initiative, and more, we seek to reach out to our communities and our neighbors showing generosity, love, and peace.

**CAMP SWATARA REPORT**

Jason Haldeman, Board Member, brought greetings from the Board of Trustees. Camp Swatara is currently in a season of transition. The Board thanks past Executive Director, Tim Courtright. The Board is enthusiastic about the future of Camp Swatara. Camp Swatara has hired a new Executive Director and Associate Executive Director (new position) and these individuals will be announced in just a few weeks. All are invited to come to camp, whether that might be sending a young person to summer camp, attending a retreat, or bringing your family or group to the Family Camp Center. Camp Swatara has helped to shape tens of thousands of individuals and will continue to do so into the future.

**SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER REPORT**

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey, Director, and Karen Hodges, Program Coordinator, thanked the district for the support and participation in SVMC. They invited attendees to look through their new brochure included in the conference packet. There are currently three ANE students in the ACTS Program. SVMC offers continuing education for pastors. They also provide resources for congregations. SVMC is in the process of developing a training for lay leaders in congregations. It is planned to be up and running next fall. Tom Strubel (Ephrata) is celebrated in his graduation from the ACTS Program.

**COBYS FAMILY SERVICES**

Anne Stokes, Director of Development and Communication, gave some background information about COBYS. This is a ministry started by the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren. COBYS has four areas of service – foster, adoption, counseling, and family life education. The support of congregations makes all of this possible.

**BREAK**

Break was shortened because we were running behind schedule.

**EDER FINANCIAL REPORT**

Nevin Dulabaum, President, and Doug Umble, VP of PA Region, Everence Financial, Nevin referenced the report on pages 67-70 in the conference booklet. A video was shared detailing some of the challenges Eder Financial has recently faced. Eder Financial is currently working with Everence Financial to implement the transition of its retirement, organizational investing, and planned giving clients to Everence. Eder will transform itself into a foundation that will support congregational and denominational initiatives and will maintain its agency status with the Church of the Brethren. This has been a very amicable transition with Everence. Doug spoke and explained a bit about Everence. Retirement and Organizational Investment accounts are in the process of being transferred from Eder to Everence and much of this should be completed by the end of this month.

**BETHANY SEMINARY REPORT**

Doug Macias, Director of Fundraising and Constituent Relations, brought greetings from Jeff Carter, President of Bethany, who is currently in Thailand. Bethany offers 5 masters degrees and 9 certificates. Enrollment has doubled with 2 record years. They have a Brethren studies endowed chair. Bethany now offers a full scholarship for Brethren students. Bethany is planning to leave the federal loan program. Bethany now gives juniors and seniors at the six Brethren-related colleges and universities a jumpstart on graduate school at Bethany Theological Seminary.

**REFLECTION FROM 2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE MODERATOR**

Don Fitzkee, 2026 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Moderator, This summer's Annual Conference theme was, "Imagine." ANE was well represented at Annual Conference. Conference this year was the best attended conference since Covid. Don traveled throughout his moderator year, from California to Florida, and even Nigeria. He preached at many churches throughout the year. He wrote several Messenger columns throughout the year. What did he learn about the state of the church? We have fewer congregations than we used to have, and many of our congregations are small and membership is older. This creates new problems. We also have a divided church and schism has affected the denomination. We need to lead with grace and not question the faith commitment of others when they believe differently. Don was reminded of why he loves this church. There are good things happening. Maybe we need a variety of theological perspectives to do the work of Jesus. Our state of the union is fragile and fragile things need to be handled with care. Don encouraged us to handle each other with care as we continue the work of Jesus, peacefully, simply, together.

**QUESTION & ANSWER TIME**

Pete Kontra, District Executive and Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, Board Chair, answered questions:

**Speak to how the immigration conflict is affecting the ANE district** – We have several Hispanic congregations and an Arabic congregation that could potentially be affected. We have had one

member detained by ICE. Even if you're secure and legal, there is still fear. How do you support? Financial donations are appreciated, but you can pray individually and in congregations. There are regular prayer gatherings via zoom that you can participate in. Check out resources online to help educate yourself.

**How do you fill volunteer roles within congregations?** – We generally do not do a great job at lifting up gifts until we want to put someone in a role. We need to make a special point to recognize and cultivate gifts. We also need to think beyond education and careers and recognize that a middle school teacher may not want to work with that same age at church. We need to look beyond what people do on a day-to-day basis and look at what might be a person's gift.

**Update on New Table** – New Table is an effort started by District Executives two years ago with the purpose of figuring out how to be together amidst our differences. We are seeking to improve communication and relationships so we are not all existing in our own "silos." This program will eventually move from a denominational level to a district and congregational level.

**Other questions/comments from the floor:**
**Challenge**: The Dominican Church is planting new congregations. Are we doing the same?

**Recommendation**: Suggestion of an advisory board with one representative from every congregation so that every congregation has a voice and a buy-in.

**Thought**: One of the biggest things we do together is the Disaster Relief Auction, and nothing has been mentioned about it.

**ADDITIONAL TIME OF CONGREGATIONAL SHARING**

- Pathways to Peace and Justice – October 24 – flyer in packet
- Palmyra congregation does a Community in Action Day.
- Elizabethtown – Haitian individuals in the congregation shared what living in Haiti was like. We were each challenged to learn to know people from other places and cultures.
- Un Nuevo Renacer congregation – now in Akron and God has a plan for everything and everyone
- Hatfield has benefitted from DDR because families that come to their day care and food bank are immigrants. Know that there are people in your community that need you to come alongside them.
- Myerstown – Took missions out of the budget and chose 12 organizations to support (one each month) and found that the total amount they gave to their community was more than the amount removed from the budget.
- Germantown – Building and Empowering Lay Leadership – They have benefitted from this program and it is open to other congregations.
- Elizabethtown – Lots of immigrant families within their congregation and they put a lot of money into keeping them safe.

**CLERK'S REPORT & SLATE PRESENTATION REPORT**

Friday Worship Service Attendance: 59 in-person and 27 online
Offering: $16,486 ($1,011 from Friday night's worship service, $15,080 pre-conference, and $395 Saturday)
Bible Study Attendance: 14
Saturday Morning Attendance: 140
Saturday Afternoon Attendance: 127
Delegates: 95 present out of 97 registered. Total possible 178 delegates
Congregations and Fellowships: 45 present out of 44 registered. Total possible 58 represented (not including projects or those in the withdraw process)

The 2027 Slate was approved with 88 slates returned; 75 affirmed all candidates and 13 had exceptions

**BUSINESS ITEM #6 – Action on all reports**

Moderator, David Sollenberger, received the motion that all reports be officially accepted. There was a second to the motion. No questions. Motion passed by show of hands.

**CONSECRATION & TRANSFER OF LEADERSHIP**

Dave said it was a pleasure to serve as Moderator and speak at several churches. Our churches are being faithful to our mission of serving Jesus Christ. Dave passed the gavel to Karen Hackett, Moderator for 2027 District Conference. Karen's theme for 2027 is "One body in Christ" from Romans 12:5. We are not meant to walk our path alone. We are to come together in community. Our individual gifts and talents may look different but they work together and we strengthen not only ourselves, but the entire body of Christ.

**CLOSING HYMN & DISMISSAL**

Meeting was adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheri Johnson, ANE Clerk