

CALL TO ORDER

At 8:15 am, on October 11, 2025, the 56th Annual District Conference Business Session, of the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren, was called to order by Moderator Adam Ulm. He welcomed attendees, introduced those at the head table and introduced some of the individuals who will be presenting to the conference body later in the day. Brother Adam mentioned organizations that have tables in the lobby and encouraged participants to interact with those organizations during breaks. Adam introduced the praise team. He mentioned the “Good Things Tree” for sharing good things happening in local congregations with others at district conference and encouraged attendees to write good things on leaves and hang them on the tree. He also mentioned the area where attendees can write letters to our current BVSers. This serves as our service project for District Conference. Regarding the Q&A session in the afternoon, Adam encouraged attendees to write down questions in preparation for this item on the agenda.

CONFERENCE OFFICERS

Adam Ulm, Moderator; David Sollenberger, Moderator-Elect; Ray Flagg, Treasurer; Sheri Johnson, Clerk;

CONFERENCE PERSONNEL & DISTRICT OFFICE STAFF

Doug Balmer, Parliamentarian; Philip Johnson, Timekeeper; Pete Kontra, District Executive; Kelly Bernstein, Office Administrator; Marianne Fitzkee, Communications & Event Specialist.

BUSINESS ITEM #1 – Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made to approve the revised agenda in the packet, which added a report from Camp Swatara. Motion was seconded and passed by oral vote.

WELCOME

Mark Clapper, Executive Director of Legacy Planning & Engagement at Elizabethtown College, welcomed attendees to Elizabethtown College and brought greetings from the President of Elizabethtown College and also from Bethany Theological Seminary, where Mark serves as chair of the board. Last year was the 125th anniversary of Elizabethtown College and during the year stories were shared about the college and those stories are being compiled into a book. The college is currently working on the “Building Brighter Futures Campaign.” The college had a good recruiting year and the college is excited about the future. Mark mentioned some upcoming events and invited attendees to any events that they are interested in attending.

SONGS

Praise songs “Good Grace” and “King of Kings” and hymn “Holy Spirit, Come with Fire”

DISTRICT EXECUTIVE REPORT

Pete Kontra, District Executive, greeted the attendees and remarked that it was great to worship together last evening, with Josiah Ludwig bringing the message. Pete began his remarks by asking attendees to think about who they are listening to and he shared part of the Sermon on the Mount. He reminded attendees that it is relationships that are important and that God came to save the world and not condemn it. Brother Pete reminded conference goers that God is not done. He asked, “What is next?” God will always give us what we need to do his work. Pete reminded attendees that we are led by scripture, heritage and the Holy Spirit. Pete presented the report on pages 13-17 of the conference book and shared a video about the role of the district. Pete mentioned several individuals and recognized Mary Etta Reinhart for her service since 2014 on the Commission for Witness and Outreach and Commission for Nurture. She has served as TRIM (Training in Ministry) coordinator and has served as interim pastor at several congregations. Mary Etta is now retiring from ministry. New positions filled include Marianne Fitzkee as Communications and Event Specialist, Stan Dueck as Director of Discipleship Ministries, Adam Swartz as Director of Finance, Don Mitchell as Director of Intercultural Ministries, and Kelly Bernstein as Office Administrator.

DISTRICT BOARD REPORT

Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, Board Chair, presented the report on pages 18-21 of the conference book. He thanked all members of District Board and Pete Kontra, District Executive, and all the district staff. He remarked that stories have to be told, or they die. As Atlantic Northeast District, we have a story to tell. We have to decide what to say and what to leave out. Instead of just looking at the business items, we need to look at all the good work being done in the district. All these stories work together to form the whole story – a story that is worth telling. Brother Jim encouraged everyone to write their part of the story.

BUSINESS ITEM #2 – Disorganization – Blue Ball Church of the Brethren

District Board brings this business item to District Conference. John David Bowman, Elizabethtown COB, remarked that disorganization brings a sadness to the district. Jim Grossnickle-Batterton responded that all churches requesting to leave the Church of the Brethren has done so in a thoughtful manner. Pete Kontra affirmed that they are still our brothers and sisters in Christ who seek to do Christ's work. Jim Eikenberry, Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, recognized the difficult work involved in these business items and suggested that instead of responding "yes" to the motion, we use the phrase, "God help us." Motion passed by oral vote.

BUSINESS ITEM #3 – Disorganization – Coventry Church of the Brethren

District Board brings this item to District Conference. Liz Bidgood-Enders, Elizabethtown COB, pointed out that last sentence on page 22 is incorrect. The sentence was corrected to read "On **March 18, 2025**, the District Board recommended the disorganization of **Coventry** CoB to District Conference" *[corrections in bold]*. Several speakers commented on the heritage of these congregations and the service that members of these congregations have provided. Louise Wolgemuth, Lititz COB, asked about access to records and artifacts from Coventry. Jim Grossnickle-Batterton responded that that was worked out with Coventry. Motion passed by oral vote.

BUSINESS ITEM #4 – Revision: Plan of Organization

District Board brings this item to District Conference and Jim Grossnickle-Batterton explained the changes recommended to be made to Conference Committees (Gifts Discernment Team and Program and Arrangements Committee). There was no discussion. Motion passed unanimously by oral vote.

COMMISSION REPORTS:

Church Development

Lexi Aligarbes, Chair, shared the report on page 26 of the conference book. She remarked that God is moving and opening new doors. She thanked members of the commission for their continued work with the commission and thanked others for their help and support. She shared that Ebenezer COB is excited to be seeking congregational status. Several other congregations are seeking revitalization, and the commission is working with them and supporting them.

Ministry

Ray Dotter, Chair, shared the report on pages 30-31 of the conference book. He remarked that the report is not exciting to read but the outcome of the actions that the Ministry Commission is taking to support licensed and ordained ministers is exciting! He encouraged everyone to go back to their congregations and see who might be willing to explore opportunities in ministry.

Nurture

Karen Hackett, Chair, shared the report on pages 27-29 of the conference book. She shared several events planned by the Nurture Commission during the past year and shared some upcoming events, encouraging all to attend. She reminded all to check the website and bi-weekly newsletter for more information. Sister Karen recognized Mary Etta Reinhart and thanked her for her service.

DISCUSSION

Table groups were asked to discuss how they are actively participating with these commissions who have reported, and if there is a way these commissions could be an added resource for congregations.

COMMISSION REPORTS:

Witness & Outreach

Tim Speicher, Chair, shared the report on pages 32-33 of the conference book. He highlighted Brethren Disaster Ministries and this meaningful way to reach out to those in need. He also mentioned Children Disaster Services and an upcoming training next weekend. If congregations are interested in applying for support from the Barnabas Fund or Helping Hands Benevolence Fund, please reach out to the commission.

Stewardship

Barb Coffman, Vice Chair, shared the report on pages 34-35 of the conference book. She thanked Brian Rice for his role as chair and secretary. Sister Barb commented on actions made by the Stewardship Commission during the past year. She thanked Kay Weaver for her service as Interim Director of Finance. She will transition to Treasurer in 2026. Adam Swartz will be transitioning to Director of Finance. Barb introduced Marianne Fitzkee, the new Communications & Events Specialist, who highlighted communications between the district and congregations. Sister Barb asked attendees to consider what programs are important to them and what programs they would like to help finance.

DISCUSSION

Table groups were asked to discuss how they are actively participating with these commissions who have reported, and if there is a way these commissions could be an added resource for congregations.

BREAK

Attendees were reminded to add to the "Good Things Tree" and to send cards to those serving in BVS.

ANE YOUTH UPDATE

Jamie Nace (Nurture Commission Vice Chair) showed a video highlighting 2025 FaithX Service Trips. A Second video was shown in anticipation of National Youth Conference 2026. Congregations are encouraged to send youth to NYC next summer!

DISCUSSION – Renewed by Unity: The Merger Journey of the Parker Ford Church

At District Conference 2024, the story of Parker Ford merging with another congregation was briefly shared and several people had asked for more information.

Dave Hakes was part of a church plant with the Brethren in Christ. He got together with a group of local pastors that came together to form a local youth ministry. These churches started partnering together during the pandemic. His congregation lost a lot of families prior to and during the pandemic.

Djay Martin started at Parker Ford in 2017. He recognized a lot of commonality and shared heritage with the Brethren in Christ denomination. When Parker Ford started to grow and felt the need for more leadership, they felt the call to partner with the Brethren in Christ congregation and a Southern Baptist Church. This newly formed congregation would remain as Parker Ford, but would also have dual membership in the Brethren in Christ. Parker Ford was the only congregation of the three who had a physical church building.

There was a year of discernment, worshipping together periodically, a feasibility study, etc. They found a hunger to try something new within their congregations. In a world desperate for the energy of the Holy Spirit, they wanted to be part of a fusion of new ideas. They combined into one congregation three years ago, and they still like each other and it is working well. It took a lot of flexibility and humility. They formed an assimilation team to get feedback from all three congregations during the first year.

Currently they are working with 24 churches from 24 different backgrounds that will walk together in the next year. They plan to write a book about this experience.

A question from the delegate body centered around how to combine different interpretations of Biblical authority. Response: Each of the congregations had trust in their pastors and their leadership teams. The first year they really focused on their identity as a congregation, rather than focusing outward. They didn't shy away from differences, but they focused on the important things. They allowed themselves a lot of grace as long as the important truths were maintained. They spent a lot of time in prayer.

A question arose about how they handled differences. Response: There are some at Parker Ford who are still uncomfortable with women in full leadership. They seek to honor everyone at the table but they are firm about who they are as a church and what they stand for. There were times where they tabled discussions for a few months, and spent time reading and praying, before they came back together to discuss.

A question was asked about navigating traditions across three different perspectives. Response: There has been some tension. The older members had to sacrifice a lot for the future of the congregation. They stepped out in faith because they wanted young families and they wanted the church to grow. Congregants had to let go of some of their traditions in order to becoming a thriving church. There was also a lot of teaching about what some of the traditions (i.e. Love Feast) mean.

Takeaways from discussion: Relationships are important. We need to spend time focusing on the important things, rather than the details.

HYMN

"For We Are Strangers No More"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tim Speicher shared about the Barnabus Fund that supports four urban congregations with limited resources (Harrisburg First, Alpha and Omega, Germantown, Brooklyn First). Other ANE congregations with limited resources can apply for funds from the Barnabus Fund. Offerings today go to fund the Barnabus Fund.

LUNCH BREAK & INSIGHT SESSIONS

Pastor Adam closed the morning session in prayer, praying specifically for the Blue Ball and Coventry congregations that God would continue to work in them and through them. The congregation was dismissed for lunch. Insight sessions include **Eder Financial**, **Conflict Resolution**, and **Stories behind the Songs – A Brethren Hymn Sing**.

HYMN

"Move in Our Midst"

FINANCIAL REPORT

Adam Swartz, Assistant Treasurer, reviewed the updated Financial Report found in the delegate packet. He also reviewed the income and fund transfers for the Ministry Investment Plan.

BUSINESS ITEM #5 – 2026 District Ministry Investment Plan

Kay Weaver, Interim Director of Finance, mentioned that Ray Flagg, is ill and could not be at District Conference. Sister Kay presented the proposed 2026 District Ministry Investment Plan. She noted that the line item for Ministerial Student Grants (Commission on Ministry) shows \$0 but that is because it is funded through the Seeds of Faith Fund. The Barnabus Fund (Commission on Witness & Outreach) will be funded through the Barnabus Investment Fund. Please note that due to staffing changes, some of the line items may be adjusted, but the total budget remains the same at \$532,381.00.

John David Bowman, Elizabethtown COB, asked if there was a concern that we will not be able to meet our budget. Kay responded that it is a possibility and we have some reserves that serve as a safety net. However, in the last two years, we have needed to transfer more money from our reserve funds.

Delegates approved the 2026 District Ministry Investment Plan by unanimous oral vote.

BUSINESS ITEM #6 – Approval of the 2026 Fair Share Giving Amount

Kay Weaver, shared that the Fair Share Giving Amount is proposed as \$55/member. Pat Leiter, Elizabethtown COB, spoke that determining membership is a challenge.

Delegates approved the 2026 Fair Share Giving Amount as \$55/member by oral vote.

BUSINESS ITEM #7 – 2026 Slate

David Sollenberge, Moderator-Elect, presented the slate as recorded on pages 42-47 of the conference book with the addition of Bill Kepner added to the slate as a member of the COBYS board. The slate was distributed, collected, counted, and reviewed by the Gifts Discernment Team. Results are recorded below in the Clerk's Report.

MISSION & MINISTRY BOARD REPORT

David Steele, General Secretary, shared the report on page 48 of the conference book. Brother David recognized two members of the ANE district that serve on the Mission & Ministry Board – Josiah Ludwig and Eric Ramirez. David thanked the district for the support they give the denomination. As we seek to be Jesus in the neighborhood, what does the future look like for the Church of the Brethren? This is the question the executive staff seeks to answer on behalf of the board. He provided examples of ways that the executive staff and board are working to plan for the future of the denomination, as well as ways that the church is currently serving in our local communities and around the world. He encouraged everyone to subscribe to Messenger, or to read Messenger online.

QUESTION & ANSWER TIME

Pete Kontra, District Executive, Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, Board Chair, and David Steele, General Secretary, answered questions:

Pete Kontra was asked how he became District Executive. He responded by talking about the need to call out leadership as we see those gifted in our congregations, because that was how he was called to his current position.

All participants were asked to define what in ministry they are excited about, or what gives them hope. Brother David responded that there is a new sense of energy emerging in the church. Brother Jim replied that he enjoyed watching videos at Annual Conference of what churches across the country are doing to serve their community. He enjoys those stories of individuals, or groups of people, who are so committed to the mission of the Church of the Brethren, that they will make a way, even when there are obstacles. Brother Pete is excited about our congregations of different ethnicities who are passionate about the work of Christ.

Joel Pena, Alpha & Omega COB, asked what their vision is for Latino churches who wish to be part of the Church of the Brethren. Pete responded that we are all one body and he values the gifts and passion the Latino brothers and sisters bring to the district and we seek to balance leadership across the district to include all ethnicities. David said the board and staff has renewed their commitment to be intentional to make sure all ethnicities are included and they have worked hard to make sure translations are available to non-English speakers. Jim said that we all have something to learn from one another.

Franklin Iyasere, Providence COB, asked if we could have gatherings more frequently to worship and pray to help us stay focused.

EDER FINANCIAL REPORT

Loyce Borgmann, Church of the Brethren Denominational Director, shared the report on pages 49-50 of the conference book. Eder provides a retirement plan and investment opportunities for congregations. Sister Loyce provided some highlights of services available to churches and church employees and encouraged anyone with questions to reach out.

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey, Director, shared the report on pages 51-53 of the conference book. Five partnering districts make up SVMC. Atlantic Northeast is a strong supporter of SVMC. SVMC provides educational opportunities and classes through TRIM and ACTS. These classes are open to anyone, not just ministers or those studying to be ministers. SVMC seeks to support all types of congregational leaders. Karen Hodges, Program Director for SVMC, honored six graduates, three of whom are from ANE district.

CAMP SWATARA REPORT

Tim Courtright, Executive Director, shared the report included in the delegate folder. Brother Tim shared some reoccurring themes that he had noticed during discussions at district conference: relationships, change with action, and stories. Tim shared a story from Camp Swatara that encompasses these themes concerning an owl trapped in the soccer net. He encouraged attendees to consider how something that we think is a safety net may be keeping us trapped. The theme for this summer at Camp Swatara was "Be Still." We need to fall into God and rely on him.

COBYS FAMILY SERVICES

J. Michael Lausch, Executive Director, shared the report on pages 54-57 of the conference book. Attendees watch a video showcasing COBYS' services. Brother Mike thanked attendees for their support and prayers.

BREAK

Attendees were given a 15 minute break.

TIME OF CONGREGATIONAL SHARING

Brother Adam shared some "leaves" that were added to the "Good Things Tree" about many of the things attendees are excited about in their congregations and communities. He hopes this is an encouragement, challenge, or resource to congregations for other ministry opportunities.

CLERK'S REPORT & SLATE PRESENTATION REPORT

Sheri Johnson, Clerk, reported the following information:

Friday Worship Service Attendance: 91 in person and 25 online connections
Offering for the Barnabas Fund, including pre-conference offering, and offerings at Friday night's worship service and Saturday at conference: \$1693.00
Bible Study Attendance: 18 online attendees
Saturday Morning Attendance: 147
Saturday Afternoon Attendance: 130
Delegates: 108 present out of 113 registered. Total possible 187 delegates
Congregations and Fellowships: 45 present out of 46 registered, out of a possible 57 (does not include projects or those in the withdraw process)

The 2026 Slate was approved with 93 slates returned; 87 affirmed all candidates and 6 had exceptions

BUSINESS ITEM #8 – Action on all reports

Moderator Adam Ulm received the motion that all reports be officially accepted. There was a second to the motion. No questions. Motion passed unanimously by oral vote.

CONSECRATION & TRANSFER OF LEADERSHIP

2026 Moderator, Dave Sollenberger, said that a loving, unified church still has some unfinished business. He is drawn to Hebrews 12, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Jesus is calling us to care for others and invite all people to God's family. We cannot be distracted by all the clamor in the world.

CLOSING HYMNS & DISMISSAL

"Holy Forever"

The conference was concluded at 3:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheri Johnson, ANE Clerk