



Church of the Brethren

May 2022

Greetings to you in the name of Christ our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord!

Once again I want to express my gratitude for the many ways your district and local congregations faithfully strive to live out the Gospel—to simply try to do what Jesus did. The vital ministries of our Church of the Brethren congregations, small to large, are at the heart of our Church. We should never diminish the essential role that each unique part of the body plays in our common ministry together. With that in mind, as you gather in person or virtually for your District Conferences, I have invited our Mission and Ministry Board and staff to hold you and your work and ministries in our prayers.

For a more comprehensive report about the work of the Mission and Ministry Board and staff, I would point you to the Annual Report found at <https://www.brethren.org/about/annualreport/>. In addition, we are planning to report at many of your district conferences or be available for questions and conversations.

In these days, uncertainty and disruption are prominent in many of our congregational and district circles. One cannot deny the challenges that we face as a denomination—challenges that are manifest in the recent splits in which congregations have left or are leaving us; the ongoing disputes regarding sexuality, Biblical authority, and the calls for greater accountability; and the echo chambers of misinformation that continue to fuel mistrust. Yet these challenges and others that seem to gather the most attention only serve to mask the pressing reality that our membership continues to decline. While it is much easier to blame others or claim that the issues named above cast a shadow that discourages outsiders from darkening our doorways, I would simply ask: What are you doing to be Jesus in your neighborhood? If we Brethren are known by the manner of our living, what is your living saying to those in your local community? Who are your neighbors? What are their needs? Do you really know?

As a former pastor, I know that it was rare for the people in the communities where I served to look to the district or denominational stage. What made the most significant impression was the local congregation's invitation and hospitality; their engagement, service, and mission in the local community; and their efforts at supporting missions beyond their local setting. If it is our purpose to find fault and scrutinize those who do not live up to our standards and understanding of Scripture, then we will surely have little problem finding that which we seek, given the sinful and imperfect nature of each of us. Meanwhile, our neighbors will miss out on learning to know about the transformative power of Jesus.

In the context of the Mission and Ministry Board's Strategic Plan, the Board has identified priorities for our staff's work. Among them: develop a prominent, comprehensive, sustained framework for equipping evangelism; and develop a program about healing and reconciling relationships within the church and transforming conflict, including the intentional construction of a network of members who understand the dynamics of conflict and who are called to serve in a ministry of bringing healing to our brokenness. In naming these priorities, the Board is

Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.

recognizing that to be Jesus in our neighborhoods and to do that together, we must first begin healing the brokenness within our own body. In addition, our staff needs to help provide the tools and resources to support and guide our congregations in their effort to engage their communities in mission and service.

It is important to acknowledge that no program will fix us. Healing our brokenness and the brokenness in our relationships will take time, and it is an effort we must make together. This is not a pass to dismiss the tough issues that we face, but an invitation to commit to finding ways to come together, setting aside our assumptions about the other and learning to know one another—learning about their families, jobs, interests, retirement, etc. It is also an invitation to gather with others in your district to study and discern scripture together around those tough issues, to pray together, and to open yourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

My friends, it is my hope and prayer that you will join me in efforts to heal the brokenness between us and focus more on loving each other to death. May we also give our full attention to our call and work to be disciples of Jesus in our communities and world. I believe loving each other to death—as well as those in our communities—allows for the transforming power of Jesus to be set free in our neighborhoods.

I invite you to join me in our common efforts at being Jesus in our neighborhoods.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Steele". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Steele".

David Steele
General Secretary