

# Atlantic Northeast District, Church of the Brethren

## Way Forward Ministry

### ❖ Background

- **May 2019:** On May 23, 2019, approximately 150 district ministers and congregational leaders met along with denominational leadership at the Hempfield Church of the Brethren to discuss the state of the church on all levels and how to move forward amidst our various differences. The questions and responses shared during this discussion were documented and processed into a report that was shared broadly with the district. This gathering set the tone and a beginning for the work of the “Way Forward” ministry.
- **June 2019:** That June, the Atlantic Northeast District Board called out and approved a diverse group of individuals as a working group to use the data collected from the meeting in May, tasking them to discern how we might move forward amidst our differences and maintain the unity of our faith. This working group was named the “Way Forward Team.”
- **July 2019-June 2020:** The Way Forward Team met regularly and prayerfully over the following year, completing a suggested covenant and a 12-page report that they shared with the District Board, which was received and affirmed at the regular ANE District Board meeting in June, 2020.

### ❖ Summary of the Report

- At the heart of the covenant and report was the New Testament call to Christian unity, expressed in two primary scriptures, quoting both Jesus and Paul.
  - “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” - Romans 15:5-7 (NRSV)
  - “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” - John 17:22-23 (NRSV)
- This extensive report included significant recommendations to the board for restorative reconciliation and relationship building; it covered ways in which individuals and congregations might adopt practices of respectful conversation; and it called for development of a process to handle disagreements between congregation and individuals to maintain unity.
- The centerpiece of the Way Forward Team’s report was the Way Forward Covenant, now renamed the Way Forward Commitment, which included outlining Christian standards for both the District Board and for individuals and congregations. Each section, for the district board and for individuals and congregations, includes 5 points that are basic to faithful Christian life and practice.

## ❖ **Current Status of the Way Forward Ministry**

- The District Board voted to adopt the covenant/commitment for themselves in June 16, 2020. The district is now inviting individuals and congregations to make this commitment for themselves. It is our prayer that every member of the ANE District, individuals as well as congregations, will join us in embracing the Way Forward Commitment.
- The original report included a recommendation for a team to assist the board in implementing the Way Forward. This team, called “The Way Forward Shepherding Team,” has been working diligently to assist the District in getting the work of moving forward accomplished.
- Some of the work the Board that is living out their commitment to the Way Forward includes:
  - The board continues with a commitment to prayer about reconciliation and moving forward.
  - Each commission continues to discern how their current work supports the Way Forward, and what new ministries may be implemented.
  - The board has created a Shalom Team to assist with reconciliation.
  - The ministry commission is committed to fostering COB beliefs and practices with our ministers, new and current.
  - The ministry commission hosted the June 24 Ministers/Families gathering for fellowship and supporting connections across the district.
  - The nurture commission is planning a Leadership Summit for May of 2023.
  - Staff are working at re-evaluating the district’s events and gatherings, asking “What are fresh ways for us to connect and gather together?”
  - The board has supported a renewed emphasis on district-wide Bible studies.

## ❖ **What Congregations and Individuals Can Do**

- Agree to the Way Forward Commitment, and let it inform your thoughts, words, and deeds.
- Pray for one another.
- Discern how you can foster relationships with sister congregations.
- Worship with others in the district.
- Share in service projects with others in the district.
- Think about how your resources might also strengthen others in the district.
- Intentionally engage in fellowship opportunities with others in the district, enjoying the richness that we share in Christ.
- Choose to make the effort to engage in wider district events and conversations, Bible studies and other meetings, to foster relationships, understanding, and how we work together as a district.
- And finally... send us your stories! Share with the district office, or with anyone from the Way Forward Shepherding Team, experiences that show how well we can move forward together, so that those stories can be used to encourage and inspire others!

Complete information about the Way Forward Ministry is available on the ANE District website ([www.ane-cob.org](http://www.ane-cob.org)), including a helpful interpretive video that is designed to share with congregations. We encourage you to visit the website, and gain more details on this meaningful ministry, as we work together to seek the mind of Christ.