

Christ's Ambassadors: Report on Annual Conference

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

It was my pleasure to serve as the delegate once again from Hatfield Church of the Brethren for the annual Atlantic Northeast District Annual Conference, held on the Elizabethtown College campus on Saturday, October 12. Once again, we were able to sit around tables with other delegates and non-delegates, allowing us to introduce ourselves and discuss questions posed from the stage. This year's theme was Christ's Ambassadors – pursuing the path to reconciliation.

Kathy Brode, this year's conference moderator, introduced the theme this way:

“... in a time of great challenges within our denomination, it is sometimes difficult to turn our focus outward; we become consumed by the difficulties from within. However, we must remember that our God is a sending God, and we are charged with taking his message of peace to a troubled world. In the 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul reminds us that as we make our peace with God, the Holy Spirit gives us new life. We are recreated, not merely rehabilitated or reeducated. Under the guidance of the Lord, we begin a new life. He makes peace with us, reconciling us to himself by erasing our sins and making us right with him. Having been reconciled to him, we are then entrusted with the precious task of encouraging others to make their peace with God. We

become Christ's ambassadors in the world. The job of an ambassador is to serve as an official representative of one country to another. We, as ambassadors of Christ, are sent out into the world with his message of peace and reconciliation—a challenging task, for sure, but also a privilege!”

The business session began with a report on Elizabethtown College, given by Mark Clapper, Executive Director of College Engagement. E-town College continues to develop innovative programs and has been recognized with several honors. In May, E-town graduated 550 students from six undergraduate schools and the School of Graduate and Professional Studies.

District Executive Pete Kontra was next to speak. He has spent a lot of time visiting District churches. In his report he posed these questions to the congregations:

“Living into our core purpose in Christ, how do we adapt to reach our communities in a world that does not function as it did 50 years ago, or even 10 years ago? How can we lift up our Way Forward together? How can we share with our congregations the work and ministries of the district? What are new relationships each of us can intentionally form? How do we grow in sharing our resources? How do we spur one another on to do the good works of Christ in our communities?”

He also shared about attending the 300th anniversary of the Germantown congregation and reflecting on how many people have been impacted for Christ in that time.

Following Pete's presentation, District Board Chair, Jim Grossnickle-Batterton, presided over the disorganization of both the Richland and the Long Run Churches of the Brethren. Richland disorganized due to its inability to continue to operate, while Long Run disorganized over irreconcilable differences with the District. It is always with heavy hearts that the gathered delegates affirm the disorganization of any of the District's congregations. He also informed the group of the revision to the Plan of Organization, Article 6; Related Institutions and Interest Groups. That information can be found in the materials on the glass case in the narthex, along with the various commission reports.

Next in line were reports from the various commissions of the District. Ray Flagg, Treasurer, followed with the annual financial report. Just as the District churches are feeling a financial pinch, so is the District. Reorganization is happening to streamline responsibilities to remain financially viable. The 2025 District Ministry Investment Plan was reviewed and approved, as well as the 2025 Fair Share Giving Amount of \$55.00 per member.

At this point, the group broke up for lunch and in-sight sessions. I chose to visit the Part-Time Pastor, Full-Time Church presentation. My

assigned circuit rider, Angela Carr, was the presenter. This was the first time we were able to meet in person in the two years she has been assigned to me. It was a pleasure to meet her face-to-face.

The meeting was reconvened after lunch and in-sight sessions with more reports from various commissions, not only from the ANE District but also from Annual Conference Standing Committee and Mission and Ministry. Dr. Rebecca Dali, from the Center for Caring and Peace Initiatives (CCEPI) in Nigeria, brought greetings and a report of their successes in that country.

Pete Kontra and Jim Grossnickle-Batterton hosted a time of question and answer. This is an opportunity for delegates and non-delegates to ask questions that were not addressed in the commission reports.

Due to the lateness of the date and my need to make the two-hour trek back home, I did not stay until the end of the conference day. However, all the reports can be found in the notebook and folder on the glass case out front. If you would like to learn more about the conference, go to the ANE website which is ane-cob.com, click on Conferences in the top tool bar, then on the 2024 Annual Conference.

During this time of transition at Hatfield, my biggest take away from the Conference is that there are a number of resources that we might take advantage of within the District. This is something that we can discuss with District Executive Pete Kontra when he attends the December 9

Worshipful Work meeting. If you have questions for Pete, please share them with one of our board members. This leads me into an invitation to everyone to stay following today's service for our annual congregational meeting where we will elect board members and deacons for the coming year. Don McDonough will be joining us as our moderator this year.

With that in mind, let us all stand as we are able and join in singing our closing hymn #415 Forth in Thy name.