

## Query for 2017 District Conference

Whereas: The 2017 Report of the Leadership Team and Council of District Executives on the Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations and Districts gave a reaffirmation to the 2017 Annual Conference to place the prospect of licensed and ordained Church of the Brethren ministers performing same-sex marriages under the discretion, discipline and authority of the local Church of the Brethren districts

Whereas: This same 2017 Annual Conference report on page 10, lines 4-6 strongly encouraged districts to review their policies, processes and procedures to ensure that they are in harmony with Annual Conference actions and decisions, replacing or removing these policies, processes, and procedures as necessary.

Whereas: This 2017 Annual Conference report states on page 9, lines 30-31 that ministers and congregations are not authorized by Annual Conference to perform same sex weddings.

Whereas: This 2017 Annual Conference report states on page 9 lines 42-48 that the officiating of same sex weddings by credentialed clergy shall be handled as a matter of ministerial conduct. However, this report does not give specifics on how matters of ministerial conduct are to be handled.

Whereas: Given the years of ongoing discussion and disagreement among Brethren on issues of this nature, we feel that clear transparency regarding how these matters of ministerial conduct (specifically Southern Ohio District ministers performing same-sex marriages) are practiced in our district will be vital to the ongoing stability of the fellowship of our District.

The Query: The West Alexandria Church of the Brethren is asking the Southern Ohio District Board to report practice and protocol for how matters of Southern Ohio District ministers performing same-sex marriages have been handled in the past and will continue to be handled in the future.

This query was approved by West Alexandria Church of the Brethren in special council on September 10th, 2017. The membership vote for approval was unanimous with 24 votes.

## District Board Response

The Southern Ohio District Board, meeting in regular session on September 16 at the Bradford Church of the Brethren, received this query and agreed to share a report with the 2017 Southern Ohio District Conference. A draft of the report was developed by the Ministry Commission and was approved by the District Board on September 29, 2017. The report follows.

A query came to the 2015 Annual Conference entitled Query: Same Sex Weddings (the full text of this query and actions can be found in The Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts report to the 2017 Annual Conference <http://www.brethren.org/ac/2017/business/UB-4-Authority-and-Accountability-final.pdf>). The question of the query was “How shall districts respond when credentialed ministers and/or congregations conduct or participate in same sex weddings?”

Standing Committee was given the responsibility to respond and made the recommendation "that the conduct expectations of the general membership, as stated in the 1983 Annual Conference statement “Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective,” which was reaffirmed at the 2011 Annual Conference, and the conduct expectations of licensed and ordained persons, as stated in the 2002 Annual Conference statement “Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” make it clear that for credentialed ministers to officiate or provide leadership at a same sex wedding is to go against the stance of the Church of the Brethren. It shall be considered a matter of pastoral/ministerial misconduct. The districts shall respond with discipline, not with allowances based on personal conscience. The consequence for officiating or providing leadership at a same sex wedding is the termination of the ministry credential of the one officiating or providing leadership at a same sex wedding. This shall be for a period of one year, pending review by the district ministerial leadership team."

The delegate body’s vote on Standing Committee’s recommendation did not obtain the two-thirds majority required as a controversial issue; the motion failed.

Subsequently, the 2016 Annual Conference adopted a motion from the floor to refer the concerns of the query to the Leadership Team in consultation with the Council of District Executives to bring clarity and guidance concerning the authority of Annual Conference and districts regarding the accountability of ministers, congregations, and districts, bringing recommendations to the 2017 Annual Conference.

It is this report that is noted in the query from West Alexandria. Delegates and other interested persons of the Southern Ohio District are encouraged to read this report in its

entirety to understand the context of the whereas sections and to help fully comprehend this report from the Southern Ohio District Board.

In the spirit of the 2017 Annual Conference report and agreements of the Council of District Executives regarding any and all instances of ministerial conduct, the Southern Ohio District Board offers this report, with significant language quoted from the 2017 Annual Conference report.

The officiating of same sex weddings by credentialed clergy shall be handled in the same way as any other report of ministerial conduct: if a district executive minister receives a report based on direct knowledge that a minister has performed a same gender marriage, the information shall be reported to the district's credentialing body as a matter of ministerial conduct.

It will continue to be the standard practice among district executives that districts respect decisions concerning ministerial misconduct and removal of ordinations by other districts. This is the practice agreed to by the District Executives and affirmed at Annual Conference 2017. This applies to any Annual Conference statement of which a credentialed minister may not follow due to individual or corporate conscience (in the case of their congregation). Such conduct (not misconduct) can come to the attention of the credentialing body (in Southern Ohio this is the District Ministry Commission). The credentialing body can then choose what course of action (if any) is appropriate.

Part of this not noted in the document, but agreed to by District Executives, is the role and position of the congregation where the minister serves and/or has their membership. In the specific case of this query, if the congregation counsels with the pastor/minister to not perform a same sex wedding/marriage/union, then the pastor/minister should not do so; such an action would be an abuse of power and would most likely lead to some sort of discipline on the part of the District Ministry Commission. On the other hand, if the congregation is supportive of the pastor/minister performing the wedding and the minister desires to do so, the abuse of power does not exist. Conversation with the District Ministry Commission about this can still take place, but at a different level than abuse of power, matters of individual and corporate conscience are taken in consideration.

The current practice, polity, and protocol from the 2017 Annual Conference report and current practice and agreement of the Council of District Executives regarding ministerial conduct as it relates to any Annual Conference statement is to acknowledge both the Annual Conference statement and the personal and corporate conscience of ministers and congregations. The Ministry Commission may call any credentialed minister into a conversation regarding any Annual Conference statement as the situation warrants.