



Womaen's Caucus of the Church of the Brethren

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The Womaen's Caucus of the Church of the Brethren has long held that cultural biases against women in leadership have affected generations of election outcomes. Following 18 months that included two "Speaking Truth to Power" panels, many interviews with people who have been nominated for an AC-elected office and other highly visible leadership positions, and two webinars conducted in partnership with AC leaders, Womaen's Caucus also holds that the structural system of leadership selection within the Church of the Brethren prevents women and other potential leaders from fulfilling their calls to church leadership.

Here is what we heard through our work.

- Elected persons overwhelmingly report feeling humility in being chosen to serve as well as frustration with the opposition to change that they often encounter.
- Different positions require different skill sets, different time commitments (annually and length of term), and different levels of resilience. The alignment between the responsibilities of the position and the capabilities of the person filling the role is central to personal satisfaction and effective leadership.
- For all elected positions, leaders must be willing to listen but also have the courage to speak up for the ways of Jesus. They need to have strength to stand in the midst of conflict.
- AC-elected persons must be true to themselves while being committed to representing the whole church in the name of Jesus." Christ's church, not mine."
- All AC-elected positions are non-compensated. However, reimbursement is provided for expenses associated with meeting attendance. Declining CoB financial resources make covering costs more difficult.
- All elected positions have expected in-person meetings several times each year. Covid and increased use of technology may alter that expectation.
- Home and family expenses incurred because of the absence of an elected person are not reimbursed (care for dependents, children, animals; yard or farm care; etc.) This is particularly challenging for single-parent households or persons caring for elderly family members.
- Moderator and AC Secretary positions are reported as equivalent to full-time or nearly full-time work. The Moderator role includes a less-demanding year as Moderator-elect before assuming the full responsibilities of Moderator. The AC Secretary role runs for five full years.
- The current job of AC Secretary represents the combining of two former AC positions (Recording Secretary and Corresponding Secretary) making that work load substantial.

- The time demands for many of the positions, especially for Moderator and AC Secretary, strain work/church/life balance even within supportive family units. Moderator and AC Secretary roles can generate high levels of stress due to the weight of the words they speak/write, the actions they take or endorse, their interpretations of theology or church practice, and the need to be accessible most of the time.
- The nominations process is made simple to encourage people to participate. It asks nominators to give a reason for nominating a particular person and nominees to provide up to five sentences stating their faith perspectives and vision plus an indication of their experience with intercultural work. Selection of people for the ballot is made from the information from the nomination form unless a member of the Nominating or Standing Committee is able to provide additional insights about the nominee.
- Nominations from the AC floor bypass the vetting process of the Nominations and Standing Committees established by the denomination. Nominations from the floor are a public statement that neither of the candidates on the ballot is qualified for the position for which they have been nominated.
- AC has committed to balanced representation on the ballot but historic voting shows that males, often those associated with pastoral ministry, are more frequently elected. The AC election of 2021 varied somewhat from this pattern.
- To be elected, a person's name or reputation must be known fairly broadly across the denomination. Polarity in the denomination contributes to emerging voices being associated with one "side" or another as they seek to demonstrate their leadership potential.
- Leadership is not a solo effort. It requires patience and a willingness to work with people, including those whose beliefs differ significantly from yours. Effective leaders build followers.

Here is why this matters.

1. The current process for creating the AC ballot relies on the very limited words of the nomination form or the nominator/nominee being known by Nominating and/or Standing Committee members. In other words, you or your work must be known to make the ballot. Consequently, people who are geographically remote, have unfamiliar names, are young or new to the CoB are less frequently placed on the ballot. Neither are they tagged for leadership development activities. **When considering the growing edges of the CoB, how can we cultivate future leaders from across the breadth of denominational geography, experience, and beliefs?**
2. AC-elected positions skew toward people who have sufficient means and time to devote to extensive unpaid service. Frequently these are men (often pastors) who come from sufficiently large churches to delegate their work tasks to others or they are people who are retired. Excluded are people who are new to the denomination, those reliant on fulltime employment, people with dependents or significant home obligations, young people, and others. **How can a denomination of growing diversity justify a system of non-diverse leaders?**