

ASSOCIATION OF GRACE BRETHREN MINISTERS REPORT TO THE FELLOWSHIP COUNCIL

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Introduction

This report comes to you at the request of Tim Boal, President of the Association of Grace Brethren Ministers. It is written according to guidelines provided by Tom Avey, Fellowship Coordinator:

“The report should include a summary of strategic (GrowGoLead) accomplishments by your organization in 2005 and plans for 2006. The deadline for this report is January 13.”

I begin with an apology. This report is one week late. Our only excuse is that we are in transition and responsibilities are not well defined at this point in time.

Historical Background and Purpose

The Association of Grace Brethren Ministers grew out of the Progressive Brethren movement. The 1894 Brethren Annual contains the minutes of a meeting, held the year before, to organize “The National Brethren Ministerial Association.” A complete constitution and a course of study for ministers may be found in the minutes.

By 1939, the organization was known as “The National Ministerial Association of the Brethren Church.” That year, the Brethren Church broke in half. The Ministerial Association remained with the denomination by a very narrow majority. It was the Association’s 45th annual meeting. Those who found themselves excluded formed the “National Fellowship of Brethren Churches.” Ministers associated with the new Fellowship organized themselves into the “National Fellowship of Brethren Ministers.”

The ministers revised their constitution in 1974 to reflect the addition of the word “Grace” to the name of the Fellowship. The office of Executive Secretary was also created at that time. Revisions to the constitution were made in 1979, 1980, 1994 and 1999. The last revision changed the name to “Association of Grace Brethren Ministers.”

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The purposes of the Association appear to have changed somewhat over the last 110 years. Two of the six objectives found in the 1893 constitution deal with the need for continuing education. Two of them focus on the need for mutual association and love. One emphasizes the need for recruitment of new ministers and one promises to connect available men with churches needing pastors. By way of contrast, the current constitution succinctly names five purposes:

1. Dealing with issues
2. Serving as a conduit for communication
3. Promoting fellowship
4. Providing help
5. Recruiting new pastors

Impetus toward Change

Over the last half dozen years, officers of the Association have become increasingly concerned about their inability to reach stated goals. In February, 2002 they proposed a joint initiative by the Association and the Fellowship Council. Under their plan, the Association would sponsor a “pastoral ministry office” to focus on four objectives:

1. Recruitment and Membership
2. Development and Effectiveness
3. Encouragement and Care
4. Redeployment of Pastors

They asked the Fellowship Council to sponsor a separate “church ministry office” which would focus on four other objectives:

1. Pastoral Connection with Open Churches
2. Research and Development
3. Crises, Realignment and Redeployment
4. Church Education

The Fellowship Council responded by asking the Association to develop a plan for response from their organization.

The Pastoral Ministry Office

In February, 2003 the officers approached me about opening a Pastoral Ministries Office for them. I replied by offering to research and develop the concept further. They agreed, and I began to serve as a “research and

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development director” in August, 2003. When my selection was announced to ministers assembled at the annual meeting in July, 2003, the officers announced “six purposes of the AGBM in establishing the Pastoral Ministries Office:”

1. Empower someone who will lead the leaders and seek to develop the AGBM into a proactive organization dedicated to enhanced ministerial effectiveness within the FGBC.
2. Empower someone who will work to develop an organizational culture of high expectation for ministry competence and lifelong learning.
3. Empower someone who will lead the way in re-shaping the AGBM for the 21st century, someone who will work to see the AGBM become an organization where it is valuable for members to belong.
4. Empower someone who will act as an advocate for ministerial members.
5. Empower someone who will develop a network of individuals who can shepherd those ministers who need encouragement and support.
6. Empower someone who will work for consistency in licensing and ordaining procedures.

The following year, I delivered my initial report not only to the officers but also to all the members assembled at the annual meeting in Kingsport, Tennessee. My report offered proposals related to structure, membership, decentralization, networking, certification and resources.

Accomplishments in 2005

The officers met three times in 2005 to conduct Association business and advance the application of these proposals. At their meeting last February, the following recommendations were approved for presentation to Association members in July. They are as follows:

1. Begin immediately to identify, qualify and recruit nominees for election to a future board of directors. This board should consist of not less than nine and not more than 18 members selected from various regions of the country.

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2. Provide for the election of an executive group of officers by the entire membership through a paper or electronic mail ballot. This group should consist of a president, a secretary, a treasurer, and three members at large.
3. Ask the executive group to elect an executive director to be responsible for the day to day operations of the Association. The Director should be a voting member of the Executive Group.
4. Allow the future Board of Directors to define and determine eligibility for membership in several categories. Financial assistance should be granted to those who are unable to pay dues because of limited income.
5. Allow membership privileges of eligible applicants to begin with the acceptance of their application by the Executive Director. The membership year should begin July 1 and the fiscal year should begin June 1.
6. Encourage the development of “affinity groups” within and alongside existing district ministerial associations. These should be recognized as places where new ideas may be exchanged and mutual interests may be advanced.
7. Create a national “face” for the Association through a partnership with the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. This includes the maintenance of a web page and the periodic mailing of materials to members.

The members of the Association approved all seven recommendations at the Annual Meeting held in Winona Lake, Indiana on July 31, 2005.

When the officers met in July, they agreed to a proposal from Tim Boal to hold a “certification summit.” Those invited to the Summit include examining board representatives from all the Districts, officers of the Association and members of the Leadership Team from the Fellowship Council. Grace Church in Lititz has agreed to host this gathering the last week of March, 2006. Grace Brethren North American Missions has offered to reimburse travel expenses for the participants.

The officers gathered once more in Winona Lake, Indiana the third week of November. Among other things, the officers carefully studied a complete revision of the bylaws which I prepared for them. We are still exchanging views by e-mail, but I expect that the revision will be ready for posting on the Association’s web site by the first of March.

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In summary, accomplishments in 2005 include the following:

1. Developing seven recommendations based on proposals which were presented to Association members in July, 2004.
2. Creating a partnership with the Brethren Missionary Herald in the interest of improved communication.
3. Closing the office of Executive Secretary which was held by Lee Dice for a period of 10 years. Transferring records to Winona Lake.
4. Opening a new office in Winona Lake in partnership with the BMH. The official AGBM address is now Box 694, Winona Lake, IN 46590.
5. Receiving approval of all seven recommendations at the Annual Meeting of members in July, 2005.
6. Planning for a Certification Summit to be held in Lititz, PA the end of March, 2006.
7. Developing a full revision of the bylaws to reflect the decisions we have made.

It should also be noted that in 2005, the Association treasury provided \$1,665 in awards and scholarships and \$5,000 in death gratuities to the families of pastors and wives who went home to be with the Lord.

Plans for 2006

Our first objective in the new year is to improve communication. Our newsletter is much improved under the guidance of Terry White at the Brethren Missionary Herald, but the Association's web page is not as helpful as it should be. We want to improve its management. Our incoming President, Joel Richards, has initiated his own "pushed e-mail" plan to increase our touch with individual ministers.

Our second objective in the new year is to conduct a successful Certification Summit. We are hopeful that the Summit will lay the foundation for a national certification study group. We need national standards which are broadly supported by Association members.

Our third objective is to widely disseminate the new bylaws which we plan to call a "prototype." In other words, it is a first draft for purposes of experimentation. The members will have an opportunity to read and consider the document before the Annual Meeting at the end of July, at which time we hope they will approve it for implementation.

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Our fourth objective in 2006, assuming the prototype bylaws are approved, is to begin implementation of its principles. One of the most important first steps in implementation will be the election of a Board of Directors and an executive group of Association officers. By this time next year, a Ministry Director should be selected by the officers and approved by the Board to serve as a “chief operating officer” for the Association.

At that time, my role as Director of Research and Development will disappear.

A Vision for the Future

Over the past two years, I have traveled many miles and spoken with hundreds of people about ministry in our Fellowship. From historical documents, and from current discussions, I am convinced that Grace Brethren ministers want to see the following things come true through their Association:

1. Provide ministry certification standards which are accepted and recognized throughout the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.
2. Provide standards for churches to follow in their relationships with pastors, especially as they relate to search and selection processes, compensation, continuing education, sabbaticals, and conflict resolution.
3. Provide ethical standards for pastors and ministry leaders which are accepted and recognized throughout the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.
4. Create an environment of mutual accountability whereby pastors and ministry leaders are called upon to conduct themselves in a manner which honors the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Identify, qualify and encourage the professional development of young men and women who are being called by God to ministry in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.
6. Create an official roster of pastors and ministry leaders who are certified for service in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, whether they are members of the Association or not.
7. Maintain ministry profiles for pastors and ministry leaders throughout the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches to the end that they may know each other better and serve one another more efficiently.

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8. Create and maintain a system by which individual pastors and ministry leaders are recognized for excellence and faithfulness in ministry.
9. Offer specific activities by which pastors and ministry leaders may grow toward excellence in ministry through such means as continuing education, networking and mentoring.
10. Offer a comforting and counseling presence to pastors and churches which are struggling because they are unable to resolve conflicts or achieve stability in ministry.
11. Offer financial assistance, within the constraints of available resources, to those in ministry who are experiencing a temporary but serious financial crisis.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

- 1 Peter 5:1-4