

USMB Board of Faith and Life  
Biennial report  
July 2020

It is an honor and privilege to serve as Chair of the USMB Board of Faith and Life. Serving on the Board is a daunting task and one that none of us on the board feel qualified to do, so we humbly submit this report of our activities of the past two years for your consideration.

We have considered a number of issues in the past two years. Two of these have been predominant.

The biggest issue which consumed the greatest amount of energy for the board has been the issue of women serving in pastoral ministry. In 1990, a resolution was adopted by the delegates at the General Conference (US and Canadian Conferences combined) convention in Wichita, Kan. which encouraged our churches to affirm women in all areas of ministry within the local church but limiting them from serving as a Lead Pastor. Churches were encouraged to utilize the gifts of women in other ministry roles as they were gifted. The resolution stated that the issue would be studied and revisited at a later date.

In January 2019, nearly 20 years after that resolution was passed, USMB Board of Faith and Life hosted a study conference on the issue of women serving in pastoral ministry and specifically whether they could be affirmed and credentialed for the Lead Pastor position within local MB churches. Following much study, conversation and listening to the stories of women at the study conference, then conversations with individuals, churches and district Boards of Faith and Life, USMB Board of Faith and Life recommended that we continue our current practice of limiting licensure and ordination for the position of Lead Pastor to men only. We believe that this is an issue that will likely need revisiting again in future years.

A second issue which has received less visibility has been the issue of the nature of the atonement, what Jesus did to reconcile us to God through his death on the cross. At issue are the various views in Scripture and how our Confession of Faith in Article V describes that work and whether MBs believe generally that penal substitution is a valid theory of the atonement. Some thought was given to adding a footnote to the article which would indicate that historically, MBs have embraced the various descriptions of the atonement found in Scripture, and identified by theologians over the centuries, including penal substitution. After seeking the counsel of district Boards of Faith and Life, we determined that there was not sufficient support for adding the footnote and that Article V was best left as it currently reads.

In addition to these two topics, we have also worked at several other things. It is our desire and plan to continue to develop a working relationship with the district boards. There is a wealth of theological knowledge and ecclesiastical wisdom from which to draw and the USMB BFL would be well-served to partner more closely with those boards in the work we do. In both the women in pastoral ministry and the atonement conversations, we have attempted to invite the district boards' involvement and insight. We are grateful for their partnership. Our intention is to continue to involve them in the work of national oversight and theological direction in the future.

We have also continued to work at strengthening our relationship with our seminary and the two colleges. A new Memo of Understanding with Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary has been drafted and approved by the Fresno Pacific University Board of Directors, the USMB Board of Faith and Life and the USMB Leadership Board which outlines our understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like and

how we will engage one another moving forward. One of the practical steps we've taken is to invite the Dean of the Seminary, currently Dr. Valerie Rempel, to join us at one of our two annual meetings. We anticipate that this will continue to build trust and develop a good working relationship with the seminary as well as provide give and take on issues that are common to us.

In March 2019 we hosted the National Pastors Orientation for new pastors. This was well-attended by new pastors from each district and serves to introduce pastors and spouses to USMB personnel, programs, institutions, mission and values. Planning for the 2021 NPO will be started soon.

We are currently working with Connie Faber of the Christian Leader to rewrite portions of the book, *Family Matters*, which is required reading for incoming pastors new to US Mennonite Brethren. The book is outdated and needs refreshed given changes in national and international governance of MBs through the last several decades. The update is in progress.

We completed an addition to the USMB BFL Pamphlet Series titled, *Race Relations: The Difference That Difference Makes*. This is a statement of our support for racial justice and reconciliation and our understanding of the place of race in our world. Given recent events, this is a timely piece and is recommended reading for pastors and leaders as well as all members of USMB churches.

In response to an invitation to share our unique viewpoint with the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service regarding any future return to national conscription, BFL penned a letter which represents our Anabaptist and Evangelical perspective.

USMB BFL is grateful for the collegial working relationship with the Leadership Board, district BFLs and our churches. We look forward to serving our national conference in the upcoming biennium.

Humbly submitted,

Tim Sullivan, Chair  
Terry Hunt  
Aaron Hernandez  
Rick Eshbaugh  
Dennis Fast  
Tim Geddert  
Jana Hildebrandt  
David Loewen  
Mike Petts  
Don Morris