

# Office of the Bishop



Todd H. Fetters  
Interim Bishop

When the gavel fell to close the 2017 National Conference, I was determined to ride a wave of enthusiasm that emerged for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ from the sentiments of our unofficial theme, “Let the Wind Blow!”

Such comments as these put wind in the sails of the United Brethren National Office team and have sustained us over the past two years:

- “I’ve never been so excited and proud to be a UB-er” – several UB pastors.
- “I came away energized and challenged, feeling part of something truly God-inspired and empowered” – UB pastor.
- “Attending this conference helped us see that the UB history is our history” – an international UB official.
- “I wasn’t sure or sold on the UB-thing, as I grew up in a different denomination. But now I get it. I’m in!” – a UB pastor’s spouse.
- God used this conference to re-energize, re-focus, and re-commit our lives to him no matter what is going on around us. We will wait for his wind, and when it blows, we will ride” – UB pastor and spouse.

With our hearts and our eyes set on the Lord’s amazing work among us in 2017, Saint Paul’s prayer became our prayer: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

So, we asked and imagined...and went to work, trusting all the way that God would do more.

## A Vision for the United Brethren in Christ

When asked to articulate my vision for the UBIC, I offer this statement:

*To see the United Brethren in Christ successfully strengthen existing churches and start new churches under the superintending power of the Holy Spirit.*

Ideally, three commitments bring about three realities in a strong local church. Through its commitment to the *Gospel*, a strong church will be *spiritually alive in Christ*. With its commitment to *unity*, a strong church will be *relationally connected to one another*. By committing itself to *mission*, a strong church will be *missionally engaged* in the neighborhoods and among the nations.

Strengthening existing churches and starting new ones is essential for us. But it’s hard work that requires unwavering faith in, disciplined obedience to, and laser-like focus on the Lord’s Great Commission. Together, let’s preoccupy ourselves with the Lord’s track record. The Holy Spirit’s accomplishments in church development and multiplication are legendary. He knows how to start and build churches that even the gates of Hell cannot defeat. *Let the wind blow!*

## A Quadrennial Strategic Focus

In 2017, in addition to communicating regularly with the UBIC family, I laid out five strategic initiatives that would garner my attention for the quadrennium.

### 1. Organize a denomination-wide prayer network.

- We entered into an agreement with Strategic Renewal (Daniel Henderson) as a strategic partner to promote the essential ministry of the Word and prayer to our pastors.
- I participated in a “90 Days to Pastoral Empowerment” cohort with seven other UBIC leaders. It was led by Daniel Henderson. My goal was to improve my own spiritual vitality and to be equipped to model and nurture prayer to other leaders.
- Nearly 37 pastors and leaders will have participated in cohorts by the end of 2019. The goal is to have

*Let's Pray!*



one pastor from each cluster who can serve as a mentor and catalyst for the other pastors and their churches.

- National Conference 2019 will focus on the theme, “Let’s Pray!” with Daniel Henderson serving as our keynote speaker. I want to see a prayer gathering or prayer meetings pop up in our churches that are “worship-based, Scripture-fed, and Spirit-led.” Daniel will present a workshop at National Conference on Thursday, July 18, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Plan to attend with others from your church.

- Mike Dittman conducted “Soulcare Retreats” with most of our clusters to emphasize the importance of leadership teams that prioritize prayer.

- *Future.* I will work with UB Global to develop a platform for inviting intercessors and disseminating requests throughout the denomination that focus on praying for the neighborhoods and for the nations.

## **2. Facilitate a local church assessment and consultation program.**

- The focus that Mike Dittman and I have given to churches has been our own “human resource” rather than some written plan intended for them to follow. We find value in “face to face, heart to heart” connections.

- Mike Dittman will present a practical workshop at National Conference designed to provide a “blueprint” for renewal in the local church. I’m excited about this next step of resourcing for our churches and church leaders.

- One-day or two-day church consults were incorporated with leadership teams whose churches have entered the stationing process to make sure that we understand them well enough to find the right pastor.

## **3. Continue investing in cluster leaders and catalysts for strengthening and starting churches in their region.**

- Most clusters have an assigned cluster leader. Mike Dittman contacts them and actively coaches them. I believe Mike’s mentoring is a value-added investment in our cluster leaders that pays it forward to our pastors.

- Cluster leaders are engaged in the stationing process either with me or as my designee.

- The Barnabas Project is set to go beyond the cluster leader and provide strategic coaching to pastors through trained coaches. Dan Kopp has identified and is training coaches so that every pastor who wants a coach can have one. Dan will train interested coaches at National Conference on Friday afternoon, July 19, from 1:30 – 3:30.

- *Future.* I will design a “task sheet” plan that identifies the tasks associated with the stationing process and assigns the responsibilities among the local church, cluster leaders, and denominational leadership.

## **4. Recruit pastors who can strengthen and start churches.**

- We welcomed Rich VanArsdalen when he approached us with a desire to plant a church in New Philadelphia, Ohio, and partner it with the UBIC. Rich is the brother of Dr. Dan VanArsdalen (Kunkle UB church, Kunkle, Ohio).

- We use online resources to build a pool when we post the opening of churches.

- We are identifying and talking to staff pastors about a future as senior pastors.

- Mike Dittman continues to be a voice for church planting inside and outside the denomination. I appreciate his work with Rich VanArsdalen and Christopher Little (Harrisburg, Pa.).

- Our Fresh Start Initiative has laid out the pathway for church planters to identify with us and enables us to assess them, and hopefully assign them. Andy Sikora is an important strategic partner who both models fruitful church planting and mentors those we recruit.

- As Mike Dittman and Andy Sikora work on recruitment and promotion of church planting, I have put my energies into building a financial nest egg for the initiative. I have actively marketed four UBIC-owned properties. Two have sold. Two others are being considered. Additionally, I promote church multiplication to churches that close. We received contributions from two such churches. Both churches viewed their contributions as an investment to begin something new and fresh for God’s Kingdom. For that I am extremely grateful.

## **5. Appeal to churches to identify and invest in our next generations of pastors, church planters, and missionaries.**

- We partnered with Huntington University’s Veritas Theological Institute and we promote it among UB licensed ministers and churches. Veritas, for young people who have completed their sophomore or junior year of high school, is entering its third year this summer. Veritas is a week-long academy for high school students who are interested in deeper theological study or may be interested in pursuing a career in ministry.



Veritas helps provide a strong theological foundation that will be invaluable as they continue pursuing God's call on their lives.

- *Future.* I will promote a call to prayer among UBIC churches that focuses on our next generations of pastors, church planting pastors, and missionaries.

## Partnerships that are Important to the UBIC

### UB Global

UB Global, our international outreach arm, is a shared partnership with the United Brethren Church in Canada. It's technically the UB mission agency for the North American churches, not just the United States National Conference. This can be confusing at times, especially since the UB Global staff is part of the US National Conference office and accountability lines can seem blurred. But it's important to recognize that this is a partnership which has existed since 2001 (when we created what was then called Global Ministries).

The UB Global board consists of members from both the United States and Canada, based roughly on their proportional giving toward missions. Currently, there are 11 members of the UB Global board, and three of them are from Canada. Mark Wallace, who chairs the UB Global board, is a member of the Mill Crossing UB church in Cambridge, Ontario.

I appreciate the leadership of Jeff Bleijerveld, the executive director of UB Global, and the willingness of the UB Global staff to help the US national ministries whenever they can. For instance, they, like all members of the UBNO staff, have carried major responsibilities in organizing the 2019 US National Conference.

### Huntington University

Huntington University has been our preferred partner in higher education since 1897, when the denomination founded the college. We are grateful for the re-energized partnership between the denomination and university. Our president, Dr. Sherilyn Emberton, is a visionary, action-oriented leader who is a devoted friend of the church. She greatly values the University's relationship with the denomination, and reinforces the importance of this relationship whenever given the chance.

We can all be very proud of our college. They are continually adding programs and expanding — the campus in Arizona, the MBA and Agriculture programs, the flourishing doctoral program in Occupational Therapy, and more. Big plans are in the works as the University approaches its 125th anniversary in 2022.

### National Association of Evangelicals

The UBIC has been a member of the National Association of Evangelicals since 1953, which would be 66 of its 77-year history. The NAE now represents nearly 40 denominations and a constituency of millions of evangelical Christians.

Currently, the NAE vice president is one of our own — Heather Gonzales, the oldest daughter of former bishop Paul Hirschy. In years past, various UB bishops have served on the NAE executive committee. Don Duff, at the time a member of Emmanuel Community Church (Fort Wayne, Ind.), provided extremely valuable leadership to NAE and its mission arm, World Relief, in areas of finance and administration. I am honored to serve on the NAE Presidential Search Committee which, for the past year, has been working to find a successor to Leith Anderson. Three United Brethren have been honored as NAE Layperson(s) of the Year: Drs. Orville and Ruth Merillat in 1988, and Don Duff in 1990.

Our connection with NAE benefited us with the Lilly Grant they received to improve clergy financial health. Gary Dille runs point for this important program. Over the past 2-3 years, we met a goal that the National Association of Evangelicals made to equal \$50,000 of "new money" that we raise or receive. We have over \$96,000 available as grants to our licensed ministers. I want to continue to promote this during the next two years, including a match of an additional \$30,000-\$40,000. In addition to raising grant money, I



want to be a stronger voice, along with Gary, for church generosity and clergy compensation and support.

One of our Core Values as a worldwide fellowship of churches is, “We Link with the Larger Church.” The statement says:

*We value connections with Christians outside of the United Brethren family. We are not separatist in mentality or practice. Rather, we intentionally develop connections with other Christian denominations and groups which are similar in purpose and spirit, so that we can more broadly advance the work of the Great Commission and impact our world.*

The NAE follows that same concept, uniting like-minded denominations. I feel that NAE provides the gold standard definition for evangelicals in a day when the word “evangelical” is sometimes viewed negatively. The NAE also provides a non-partisan, Bible-based, winsome, and wise voice in the public square.

## UB National Office Staff

As bishop, I oversee the staff at the National Office. Ten persons work out of the office in Huntington. Two others work from their homes. We have a strong staff which labors hard to serve the United Brethren in Christ.

*Bishop's Office.* In addition to myself, six other persons would be considered part of the Bishop's office. Cathy Reich is the administrative assistant, and spearheads all the details of the national conference meetings, the annual women's conference, and the various pastors' summits. Steve Dennie is the Communications director. Marci Hammel, the Finance director, is assisted by Judy Dyer. Mike Dittman, the National Ministries director, works from his home in Michigan. Jim Bolich gives one day a week as Director of Ministerial Licensing. He works from his home in Chambersburg, Pa.

*UB Global.* Jeff Bleijerveld, executive director of UB Global, is joined by four persons. Jana Gass is the administrative assistant. There are three associate directors: Frank Y, Michelle Harris, and David Kline.

*Gary Gates.* When I was appointed Interim Bishop in 2015, one of my first staffing responsibilities was to secure a Director of Ministerial Licensing. Gary Gates had been serving in that role since 2010, while also pastoring the South Scipio UB church in Harlan, Ind. I asked Gary, who was then retiring as pastor, to continue as Director of Ministerial Licensing for another year. It turned into a second year. On September 5, 2017, Jim Bolich was appointed to that role.

I appreciate Gary's service. He solidified and simplified our complex system for licensing, he introduced the UB Ministerial Association, we began holding regional UB History courses, and he instituted the provisional license. Most significantly, we got a firm handle on where United Brethren men and women were in the licensing process, and shepherded them toward furthering their education and pursuing ordination. For me personally, Gary was a kind and supportive mentor.

*Jane Seely.* The only other staff change involved Jane Seely, who worked at the UBNO for eight years. After the 2017 US National Conference, we decided to eliminate the marketing operation, which we called Church Resources, at the end of the year. This was Jane's area. Jane saw it coming, and accepted the decision with the utmost graciousness. We appreciate Jane's years of service to the churches of our denomination, and the cheerful spirit she brought to the office. She is missed.

## Insights on Stationing in the UBIC

Since 2015, I've participated in stationing nearly 60 senior pastors. This consumes a great deal of my time. I'm grateful for Mike Dittman and the cluster leaders, who carry much of the load, but it still requires a lot of my attention — as it should. I'm also pleased with how it bonds a bishop with a congregation at a time of significant need.

Prior to 2005, pastoral stationing was done through the annual conferences, each of which had their own stationing committee. With the dissolution of the annual conferences in 2005, this responsibility was centralized in the bishop's office.

At any given time, I am dealing with a half dozen or more church openings. We assemble a stationing committee consisting of the bishop, cluster leader, and persons from the local church. The church leaders develop a parish profile, and we go from there. Sometimes the process goes smoothly and quickly, such as when an associate pastor is available who is ready and willing to become the senior pastor.



Other times, it becomes a longer process, especially if church leaders disagree on their vision for the church's future. In those cases, some discussion and steering is needed. Each church is different, so transitions take various forms. But overall, I'm very pleased with the pastoral assignments made during the past two years, using ministers already within our ranks and also drawing in some quality ministers from outside.

## Summits and Other Gatherings

### General Conference

General Conference was held July 16-17, 2017, during the two days after the US National Conference. We met at King Street UB church in Chambersburg, Pa. Each national conference could send two delegates. Jeff Bleijerveld and I represented the US National Conference.

Sierra Leone, Canada, Honduras, Hong Kong, and Jamaica each sent two delegates. Nicaragua sent one delegate. We had no representation from Mexico, Guatemala, or the Philippines. We also had representatives from several mission districts: Germany, Liberia, Macau, and India.

The delegates took action to remove the Philippines from membership in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International. That leaves us with nine national conferences.

### Pastor & Spouse Summits

In 2014 and 2016, we held summits for senior pastors and spouses, based on the attendance of the church they serve — under 150, 150-300, and 300+. We followed that same format in 2018, with all three events held in Daytona Beach, Fla. Lisa and I attended each summit, along with Mike Dittman.

*April 9-12, 2018.* Nine pastoral couples from churches with an attendance of 300+ attended.

*April 23-27, 2018.* Twelve senior pastors and nine spouses attended the summit for churches of 150-300 attendance.

*April 30–May 3, 2018.* The summit for churches with an attendance below 150 was the largest. We had 22 pastoral couples, plus six senior pastors attending by themselves. Pam Dittman was also able to attend.

### Staff Summits

In addition to the summits for senior pastors and spouses, we held events for persons serving in staff positions. These, too, were held in Daytona Beach, Fla.

*Youth.* The Youth Workers Summit is held every year. This event was held April 23-27, 2018, with 26 persons attending; and April 29 – May 3, 2019, with 24 persons attending.

*Associate Staff.* The Associate Pastor Summit was held May 7-11, 2018, with an attendance of 37.

For 2020, we plan to combine all staff summits — associate, youth, worship, etc. — into a single event.

### Women's Conference

The Women's Ministry Team does a great job putting together the UB Women's Conference every two years. The most recent meeting was held September 28-30, 2018, in Toledo Ohio, with a capacity registration of 250.

### Cluster Winter Gatherings

Each January, the cluster leaders are brought together for a couple days of training and team-building. Bishop Ron Ramsey began this practice in 2006, and it has served us well.

The 2018 edition was held January 22-23 at Huntington University, with 21 cluster leaders attending. The 2019 Winter Gathering was held January 14-15 at Emmanuel Community Church in Fort Wayne, with 20 of the 24 cluster leaders present.

### Regional Gatherings

In 2011, Bishop Phil Whipple began holding regional meetings to brief people on the upcoming national conference, and particularly about the proposals delegates would address. These have been valuable meetings.

In preparation for the 2019 US National Conference, I led five such meetings: in Chambersburg, Pa.; Willshire, Ohio; Sunfield, Mich.; Franklin, Pa.; and an online edition which drew people from coast to coast.



### Hispanic Churches

In 2005, most of our churches in California, including some thriving Hispanic churches, withdrew from the denomination. That left just one United Brethren church in California — the UB church in Pixley. I am exploring the possibility of bringing some of those Hispanic churches back into the United Brethren fold.

We also have several Hispanic churches in El Paso, Texas, and one in Santa Fe, New Mexico. These affiliated with us through the influence of Denis Casco when he was Director of Latin American Ministries (he is now bishop of Mexico Conference). Their status has been somewhat murky. I want to meet with them and explore bringing them more fully into the life of the US National Conference.

## On A Personal Note

My work as bishop has been supported by many individuals and groups. I'm happy to say that I never feel alone in this multi-faceted role or without help in the many tasks. The gratitude expressed by Saint Paul to the Thessalonian believers mirrors much of my own: "[I] remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). I give credit to the following:

1. *A Devoted Family*. I thank the Lord for my family. Lisa and I have travelled many miles over the past two years. We enjoy our time together and we find blessing every time we connect with clergy couples and the churches they serve. We officially became empty-nesters during this time. Our sons, Jordan and Quinn, are finding their way in God's big world. Jordan serves on staff in the athletic department at California Baptist University (Riverside, Calif.). Quinn is looking for his next opportunity to work with individuals with special needs.

2. *A Dedicated United Brethren National Office Team (UBNO)*. I thank the Lord for the UBNO team. This dedicated and talented group serves the Church of the United Brethren in Christ very well. Their hard work amazes me and makes me proud. Every day these team members walk into 302 Lake Street determined to serve our churches, pastors, and missionaries. We believe in our mission to assist the local church. Over the past two years, each of us can point to the sustaining grace of God and the encouragement of other members. None of us were immune to life's changes and challenges — personal illness, battles with cancer, family trials, etc. And through it all, we come to you this National Conference confident to say, "God can be trusted. Great is His faithfulness."

3. *A Collaborative Executive Leadership Team (ELT)*. I thank the Lord for the ELT members. They are such a blessing to the Church. These 12 individuals have helped to shape the vision we have to strengthen and start churches. We acknowledge together that the air of cynicism and skepticism is moving out as a fresh air of hope and optimism is moving in as we've been determined to trust the Holy Spirit to "let the Wind blow!"

4. *A Praying Church*. I thank the Lord for the many texts, emails, phone calls, and personal conversations that inform me that I am being prayed for every day. Can't even imagine that this role could be done without a praying, supportive Church. Furthermore, it is the only way understanding, discernment, and wisdom from the Lord are granted.

5. *A Faithful Lord*. I thank the Lord for being present and active. I've grown to rely on the name, Jehovah Jireh — the Lord our Provider (Abraham with young Isaac — Genesis 22:1-14). When a church needs a pastor, I've seen the Lord provide the right person at the right time. When I'm desperate to speak into a challenging situation, the Lord provides the right words at the right time. When a new opportunity needs resourcing, the Lord provides the right means at the right time. I've learned that the Lord — Jehovah Jireh — is always on time with the right provision.