

DISCIPLINE REVISION: Other Proposals

34-1

Report 34 contains a total of 22 revisions to the *Discipline*. Most are minor or editorial changes—little more than housecleaning. In some cases, the proposed revisions bring the *Discipline* into line with actual practice. Other revisions remove unnecessary material or clarify existing content.

To streamline deliberations on the conference floor, the revisions have been grouped into just ten proposals, each containing 1-3 revisions.

Proposal 1: Standards of the Church

Definition of the Family (Chapter 5)

¶121.2. The “single parent household” definition needs to include situations which go beyond those spelled out. For instance, a man or woman may have custody of children from a sibling who has died or is incarcerated. A single may also be a foster parent.

¶121.4 also needs revision, since some singles (such as divorced persons) do not necessarily choose to be single. The new wording would bring this statement into line with the opening paragraph of ¶122 Singleness.

Current wording of ¶121 Family: Definition

We recognize that a family can take four forms:

1. A married couple (male husband and female wife) who may or may not have children.
2. A single parent household, in which a male or female parent is charged with the responsibility of raising and nurturing his/her natural or adopted children.
3. A widow or widower who is left without children at home.
4. A single person who has chosen to live on his/her own as a separate household.

Reword points 2 and 4, so that the entire section reads as follows:

We recognize that a family can take four forms:

1. A married couple (male husband and female wife) who may or may not have children.
2. **A single parent household, in which a man or woman has responsibility for raising and nurturing children.**
3. A widow or widower who is left without children at home.
4. **A single person living as a separate household.**

Proposal 2: Ministers

2a. Expectations of Ministers (Chapter 7, ¶204.2)

This proposal would delete the ending clause in the second sentence of ¶204.2. The revision addresses a minister's relationships with all people, regardless of sex or age.

Current wording of ¶204.2:

2. Spiritual Development and Lifestyle

All ministers should give priority time to their own spiritual development through the disciplines of prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and fasting. They should be wise managers of their time and careful stewards of their relationships with all people, especially with regard to the opposite sex. They should use their speech judiciously, speaking evil of no one, and should take the initiative in restoring broken relationships.

Revise the second sentence of ¶204.2 (in bold) as follows:

2. Spiritual Development and Lifestyle

All ministers should give priority time to their own spiritual development through the disciplines of prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and fasting. **They should be wise managers of their time, and above reproach in their relationships with all people.** They should use their speech judiciously, speaking evil of no one, and should take the initiative in restoring broken relationships.

2b. Duties of Senior Pastors (¶438.4)

This was written at a time when denominational newsletters were sent to churches to be distributed in bulletins. This proposal would remove reference to specific publications, which can change, and use the generic "communications."

Current wording of ¶438.4:

4. By promoting church newsletters and other communications.

Revise as follows:

4. By promoting communications from the national office.

Proposal 3: Geographic Organization

3a. Church of the UBIC International (§302.8)

Mission districts are groups of churches in a country which haven't yet organized as a national conference. All mission districts are under the supervision of an existing national conference. India, for instance, is a mission district of the US National Conference. Mission districts need to be included as part of the total UB Church International.

Revise §302.8 to include mission districts, by adding the words in bold:

8. Church of the United Brethren in Christ International

All United Brethren national conferences **and their mission districts** are part of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ International.

3b. Right to Books and Records (§303)

This paragraph goes back to a time when nearly all positions at every level—the local church, annual conference, and denominational levels—were elected. We've long since moved away from that, but the intent is still relevant for non-elected positions. The proposal basically changes "elected" to "selected," tweaks some other language, and makes gender references consistent with the rest of the *Discipline*.

Current wording of §303, "Right to Books and Records"

Any person who has been elected to an office is entitled to immediate possession of all papers, documents, books, records, and minutes pertaining to the past acts and proceedings of said office. The predecessor shall turn over all such documents and records in his/her possession.

Replace with the following:

All persons selected for local church or denominational offices are entitled to immediate possession of all papers, documents, books, records, and minutes pertaining to that office. Predecessors shall turn over all such documents and records in their possession.

Proposal 4: Membership

We have three relatively minor revisions in chapter 10.

4a. Definition of Membership ¶411

This proposal condenses the currently wordy definition of membership (which came from a 2005 study).

Current Definition of Membership in ¶411. Strikethrough indicates material to be deleted.

Membership is a process that best marks and maintains a believer's commitment to life transformation, while working to ensure the integrity, unity, and building up of the church. ~~Thus, membership is more like discipleship than enlistment. It is more than simply being saved, but less than what a believer becomes in a lifetime of spiritual growth. Membership is not about an organization, but about the living organism of Christ's Body. It is not about privilege, but about becoming more like Christ in the context of a local and worldwide community. "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7).~~

Shorten as follows:

Membership is a process that best marks and maintains a believer's commitment to life transformation, while working to ensure the integrity, unity, and building up of the church. It is not about privilege, but about becoming more like Christ in the context of a local and worldwide community. (Colossians 2:6-7)

4b. Membership Accountability (¶412.4)

The last sentence of this paragraph is either unnecessary, or needs to spell out where exactly expectations are "clearly stated and printed." This proposal would delete that sentence as follows:

4. Mutual accountability is essential to the maturity of the church member. Believers who choose membership in a United Brethren church voluntarily accept being held accountable for their Christian faith and practice. ~~The church's expectations for its members are clearly stated and printed.~~

4c. Receiving Members (¶415)

This section is currently presented as a liturgy of sorts to be read in public. This proposal would shorten the section and make it more consistent with the rest of the *Discipline*.

Current Wording. Words to be removed are in strikethrough.

¶415 Receiving Members

Each church may determine the procedure for accepting qualified persons into membership.

It is important that new members and the congregation bond. Thus, the church should find a satisfactory way to communicate to its entire body the favorable answers to the following questions.

1. Receiving Adult Members

~~As a church, we believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, the regeneration of the soul, a wholly surrendered and Spirit-filled life, and growth in grace and knowledge of the truth. We believe that there must be perseverance in Christian living and faithfulness in Christian witness to promote harmony in our relationship with the Savior.~~

~~—Our beliefs are further indicated by the questions which follow:~~

~~—(The minister shall then ask the prospective member the following questions:)~~

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

~~If so, answer, "I do."~~

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

~~If so, answer, "I so believe."~~

c. Are you determined by the grace of God to follow Christ, renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to live a life of holiness and devotion to God and his cause?

~~If so, answer, "I am."~~

d. Are you willing to be governed by our church Discipline, and are you willing to be placed under the authority of the local church?

~~If so, answer, "I am."~~

e. Are you willing to give of your time, talent, and means to the support of the various interests of this church according to your ability?

~~If so, answer, "I am."~~

f. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized at your earliest convenience?

2. Receiving Student Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

~~If so, answer, "I do."~~

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

~~If so, answer, "I so believe."~~

c. Do you promise to attend the services of the church and to read the Bible and pray, so that you may become more and more like Jesus?

If so, answer, “I promise.”

d. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

¶415 will then read as follows:

¶415 Receiving Members

Each church may determine the procedure for accepting qualified persons into membership. It is important that new members and the congregation bond. Thus, the church should find a satisfactory way to communicate to its entire body the favorable answers to the following questions.

1. Questions for Adult Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

c. Are you determined by the grace of God to follow Christ, renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to live a life of holiness and devotion to God and his cause?

d. Are you willing to be governed by our church *Discipline*, and are you willing to be placed under the authority of the local church?

e. Are you willing to give of your time, talent, and means to the support of the various interests of this church according to your ability?

f. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized at your earliest convenience?

2. Questions for Student Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that he accepts you as his child?

c. Do you promise to attend the services of the church and to read the Bible and pray, so that you may become more and more like Jesus?

d. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

Proposal 5: Churches in Crisis

There are three proposed changes in chapters 13 and 14.

5a. Churches in Crisis/Intervention Strategies (§441.2c)

This proposal removes a provision for denying a church the right to vote at National Conference. This would create a category of church which isn't explained anywhere else in the *Discipline* and, assuming the church continues paying the Partnership Fee, would in effect constitute "taxation without representation."

Delete the second sentence of §441.2c:

c. Maintenance Plan. A maintenance plan would allow the congregation to decide to continue its present course, but without any further outside intervention and/or assistance. ~~The church would lose its voice in the national conference after five years of no progress toward an agreed plan.~~

5b. Closing a Church (§442.3)

§442.3 lists four actions to take after a local board decides to close a church. The first requirement is that the board determine which 501(c)(3) organization will receive the property. In practice, property of closed churches is not always transferred to another non-profit organization. For instance, some closed churches have become private homes. However, proceeds from the sale of church property must end up with a non-profit. This proposal revises the wording to reflect this.

Current wording of §442.3, "Closing the Church":

The final decision will be made by the local board. When that decision is made, the following actions will occur:

- a. The local church will determine the 501(c)(3) organization that will receive the property.

Revise §442.3a as follows:

The final decision will be made by the local board. When that decision is made, the following actions will occur:

- a. The local church will determine the disposition of the property. Any proceeds from selling the property will be transferred to a 501(c)(3) organization chosen by the local board.

5c. Churches that Withdraw (§453)

Most of the statements in §453, which were adopted in 2013, conflict in some way with the United Brethren Ministerial Association. Since this section is not necessary, it would be removed from the *Discipline*. The PMLT can determine whether anything on this subject should be included in the Pastoral Ministry Handbook.

Delete ¶453:

¶453 Withdrawing: Ramifications for Ministers

1. Ministerial licenses and ordinations will no longer be valid as of the withdrawal date.
2. Any members of the church who are licensed United Brethren ministers must surrender their credentials or transfer their membership to another United Brethren church.
3. Ministers may be unable to perform certain duties, such as weddings, depending on local or state laws.
4. Ministers will not qualify for housing allowance unless they are under the umbrella of a group with a federal 501(c)(3) status.
5. All participants in the denomination's retirement program will be terminated from that program according to its requirements. Some current retirement benefits could be lost or affected.

Proposal 6: The National Conference

Three changes are proposed for chapter 15.

6a. Purpose of the US National Conference (¶501)

In ¶501, revise the purpose to state it in one sentence. Material being removed is already covered under Duties of the National Conference.

Current Wording

The United States National Conference shall oversee all affairs pertaining to its various ministries. The US National Conference shall establish policies pertaining to the ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, United States of America.

Replace with the Following:

The United States National Conference shall oversee all affairs pertaining to the ministry of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, United States of America.

6b. Lay Representation (¶503.2)

In practice, the bishop does not announce how many lay delegates each church can send. Rather, churches determine this on their own based on guidance in the *Discipline*. Also, the year used for statistics needs to be spelled out more precisely. This change will bring the *Discipline* into line with actual practice.

Current ¶503.2a, "Lay Representation":

- a. The bishop shall, as early as possible, announce the number of lay delegates to which each local church is entitled. The number will be based on the official statistics at the end of the first year of the biennium.

Replace with the following:

a. The number of lay delegates for each church will be based on the official statistics at the end of the first full year preceding the national conference.

6c. Responsibilities of the National Conference

¶505.3 needs a few words of explanation.

¶505.4: In practice, the ELT adopts the coming year's budget—not the US National Conference. Other financial policies are left to the ELT or the Office of the Bishop.

Current wording of ¶505.3-4:

3. The US National Conference shall consider the revision of the *Discipline*.

4. The US National Conference shall establish financial policies for developing the annual budget for the US national church. The Executive Leadership Team will adopt the budget the years that the US National Conference does not meet.

Replace with the following:

3. The US National Conference shall consider proposals for revising the *Discipline*.

4. The US National Conference shall oversee the financial stewardship of the US national church.

Proposal 7: The US Bishop (Chapter 16)

7a. Appointing a chairperson in the bishop's stead (¶504.1)

This proposal addresses a situation which actually occurred at our 2015 US National Conference, when the ELT needed to appoint a chairperson.

Add the sentence in bold to ¶504.1:

¶504.1 The Bishop

The US bishop shall be chairperson of the US National Conference. **In the absence of the bishop, the Executive Leadership Team shall designate an ordained United Brethren minister as chairperson.**

7b. Duties of the Bishop (¶512)

Most of the duties begin with a verb, but a few begin with "The bishop shall." Consistency is needed, so editorial changes would be made in four places. In addition, ¶512.4b would be revised.

Current wording of ¶512.3 and ¶512.4.

512.3 Beliefs and Practices

a. The bishop shall interpret the Discipline. This ruling shall stand until the next meeting of the US National Conference or the Executive Leadership Team.

512.4 Partnerships

a. The bishop shall ensure that US National Conference entities comply with any joint ministry agreements with any other United Brethren national conferences.

b. The bishop shall, at his discretion, participate in or designate someone to represent the US National Conference to parachurch and inter-denominational ministries, and to other evangelical denominations.

c. Encourage and promote continuing relationships with the international conferences.

d. The bishop is an ex-officio member of the US delegation to the General Conference.

e. Appoint the appropriate number of delegates to represent the US National Conference to the General Conference. [See ¶33, International Bylaws]

Revise as follows:

512.3 Beliefs and Practices

a. Interpret the Discipline. The bishop's ruling shall stand until the next meeting of the US National Conference or the Executive Leadership Team.

512.4 Partnerships

a. Ensure that US National Conference entities comply with any joint ministry agreements with other United Brethren national conferences.

b. Oversee United Brethren relationships with parachurch and inter-denominational ministries, and with other evangelical denominations.

c. Encourage and promote continuing relationships with the international conferences.

d. Serve as an ex-officio member of the US delegation to the General Conference.

e. Appoint the appropriate number of delegates to represent the US National Conference to the General Conference. [See ¶33, International Bylaws]

Proposal 8: Executive Leadership Team

8a. Purpose of the ELT (¶601)

This is basically an editorial change. Delete the end of the sentence, which includes information already stated in ¶605.1 Duties.

¶601 Purpose

The Executive Leadership Team shall conduct business between sessions of the US National Conference in accordance with the plans and policies of the US National Conference.

8b. Duties of the ELT (¶605)

Approving job descriptions and operating procedures is a management function, which is already included under the duties of the US Bishop in chapter 16. The ELT doesn't get involved in these areas, but focuses on policy issues.

In ¶605, delete the words in strikethrough, as follows:

6. The Executive Leadership Team shall develop and approve evaluation procedures for the US bishop, ~~and shall approve job descriptions and evaluation procedures for the directors and staff.~~

8. ~~The Executive Leadership Team shall approve job descriptions and operating procedures of leadership for inclusion in the manual of operations.~~

8c. Duties of the ELT: Finances (¶605)

This proposal adds two finance-related duties: one about adopting the annual budget (which the ELT already does in practice), and one regarding the partnership fee (nowhere does the *Discipline* state who has authority to change the partnership fee).

Add the following as new duties of the ELT:

9. The Executive Leadership Team will adopt the annual budget for the US National Conference.

10. The Executive Leadership Team shall recommend to the US National Conference any change in the partnership fee.

Proposal 9: Higher Education Leadership Team

The Discipline states four duties of the Higher Education Leadership Team. The third one, ¶617.3, is inaccurate, since the HU Board of Trustees (not the HELT) has legal oversight of Huntington University. This proposal would delete that duty, and leave the other three. The whole paragraph is given below for context.

Current wording of ¶617:

617 Duties and Powers

1. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for policies which effect the work of higher education in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, USA.
2. The Higher Education Leadership Team shall report to the meetings of the US National Conference and the Executive Leadership Team.
3. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for the oversight of Huntington University in Huntington, Indiana.
4. The Higher Education Leadership Team is responsible for the oversight of the United Brethren Historical Society.

Replace ¶617.3 with the following:

3. The Higher Education Leadership Team represents the beliefs, practices, and interests of the denomination to the Huntington University Board of Trustees.

Proposal 10: Editorial Changes

A number of changes can be made editorially. Such changes do not require changing the substance of anything in the *Discipline*.

1. Many parts of the *Discipline* include long, unnumbered prose paragraphs, sometimes with multiple provisions in each paragraph. Numbering needs to be inserted to make it easier to reference specific statements. This can be done very simply without changing any content or meaning. In a couple places, a word or two may need to be added for the sake of consistency. Paragraphs in question include: 111, 113, 115, 119, 123, 124, 128, 131, 136, 141, 142, 143, 144, 201, 202, 203, 204, 503, 531, 604, 614, 615, 616
2. With ¶141, give these headings to the three long paragraphs: 141.1 Discrimination; 141.2 Equality and Justice; 141.3 Compassion and Service.
3. In ¶613.2a, change “commission” to “team.”
4. Renumber as necessary, due to revisions made at National Conference.