Leadership Council approves new USMB staff position

Leadership Council issues statement, makes appointment and approves budget during October meeting

By **CL Staff** - October 28, 2022

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USMB Leadership Council members gather around Bruce Enns, seated, the new Multiply general director, for a time of prayer for Enns and the mission agency. Photo: USMB

Oct. 31, 2022 Update: This *news story was updated to reflect a change in the title of the new USMB staff member and to clarify Bruce Enns' attendance.*

When the USMB Leadership Council met Oct. 7-8, 2022, in Denver, Colorado, members approved a new USMB staff position, discussed a number of significant issues and heard reports.

At the recommendation of the National Strategy Team, the Leadership Board approved the creation of a part-time position for an integrated immigrant coordinator and appointed Henri Ngolo to fill that position, beginning Nov. 1, 2022.

In addition to funding from USMB, the Central, Eastern, Pacific and Southern District Conferences will also help fund the new position beginning January 1. The national conference will cover all expenses in November and December 2022. Ngolo is also responsible for raising some of the needed funds.

Ngolo, who will be a USMB employee, will specifically serve Congolese churches that are members of USMB or are interested in affiliating with the U.S. Conference of MB Churches.

Additional decisions

In other decisions, David Zarate, from La Grulla, Texas, was affirmed as the USMB representative to Mennonite Disaster Service. He replaces Judy Lopez.

The board approved the 2023 budget of $1,029,500, which compares to $1,004,500 for 2022. Church receipts for 2023 are budgeted at $380,000 and staff funding raising is projected to net $207,000. Income from other sources, including $180,000 from MB Foundation, makes up the remainder.

The council discussed how to respond to the recent decision by Mennonite Church USA to fully include LGBTQIA persons in the church as outlined in *A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation*. Specifically, the council discussed the invitation from MennoMedia, the publishing arm of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, to be part of project celebrating the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism.

Following the Leadership Council meeting, on Oct 25, the Leadership Board released this statement: "To commemorate the upcoming 500th anniversary of Anabaptism, the Mennonite Church USA's (MC USA) publishing ministry is spearheading a potential Anabaptist Study Bible Project. The U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (USMB) and others have been invited to collaborate in this effort. While we, as USMB, affirm the place for a project like this, we have chosen not to participate.

"This decision is connected to MC USA's recent *A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation*, wherein they state positions contrary to our confession of faith. In lines 110 and 111 of the resolution, MC USA commits to advocating for these positions as they interact with other denominations and faith-based groups. As a result, at the last gathering of USMB's National Leadership Board, it was determined that entering into a collaborative project such as a study Bible would not be appropriate."

The Leadership Council spent considerable time considering several other agenda items, including the reversion clause as it appears in the national conference bylaws.

The reversion clause, which states "should a member church withdraw or be dissolved, its capital assets shall become the property of the district conference of which the church is a member" (USMB bylaws, Article IV, Section 1.D), was a topic of debate at an optional session during the USMB national convention this summer. Council members reported that several districts are also reviewing their bylaws regarding reversion clause statements.

Representatives give updates

The Leadership Council heard reports from ministry representatives. In his report, USMB national director Don Morris reviewed the recent International Community of Mennonite Brethren summit held in Brazil, shared his desire to focus on encouraging USMB churches to "look outside themselves," spoke of opportunities to partner with the Canadian Conference of MB Churches and announced that Gathering 2024 will be held in Omaha, Nebraska.

Kyle Goings, who serves as one of three part-time Leadership Pipeline mobilizers, reported for USMB Youth. USMB staff member Brian Harris, who began serving Aug. 1, 2022, as the church planting mobilizer, reported on the work of the Church Planting Council.

In addition to bringing the recommendation for an Integrated Ministries advocate, Terry Hunt, a member of the National Strategy Team and chair of the Congolese Task Force, reported on progress made in meeting the needs of immigrant congregations.

Jordan Ringhofer, representing the national Board of Faith and Life, said BFL as well as the Pacific District BFL have affirmed the recommendation that Gary Wall's ordination and credentials be rescinded. The national BFL informed national convention delegates that attended the first of two optional sessions about the recommendation from a Restoration Team that Wall's ordination and credentials be revoked and this his ministry status be updated to indicate that Wall is "not suited to serve in a district, national or international role in the Mennonite Brethren denomination unless and until he chooses to re-engage in a satisfactory reconciliation process with denominational leadership."

Ringhofer also reported that BFL is discussing resource materials related to LGBTQIA issues and sexual misconduct.

District ministers Hunt (Eastern), Ringhofer (Pacific) and Daniel Rodriguez (Central) gave updates on activities in their districts. Xavier Pina reported on the Hispanic Council, a group of 34 Hispanic churches within the PDC. Jon Wiebe reported for MB Foundation.

Friday morning, Bruce Enns, Multiply general director, met briefly with the council who prayed for him in his new role.

Morris encouraged council members to read written reports provided by USMB staff members.

The Leadership Council consists of 10 elected voting members (Leadership Board) and 10 nonvoting members representing district conferences and various national ministries

Leadership Board members present at the October meeting were Gaven Banik, Boris Borisov, Kelsey Ensz, Darrin Foddrell, Luke Haidle, Jared Pulliam, Brianne Shaw, Saron Tesfaye and Dave Thiessen. Darren Rempel was absent. Council members present were Kyle Goings, Terry Hunt, Don Morris, Xavier Pina, Jordan Ringhofer, Daniel Rodriguez and Jon Wiebe. Council members absent were Aaron Hernandez and Tim Sullivan. Bruce Enns and Brian Harris were present as guests.

National Strategy Team

The National Strategy Team (NST) met Oct. 6, 2022, to discuss its current projects.

NST members reviewed plans to hire a part-time advocate to work with Congolese congregations in the U.S., heard an update from Brian Harris, church planting mobilizer, reviewed LEAD Initiatives spearheaded by the national USMB office and heard from each representative present about strategies and programs they are involved with.

The National Strategy Team was formed in 2016 to advise, organize and direct efforts to achieve the USMB core commitments of evangelism/church planting, intentional disciple-making and leadership development. It is comprised of the five USMB district ministers, Don Morris, USMB national director, and a representative from Multiply and MB Foundation. Resource people and various experts join meetings as needed.

Board of Faith and Life

The Board of Faith and Life met Oct. 5, 2022. Minutes of the meeting were not available at the time this article was posted.

CL Staff

This article has been posted by Christian Leader staff. The Christian Leader is the magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren.