

Evergreen News

A Pastor's Perception

Am I Conscientious?

I'm not entirely sure I know what that word means. Do I have a conscience? Do I listen to it? And as a follower of Jesus, is my conscience shaped by, informed by, led by His Spirit?

When I think of conscientious, I actually think of Jesus. Paul explains it to the church in Philippi as having the mind of Christ.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." — Philippians 2:3-5

To be conscientious, I have to think of others. Which means I can't be selfish.

I don't want to narrow who "others" means, either. It's easy to think of the people closest to us. It's a lot easier to forget the people far from us. And honestly, sometimes it's hard not to just be selfish, just looking out for me.

Here's the thing our culture gets backwards. We're told to trust our conscience, follow your gut, listen to your own inner voice, as if it's the final word. But scripture never treats conscience as self-authenticating. It treats it as something that needs a teacher. Left to itself, shaped only by culture and comfort, a conscience will eventually call good things evil and evil things good. That's not just a private, personal concern. That's how an entire people loses its moral bearing.

So when I spend time with Jesus, listening to Him, reading the accounts of His life, His way, His truth, I'm not just picking up information. I'm letting Him retrain what my conscience even responds to.

Being conscientious requires a renewing of my mind. Time spent letting His influence outweigh every other voice.

Another question I keep asking: will we be doing this in eternity? In the presence of our Lord and Savior?

Jesus taught us to pray it: **Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** That's not a line we recite and move past. It's a request. And if it's really our petition, not just words we say, then

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AUGUST EVENTS

Weekly Events

- *Sunday School/Small Groups
8:30 am
- *Sunday Large Group
Gathering at 9:45 am
- *Monday Ladies Bible Study
11 am
- *Wednesday Youth 6:30 pm
- *Thursday Men's Bible Study
7 pm
- *Men's Bible Study Saturday
mornings at 7 am at
Hawthorne's

**Our Vision
Statement:**
***"To Know, Love,
& Follow Jesus
by
serving All"***



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						¹ 3M 7 am
² Sunday School 8:30 am Large Group Gathering 9:45 am	³ WWW 11 am	⁴	⁵ Youth 6:30 pm Prayer Shawl 7 pm	⁶ Men's Bible Study 7 pm	⁷ Camp Swatara Camp Swatara	⁸ 3M 7 am Sisters in Christ 9 am Private Event Camp Swatara
⁹ No Sunday School Large Group Gathering 9:45 am Camp Swatara Camp	¹⁰ WWW 11 am	¹¹ Leadership Team Mtg. 7 pm	¹² Youth 6:30 pm Prayer Shawl 7 pm	¹³ Men's Bible Study 7 pm	¹⁴	¹⁵ 3 M 7 am
¹⁶ Sunday School 8:30 am Large Group Gathering 9:45 am Baptism	¹⁷ WWW 11 am	¹⁸ Ministry Team Mtgs. 7 pm	¹⁹ Youth 6:30 pm Prayer Shawl 7 pm	²⁰ Men's Bible Study 7 pm	²¹	²² 3 M 7 am
²³ Sunday School 8:30 am Large Group Gathering 9:45 am	²⁴ WWW 11 am	²⁵	²⁶ Youth 6:30 pm Prayer Shawl 7 pm	²⁷ Men's Bible Study 7 pm	²⁸	²⁹ 3 M 7 am
³⁰ Sunday School 8:30 am Large Group Gathering 9:45 am Promo Sunday	³¹ WWW 11 am					

A Pastor's Perception

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we're asking for heaven's terms to govern earth's moments. Which means the question isn't only what I believe. It's what I'm willing to do, and not do, because of what I believe.

So I don't just object in thought. I object in behavior. I choose not to be part of certain things. Not because I've got it all figured out, but because I'm asking Him to have His way here, now, in me, and I can't ask that and then just go along with whatever's in front of me.

Do we object when someone speaks disparagingly about another person, even when it's easy, even when everyone else is laughing along? Do we object to advocating for our own comfort while someone else goes without? These aren't hypotheticals. They're this week. They might be today.

What's had me pondering all of this is the idea of a conscientious objector. It came up at Annual Conference this year, and it has roots here at West Green Tree and in the Church of the Brethren at large.

We can talk about conscientious objection in regard to war, or any number of hot-button topics. But in a post-Christian culture, one no longer primarily shaped by the teachings of Jesus, don't we need to be conscientious all the time? Asking the question: what would Jesus do? Would He find this objectionable?

One way I've heard the question asked: am I entertained by sin? Another way I sometimes ask it, when someone wants my take on their situation: would you do this knowing Jesus is right there with you?

Sit with that for a second. He is right there with you. Not watching from a distance, not waiting for you to clean up before He'll come near. He never leaves you or forsakes you. Whatever you're weighing right now, He's already present in it.

Our conscience is the gift of His Spirit, teaching us, reminding us, calling us to walk in step with Him. Sometimes those steps will go against the ways of the world.

I object to watching that. Buying that. Saying that. Going there. Maybe it goes as far as being conscious of where what we consume comes from. Who made this. Who harvested this. Who delivered it. Who prepared it. Whether going along with it is likely to cause someone else harm.

So let me leave you with one thing to actually do this week, not just ponder. Name one place this week where your conscience nudged you and you talked yourself out of listening. One conversation, one purchase, one comment you let slide. Name it. Bring it to Him. Ask what it would look like to object, not just in thought, but in what you do next.

Pastor Shawn

Attendance & Givings			
	Total Worship	Sunday School	General Fund
June 21	166	80	\$13,820.00
June 28	97	70	\$4,644.32
July 2	102	44	\$2,185.00
July 12	90	59	\$10,869.01
July 19	134	75	\$3,825.01

Forever YHWH

Over the past few weeks, we've been singing a new song titled "Forever YHWH," which references several of the different names of our God.

Let's look at a few of those names:

Adonai: Translates to "LORD" — reflects supreme authority and absolute sovereignty.

Elohim: Supreme one, mighty one.

Great I AM: Self-existent, eternal nature.

El Shaddai: God Almighty, the all-sufficient one.

Prince of Peace: Remover of hostility, restorer of humanity's relationship with God.

Emmanuel: God with us.

As you can see, this song is dense and rich in the names it uses to describe our Lord! But it doesn't just stop at listing His names; it goes a step further. The chorus echoes, "Your name is great and greatly to be praised."

The lyrics also remind us of a couple of profound truths: He lives within us, and He is right here with us.

Our prayer as a worship team is that as we sing this song and lift up the names of Jesus, we would truly praise His great name!

We look forward to continuing to use this song in our gatherings.

Sincerely,

Ryan M. Arndt *Licensed Minister / Worship Arts Coordinator*



Anniversaries

8/5 - George & Traci Clugston II

8/5 - Lance & Jessica Hitz

8/6 - Duane & Kathy Martin

8/8 - Todd & Lisa Shelly

8/8 - Jerry & Lynne Testerman

8/29 - Jim & Polly Shumate

8/29 - Randy & Anita Youtz

Birthdays

8/1 - Aaliyah Cannon

8/3 - Brenda Axe

8/3 - Noelle O'Brien

8/6 - Jan Chavez

8/7 - Phyllis Becker

8/8 - Paislee Hitz

8/9 - Ralph Daniels

8/9 - Jerry Huber

8/10 - Sarah Kolp

8/10 - Jeff Ziegler

8/10 - June Gerhart

8/10 - Ruth Hawthorne

8/12 - Grace Leonard

8/16 - Grace Fellenbaum

8/19 - Kaitlyn Mattis

8/19 - Cliff Shirk

8/20 - Donna Weaver

8/21 - Robin Cicero

8/23 - Tyra Cannon

8/25 - Walt Schwanger

Jr. Church

**We will plan to resume
on September 20th!**

**Kindergarten to 5th grade are
invited to join us in Junior
Church to learn more about
God! Plan to join us during the
large group gathering.**

**A message will be announced to
dismiss the children.**

**We look forward to having some
fun while talking about Jesus!**

VBS Thank You & Mission Update

Another AMAZING week of VBS is in the books! Thank you to everyone who helped make this ministry such a tremendous success. We were blessed to welcome 70–80 children, ages 3 years old through those who have just completed 5th grade.

Throughout the week, our VBS participants supported the Elizabethtown Area Bear Bags Program by collecting non-perishable food items and monetary donations. Thanks to your generosity, we raised **\$600** for this wonderful ministry! If you would still like to contribute, financial donations may be placed in the **piranha plants at the back of the sanctuary through August 2.**

VBS is an incredible outreach opportunity, and we are thankful that our church is able to offer it free of charge to participants. This ministry would not be possible without the dedication of many volunteers. We are especially grateful for the team that helped organize the many layers of VBS this year: **Naomi Clugston, Noelle O'Brien, Claire Leonard, Haley Keener, David Spayde, Mike Reem, Sarah Kolp, Angie Harnish, and Pastor Shawn.**

Thank you to all our volunteers, donors, organizers, and families who helped make this year's VBS a true blessing to our church and community!



Annual Conference 2026 — A Report to the Congregation

Delegates: Ben Youtz and Shawn O'Brien

What Annual Conference Is

The Church of the Brethren is not a single church. It's a denomination, a family of roughly 800 congregations across the United States and Puerto Rico, connected by shared history, shared belief, and shared mission. West Green Tree is one of those congregations. Once a year, the whole denomination gathers in one place for what's called Annual Conference, a week of worship and decision-making where the church discerns, together, how to move forward. This year it was held Sunday, June 28, through Thursday, July 2, at the Grand Wayne Convention Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Every congregation sends delegates, people chosen from within the local church to carry its voice and cast its vote. This year, we represented West Green Tree together.

Annual Conference isn't a political convention, and it isn't run like one. A former Annual Conference Secretary and Moderator, Bill Eberly, described it this way: *it's not a place for predetermined positions to be debated the way a secular legislature debates them. It's a setting where people gather to consider the questions before the church and to seek the will of God through prayerful debate and the study of scripture.*

Who Was There

This year's Conference drew 1,812 people total: 389 delegates carrying votes for their congregations, 1,270 nondelegates attending in person, and 153 attending virtually.

How Leadership Works

It's worth understanding something structural here, because it shapes how everything else in this report should be read. Nobody at Annual Conference is an outside authority handing down decisions to local churches. The moderator, who presides over the Conference, was once a delegate from a congregation just like ours. Every committee member, every Standing Committee representative (the body of district delegates that sets the agenda and brings recommendations to the floor), comes up out of a local congregation first. This year's moderator, Don Fitzkee, actually comes from our own district, Atlantic Northeast. Some of you may remember him from his years of ministry at the former Chiques Church of the Brethren near Manheim, or from his long career at COBYS Family Services.

That's not so different from how we choose leadership here at West Green Tree. We don't import leaders from outside. We look at who's already part of the body, already committed to the head of that body, and we entrust them with the work. Annual Conference works the same way, just at a larger scale. The body chooses from within the body, and Christ remains the head of it, whether we're talking about our congregation or the whole denomination.

The Rhythm of the Week

Before every single business session, the Conference gathered for congregational singing followed by a time of biblical reflection. Only after that did the delegate body turn to the work in front of them. That order shaped the whole week, worship and the Word first, decisions second.

Outside of the business and worship sessions, Conference offers a wide range of optional sessions on different topics. We chose to attend a few insight sessions, two of which were sponsored by Bethany Theological Seminary on this year's Conference theme, one grounded in the Old Testament and one in the New. These weren't part of the official business of Conference, just something we found worth our time.

The Business of the Conference

Each year, delegates are asked to act on a handful of specific items, brought forward by denominational committees and boards after months of prior work. Here is what came before us this year, one item at a time.

A resolution on weapons transfer. Delegates adopted a statement addressing the international arms trade, grounded in Jesus' words to love our enemies. It names the United States as the world's largest exporter of weapons and calls individuals, congregations, and the denomination as a whole to educate themselves on the arms trade and consider how to respond. This resolution had been developed the previous year and held over to this Conference because of a full agenda in 2025.

A resolution on immigration. Delegates adopted "Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors." It reaffirms the church's long history of conscientious objection and civil disobedience, meaning refusal to comply with a law on grounds of conscience, and applies that history to how we relate to immigrants and refugees today. It states that civil disobedience, such as offering sanctuary, may be a faithful response if immigration law comes into direct conflict with the way of Christ.

Adjustments to how ministers are credentialed. The Church of the Brethren has a formal process for recognizing and authorizing people for ministry, governed by a document called the Ministry Leadership paper. Delegates approved two changes to it. One gives licensed ministers, a category of minister with a limited scope of authorized duties, a stronger recognition when they're already carrying out fuller ministry responsibilities. The other simplifies the path for commissioned ministers, another such category, to pursue full ordination. This kind of change to the denomination's governing documents requires a two-thirds majority vote, and it received one.

Pastoral compensation. Each year, a denominational committee recommends a cost-of-living adjustment to the minimum salary guidelines for pastors across the denomination. This year's recommendation was 4.2 percent, along with encouragement for congregations to use an online compensation calculator to help align pastoral pay with actual work expectations. At West Green Tree, the Leadership Team recommends the pastor's compensation as part of the annual budget, brought forward for approval at the November congregational forum.

An interim report from the Review and Evaluation Committee. Roughly once a decade, the denomination elects a committee to study its own structure and how well it's functioning, then report back with recommendations. This year's committee brought an update on work still in progress. Part of their assigned task is to recommend how congregations and districts, different regional groupings of congregations, can continue working together well in the midst of ongoing disagreement across the denomination about how the church responds to LGBTQ+ persons. That work is not finished.

A new process for denominational leadership, called "New Table." District executives, the paid leaders of each district, began a process with an outside consultant aimed at improving how denominational leaders work together. Delegates received a document naming patterns in current leadership relationships that aren't working well. This is early-stage work, and it will likely surface again at future Conferences.

A financial services transition. For decades, a denominational agency called Eder Financial (formerly Brethren Benefit Trust) has managed services like pastoral retirement plans and insurance. The denomination is in the process of transitioning many of those services to a different organization, Everence Association. Standing Committee spent significant time this year discussing that transition with Eder's leadership. This affects benefits tied directly to pastoral ministry, and the process is ongoing.

Elections. Delegates elected Amy Gall Ritchie, of Manchester Church of the Brethren in North Manchester, Indiana, to serve as moderator-elect. Several other denominational positions were also filled by election this year, boards, committees, and agency roles. Candidates for each of these positions had their backgrounds and qualifications published in the Conference booklet, which delegates received well in advance, giving us time to review who we'd be voting for before we ever arrived in Fort Wayne.

A Closing Word

We want to be honest with you about how to hold all of this. What happens at Annual Conference is not a governing body issuing commands to local churches. It's an offering, statements and recommendations that individuals and congregations are invited to wrestle with and consider. Nobody is compelled. There is no force in religion, and there never has been for us. What we witnessed in that room was a denomination discerning together, still trying to figure out how to follow Jesus faithfully in a complicated world. We're grateful to have carried our congregation's voice into that process, together.

740 Greentree Road
Elizabethtown, PA 17022

WEST GREEN TREE
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

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Sunday Gathering Times:

- ♦ 8:30 am Sunday School/Small Groups
- ♦ 9:45 am Large Group Gathering
- ♦ Live Stream via YouTube “West Green Tree Worship”

Weekday Activities:

- ♦ Mondays: Ladies Bible Study @ 11 am
- ♦ Wednesday: Youth @ 6:30 pm
- ♦ Thursday: Men’s Bible Study @ 7 pm
- ♦ Saturday: Men’s Bible Study/Breakfast @ 7 am at Hawthorne’s Woods

Phone: 717-653-5367
www.westgreentree.org

