

The 69th Biennial Convention of the Unity of the Brethren Convention Minutes

Friday, July 9, 2021 – Hus Encampment, Caldwell, TX

Registration began at 8:00 a.m.

Worship: The worship service began at 9:00 a.m. Rev. Dr. Larry Koslovsky greeted the Convention. The opening hymn was “This is the Day.” The Gathering Prayer was given by Kayla Marek. Songs of praise were led by Lynette Urbanovsky. The Responsive Reading was led by Angie Hairrell. The Offertory Prayer was given by Rev. Whitney Amos. Special music was sung by Lynette – “*The Heart of Worship.*” Rev. Koslovsky gave the message with scripture taken from Romans 12:1-2. Rev. Koslovsky asked us “when does worship start? Worship is the way we live, and we can be living sacrifices for God.” Holy Communion was administered to all by Rev. Michael Groseclose who was assisted by Rev. Ryan Volkman and Rev. Charles Amos. The pianist was Elizabeth Rypl.

OPENING Session: President Rev. Dr. Larry Koslovsky called the meeting to order.

There were 80 people in attendance (see attached Roll Call) as follows:

63 VOTING MEMBERS present: Pastors (19): Rev Charles Amos, Rev Whitney Amos, Rev. Joe Emerson, Rev. Michael Groseclose, Rev Jimmy Hejl, Rev Dr. Brad Herridge, Pastor David Johnson, Pastor Lisa Johnson, Rev Lawrence Junek, Dr. Larry Koslovsky, Pastor Ben Kruse, Rev Dr. Mark Labaj, Rev Vanessa Mitchell, Rev Joseph Polasek, Rev Kay Polasek, Rev Mark Sebek, Rev Tommy Tallas, Rev Dr. Jerry Terrill, Rev Ryan Volkman

8 Pastors Absent: Rev’s L. Chandler, T. Chaplin, A. Gonzalez, C. Holland, J. Kueker, D. Mikeska, A. Newby, L. Zabcik

16 Synodical Lay members representing 15 churches: Bryan/CS – Alan Haisler; Caldwell – L. Urbanovsky, (Martha Huffman – absent); Crosby – Debbie Clark; Fayetteville – Sandra Stepan; Houston – J.T. Verwold; Industry – Harvey Treybig; New Tabor – Robert Campbell; Ocker – Taylor Brinkley; Rosenberg – Alice Kocurek; Snook – Angie Hairrell, Yvonne Kovar; Taylor – Kayla Marek (C. Raesz absent); Temple – Jim Hiles; Wall – Paul Beatty; West – Roy Janek; Westheimer – Leroy Parthum. 9 churches absent: Austin, Buckholts, Dime Box, Granger – no rep, Nelsonville, Pasadena – no rep, Port Arthur, Seaton, Wesley.

26 Delegates: Bryan/College Station – Chris Biggs; Caldwell – Rose Autrey; Crosby – Tillman Clark; Fayetteville – JR – absent; Houston – Rita Tyson; Nelsonville – Sandra Merz, Carrie Mlcak.; New Tabor – Shirle Urbanovsky, Lillie Chafin; Ocker – Lisa Sebek, David Sebek; Pasadena – Philip Michalik; Snook – Yvonne Kovar (Synodical), Ann Sebesta; Taylor – Leo Camden, Jr., Allen David, Joan Kautz, Kimberly Knippa, Daniel Knippa; Temple – Gayle Farrow; Wall – Susan Neal, Elizabeth Odom, Brenda Beatty, Sarah Gallander; Wesley – Beth Dusek; West – Terry and Debbie Crawford; Westheimer – Carolyn Beseda. 8 churches did not seat delegates: Austin, Buckholts, Dime Box, Granger, Industry, Port Arthur, Rosenberg, Seaton.

Committee Chairs (2): PRC – Jon Farrow (Temple); Christian Ed – vacant; Foreign Missions – David Miller (not present); Home Missions – vacant; Hus Encampment – Kent Laza (BCS).

Non-Voting: Guests – 17. Lunch was served to over 90 people.

10:15 – Session 1:

General Overview of Convention:

Rev. Koslovsky opened the meeting. The Executive committee erred on the side of caution in planning the convention with the current health crisis and had a one-day convention approved by the Synodical

Committee. The main concern was safety for all those attending. Missing from this shortened convention will be committee and bylaws work and fellowship from an extended stay.

Greetings: Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Miller, President, Provincial Elders' Conference Moravian Church Northern Province, Pennsylvania sent a video message to the convention. She sent greetings from the Northern and Southern Provinces and the Board of World Missions. We share a long history with the Moravian Church, having done mission work together in Ahaus, Honduras. Another connection is that many of our pastors have attended seminary there. Our roots with Jan Hus ties us together.

Other Greetings:

Rev. Tim Chaplin sends his regards as he recuperates from major surgery.

Dorothy Kocian – West Brethren - sends her greetings thru her daughter Mary Ann Kocian.

Rev. Groseclose said that Dorothy Hinson – Houston Brethren - sends greetings to the convention.

Rev. Joseph Polasek brought greetings from the Mutual Aid Society and reminded everyone that the Scholarship program can continue only if they get donations for this.

Kent Laza, on behalf of the Hus Board of Trustees, welcomed everyone to the convention.

Robert & Anne Thiessen brought greetings from the Raifords and the Mexican Network of Missionaries.

Reports from Officers & Chairs: Reports are in the Convention Booklet unless noted otherwise.

President – Rev. Dr. Larry Koslovsky – p. 16-17 (Attachment A). Additional – Rebecca Lively, Pasadena Representative passed away May 29, 2021.

First Vice President – Rev. Michael Groseclose – p. 18 (Attachment B)

Second Vice President – Angie Hairrell – p. 19 (Attachment C)

Third Vice President – Rev. Whitney Amos – No report in booklet. Reported it was great to see that the Unity carried-on during COVID-19. Churches responded well on Facebook and YouTube.

Secretary – report by Liz Ripple, Executive Assistant – p. 20-23 (Attachment D) Eight churches did not seat delegates: Austin, Buckholts, Dime Box, Granger, Industry, Port Arthur, Rosenberg and Seaton.

Treasurer – Lynette Urbanovsky – p. 24-27 (Attachment E)

Financial Secretary – Kayla Marek – p. 28-45 (Attachment F)

Financial Secretary Spreadsheet 2015-2021 – p. 46 (Attachment G)

Brethren Fund Assessments 2017-2020 – p. 47 (Attachment H)

REPORTS FROM CHAIRS AND DENOMINATIONAL BOARDS:

Brethren Journal Business Manager – Ben Polasek – p. 48 (Attachment I)

Brethren Journal Treasurer – Dorothy Milberger – p. 49-52 (Attachment II)

Board of Christian Education – Deborah Schiller, Chair – resigned – p. 53 (Attachment III)

Board of Foreign Missions & Missionary Reports – David Miller, Chair – p. 54-57 (Attachment IV)

Board of Home Missions – Rev. Tim Chaplin, Chair - resigned (no report)

New Beginnings at Cade Lake (Home mission project) – Rev. Kay Polasek – p. 58-61 (Attachment V)

New Beginnings at Cade Lake (Home mission project) financial report – Ben Polasek – no report.

Hus School Board of Trustees – Kent Laza, Chair – p. 62-65 (Attachment VI)

Hus School Encampment Treasurer – Todd Corporon – no report.

Ministers' Benefits Committee – Liz Ripple, Exe Sec/Treasurer – p. 66 (Attachment VII)

Mutual Aid Society – Rev. Joseph Polasek, President – p. 67-69 (Attachment VIII)

Youth Coordinator – Jennifer Chervenka – p. 70 (Attachment IX)

Pastoral Relations Committee – Jon Farrow, Chair – Attachment X - No report in booklet.

Christian Sisters Union – Paula Wagner, President – No report.

Friends of the Hus Encampment – Connie Janac – (Attachment XI) No report in booklet.

One Minute Flash Report of Congregations: (Total time for reports – 1 hour)

Not present: Austin, Buckholts, Granger-sent in report, Port Arthur, Seaton.

Bryan/College Station – Alan Haisler reported that it was a rough year, but they made it. They live streamed the church service on Facebook. Planning to build a new fellowship hall in the future.

Caldwell – Rose Autrey (delegate): things are happening at Caldwell Brethren! Repaired and restored the church. Family game night, online Bible studies, Christian Sisters meeting again and VBS.

Crosby – Debbie Clark: Bro. Larry K. puts his message every week on YouTube. SS has resumed, meal ministry once a month for shut-ins.

Dime Box – Rhonda Johnson reported: did not miss any services during COVID; will concentrate on ministry in schools; there is a high calling of our daily work – for all of us.

Fayetteville – Mike Groseclose: went to worship twice a month – 2nd & 4th Saturday services at 10 a.m.; worshipped outside for a few months, now back inside.

Granger – (Attachment XII) – Bro. Larry K. gave the report. Biggest thing – host a food pantry for the surrounding area. Used technology – video services during COVID; during the shelter-in-place they rang the church bell at 8 p.m. daily to remind people to pray. Lots of repairs to their building.

Houston – Rita Tyson: resumed regular service in Oct 2020; resumed SS; had to repair some things in the church from the February 2021 winter storm Uri; have a close church family.

Industry – Mike Groseclose: 2nd, 3rd and 4th Saturdays 3 or 5 pm. They are on the west end of Austin county, lots of fundraisers – folks don't have to skip church – can come to Industry on Saturday.

Nelsonville – Mike Groseclose: liked the outside services so much, decided to have an outside service under the trees once a month; had the sanctuary remodeled and spent \$6K on a PA system and have live streaming equipment – have people from all over the world watching.

New Tabor – Lillie Chafin: have had Pastor David Johnson since 2004 – 17 years (*Synodical - 2005*). Had a 32-ft long flat-bed trailer that they did services from, sat in cars – honked horns when they liked something – it worked well. Completed VBS – averaged 60 kids; had a 3-day revival on July 4-6; Bible study on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Pastor Johnson has a weekly Bible Boost on Facebook.

Ocker – David Sebek: 2019 – the community had a church that burned to the ground; 2020 – here comes COVID, paused service March 22; April 2 lightning struck again – heavy damage to the church - had to gut the entire building inside and out. Resumed in-person service May 2020. Planned a rededication, had to postpone due to the freeze, had it April 18. Come visit our new church!

Pasadena – Philip Michalik: Bro. Larry K. provided online services. A Spanish group meets in the church twice on Sundays -85-90 attend each Sunday. Still following COVID protocols. Spanish group had VBS that was opened to the community; they donate to the Pasadena Police department.

Rosenberg – Ben Kruse: used audio/visual equipment, had services outside for a while, now back inside; have a bible study-meal on Wednesday nights; SS on Sundays. They are doing well, maintaining.

Snook – Yvonne Kovar: service resumed in late summer 2020, all activities have resumed as normal. Constructed a bell tower and ring the bell before each service. Lost several senior members, but have gained some new ones. A new subdivision is being built across the road.

Taylor - Daniel Knippa: in-person services were suspended, services were provided online; remodeled kitchen/fellowship hall, working on a new audio/visual system for the sanctuary; will be celebrating a 125-year anniversary; have a succession committee to prepare for the future, Bro. Jimmy is retiring.

Temple – Cross Church on Birdcreek – Gayle Farrow (Attachment XIII): provided services online; when Tim was battling with cancer, we had Larry Zabcik fill in, then he got sick and Joe Emerson came; Bro Tim returned July 4 – cancer free. Had freeze damage in the church, still making repairs. Had huge oak trees that fell and had to deal with that; had a garage sale – lots of items, it was good.

Wall – Elizabeth Odom: 2017 received a huge grant to update audio/visual in the church; were closed for 2 months, streamed live services online; have a Wednesday night youth program; had about 125 kids a day come for Backyard school program; active prayer group.

Wesley – Mike Groseclose: still have the option to worship outside, set up a speaker outside.

West – Rev Gerry Davis: serving as the interim pastor since Bro. Curtis retired (has Parkinson's); have done some remodeling at the church, when it was done – it was paid for; upgraded their video/live streaming service, do Facebook Live; have had 5 new families come in the church; started a program for the youth, currently once a month, trying to bring teenagers to Christ.

Westheimer – Carolyn Beseda: began in-person services for Easter this year; Pastor sent text messages during COVID. Leroy Parthum, Board President provides good leadership – will start a new confirmation class led by Pastor Lisa; shares the church with a Latino group, this helps financially and they assist with cleaning; contribute to several organizations including Kid's meals and Samaritans purse.

Vsetin Czech Moravian Brethren Church (Hallettsville, Lavaca County) – Rev. Dr. Mark Labaj: got acquainted with the church in 1973 – met his wife there, now married 44 years. He started serving there once a month, then twice a month, then Rev Henry Beseda retired and he is now there 4 times a month. They are a self-sufficient group, lots of Czech names. During COVID, Texas Thunder Radio offered 30 minutes of time, Mark prepares a message and it's broadcasted on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. And it's working! A miracle that he has seen recently – there were 4 infants in the church. Vsetin has never a member of the UOB – always served by Unity pastors, they support mission work.

WHERE DO WE GO AFTER COVID?? (What Do We Do After COVID?)

Bro. Larry K. asked everyone to participate in an exercise to move beyond COVID. Where is God taking us now? Asked everyone to dump all the stuff out of your laps, relax for a few minutes – close your eyes, think about your own personal life. What is it that excites you? brings you to life? It's by divine appointment that God has placed us where we are today. Bro. Larry K. prayed. Then everyone was asked to find a person – team up some someone – groups of two or three, share and talk about how God is working in you and any thoughts that come up.

12:00 LUNCH – Rev. Dr. Brad Herridge gave the blessing for the meal. Everyone enjoyed Pork steak, loaded mashed potatoes, green beans, salad, rolls, apple cobbler, tea and lemonade. Pastors were asked to join in the library for the selection process of the *Pastor to the Pastors. *Bylaws (*elected by the clergy during the course of the Convention through a series of votes until one pastor receives the majority of votes.*)

1:15 SESSION 2: Rededication of the Hus Encampment Main Building (Attachment XIV)

Rev. Jimmy Hejl led the Worship Service for the rededication and opened with prayer. The Call to Worship was taken from Psalm 24. Song of praise was *For the Beauty of the Earth*.

Comments on behalf of the Hus Encampment Board of Trustees was given by Kent Laza, Board of Trustees Chair. The “Act of Rededication” was inspired by the original *Act of Dedication* of the Hus School Encampment held on June 30, 1957. Special recognition was given to Joyce Baletka who with her husband, Rev. John Baletka started the Hus Encampment; David Dusek, Designer & Project Manager; Mark Dudley, Owner of Dudley Construction, Gary Zdunkewicz and Mike Donaldson; Robert and Sam Polasek - Polasek's Air Conditioning; and Sebek Painting. A key to the main building was presented to Rev. Larry Koslovsky. Special thanks were given to Kent and Tami Laza for all the work they have done these last few years. Everyone joined in the singing of *Pass It On*. A special Benediction from a Franciscan Blessing (Attachment XV) was given by Rev. Hejl.

All those who had attended Hus School were invited to join in the singing of the full Czech version of “Hoj VERNY V boj” accompanied by Elizabeth Rypl.

CONVENTION BUSINESS continued:

Approval of Synodical Representatives for: Houston – J.T. Verwold to replace Ron Tyson; Temple Cross Church on Birdcreek – Jim Hiles to replace Deborah Schiller; West – Roy Janek to replace Shara Davis. Bro. Larry K. explained the role of the Representatives of each church and how they are elected by the congregations at the Fall congregational meeting called for the referendum vote after every convention. Representatives serve a two-year term.

MOTION: by Rev Charles Amos to accept the 3 new representatives – J.T. Verwold (Houston), Jim Hiles - (Cross Church on Birdcreek - Temple) and Roy Janek (West).

SECOND: by Taylor Brinkley (Ocker). Passes unanimously.

Youth Coordinator Salary & Expenses

Rev. Whitney Amos, Third VP and Supervisor of the Youth Coordinator reported on the job that Jennifer Chervenka is doing. The recommendation of the Executive Committee is to raise her salary to \$24,500.00 and set expenses at \$1,800.00 a year. Currently, she receives \$23,000.00 plus \$1,800.00 for expenses. This is about a 6.5 % raise. We also need to make sure the Unity's half of her FICA tax is covered (\$1,874.25 – for a total of \$26,374.25 and \$1,800.00 for expenses).

***MOTION:** From the Executive Committee that the salary of the State Youth Coordinator be increased to \$24,500/yr. with an expense allowance of \$1,800/yr.

SECOND: by Sandra Stepan (Fayetteville). Passes unanimously.

License Renewals

Bro. Larry K. explained that Pastors in the Unity of the Brethren are credentialed and approved and can be one of three standings: Ordained, an Associate or Licensed by the Synodical Committee to be able to serve a congregation in the Unity. We have a process and expectations according to our Constitution and By-Laws, like every denomination has. Ordained pastors can serve all Unity churches when they receive a call or when they sub. Associate pastors have been ordained in another denomination - Rev. Dr. Brad Herridge and Rev. Dr. Jerry Terrill serve as Associate Pastors in the Unity. Licenses are to a specific church and approved every year until the fifth year when a pastor can receive a 5-year license.

License renewals: Ben Kruse to Rosenberg - letter was sent (Attachment XVI) – he is eligible for a 5-year license; David Johnson to New Tabor (per report by Lillie Chafin) – renew 5-year license; Lisa Johnson to Westheimer (per Leroy Parthum) – renew 1-year license.

MOTION: by Rev. Mike Groseclose to approve a 5-year license for Ben Kruse to Rosenberg, renew the 5-year license for David Johnson to New Tabor, and renew the 1-year license for Lisa Johnson to Westheimer.

SECOND: by Roy Janek (West). Passes unanimously.

Consideration of Ministers – Report by Rev. Koslovsky:

Rev Gerry Davis for West: Rev Gerry Davis has been serving West as the interim pastor since January 2020. Gerry is ordained in the Baptist church and has been in ministry 35 years. The Credentials Committee has approved him as a pastor in the Unity and he will be examined and questioned at the Fall meeting. Bro. Larry K. apologized for how long this is taking.

Terry Crawford (West) is a Candidate to be a Ministerial Student.

The Credentials Committee continues to work with Judy Gotcher for Granger and Rhonda Johnson for Dime Box.

Acceptance of Retiring Pastors

Rev. Curtis Holland (63 years in ministry, served in the Unity at West for 18 years)

Rev. Lawrence Junek (served in the Unity for 48 years – retirement letter received – Attachment XVII) wants to remain with the Unity of the Brethren.

Rev. Thomas John Tallas – Retiring as the Senior Pastor of Wall Brethren church – Nov 1, 2021, but is not retiring from ministry.

MOTION: by Roy Janek (West) to accept the retirements of Rev. Holland and Rev. Junek.

SECOND: by Alice Kocurek (Rosenberg). Passes unanimously.

2:45 p.m. - BREAK

3:05 SESSION 3

Since April 1, 2017, Rev. Dr. Mark Labaj is serving under the call of the Synodical Committee to Specialized Ministry as a Hospital Chaplain. This is required by the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC). Dr. Labaj is working with BS&W in Temple. To keep this endorsement, we need to renew his Specialized Ministry as a Hospital Chaplain.

MOTION: by Beth Dusek (Wesley) to renew Rev. Dr. Mark Labaj's Specialized Ministry as a Hospital Chaplain under the Unity of the Brethren.

SECOND: by Rev. Charles Amos. Passes unanimously.

Recognition of Pastors for years of service

Kayla Marek (Financial Secretary - Taylor) thanked all pastors for their service and presented plaques to several pastors recognizing them for their years of service as follows:

Rev. Thomas John Tallas (51 years); Rev. Dr. Jerry L. Terrill (51 years, serving the Unity since 1982); Rev. Lawrence T. Junek (48 years); Rev. Dr. Mark L. Labaj (41 years, Hospital Chaplain 5 years); Rev. Dr. Larry W. Koslovsky (40 years); Rev. James D. Hejl (40 years); Rev. Joseph Polasek (31 years); Rev. Adolfo Gonzalez (30 years); Rev. Michael R. Groseclose (30 years).

Next item of Worship! - Election of Officers & Chairs for 2021-2023 (Attachment XVIII)

President – Rev. Dr. Larry Koslovsky (3rd term)

1st Vice President – Rev Joe Emerson (1st term)

2nd Vice President – Lance LaBedelle – (1st term- Wall)

3rd Vice President – Rev Vanessa Mitchell (1st term)

Secretary – Angie Hairrell (4th term - Snook)

Financial Secretary – Kayla Marek (3rd term - Taylor)

Treasurer – Lynette Urbanovsky (3rd term - Caldwell)

Ministerial Alternate – Rev Ryan Volkman

Lay Alternate – Taylor Brinkley (Ocker)

There were no nominations from the floor.

MOTION: by Rev Mike Groseclose that nominations cease, and elect by acclamation.

SECOND: by Gayle Farrow (Temple). Passes unanimously.

OTHER NOMINATIONS:

Board of Christian Education Chair – Kari Raesz (1st term - Taylor)

Board of Home Missions Chair – Rev. Mark Sebek (1st term)

Board of Foreign Missions Chair – David Miller (3rd term - Wall)

Hus School Chair – Kent Laza (3rd term - BCS)

Brethren Journal Editor – Cathleen Schlechte

Brethren Journal Business Manager – Ben Polasek

Rev. Sebek shared thoughts on his nomination for the Home Missions Chair. He desires to broaden Home Missions.

There were no nominations from the floor.

MOTION: by Rev. Mike Groseclose to elect the slate of nominees by acclamation.

SECOND: by Beth Dusek (Wesley). Passes unanimously.

Pastoral Relations Committee: Jon Farrow (Temple) & James Marek (Taylor) 2019-2023
Nominee: Anna Wotipka (Caldwell) 2017-2021 (2021-2025)
Nominee: Dan Merz (Nelsonville) 2021-2025

There were no other nominations from the floor.

MOTION: by Rev. Mike Groseclose to elect by acclamation

SECOND: by Beth Dusk (Wesley). Passes unanimously.

ELECTION OF PRC CHAIR: (elected from the 4 members serving on the committee)

MOTION: by Rev. Kay Polasek to elect Jon Farrow to serve as the Chairman.

SECOND: by Beth Dusek (Wesley). Passes unanimously.

ELECTION OF MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS BOARD:

Nominees are: Rev. Charles Amos, Rev. Dr. Jerry Terrill and Rev. Tim Chaplin.

Pastor to the Pastors: Rev. Whitney Amos and Rev. Charles Amos will be serving jointly.

There were no nominations from the floor.

MOTION: by Kent Laza (BCS) to accept the slate by acclamation.

SECOND: by Carolyn Beseda (Westheimer). Passes unanimously.

If you need help with a pastoral vacancy at your church, you need to contact Jon Farrow (PRC Chair) and/or Larry Koslovsky. The By-Laws tell us how to replace vacancies in the pastoral role.

Offering Distribution:

MOTION: by Tillman Clark (Crosby) for the offering of \$582 to go to the camp.

SECOND: by Susan Neal (Wall). Passes unanimously.

2023 Convention Date and Place

Suggested dates are July 7-8 or July 14 & 15, 2023. The plan for this year – 2021 - was to be at Camp Allen in Navasota, but due to uncertainty with the virus, a one-day convention was approved.

MOTION: by Rev. Kay Polasek to have the 2023 convention at Camp Allen in Navasota.

SECOND: by Beth Dusek (Wesley). Discussion. Passes unanimously.

Bro Mike reported that the Jelski family serving as missionaries in Israel will be in Texas in August – if you want them to visit your church, contact David Miller.

Kent Laza announced that Robert and Anne Thiessen will be ending their work in Mexico. Robert and Anne were recognized for their work. They have been serving in Mexico for 30 years and have been supported by the Unity for over 20 years. They are not retiring, and will still be associated with Mexico, but they will now be based in Ontario, Canada.

Bro. Larry K. invited sharing among the group: The one-minute flash reports were fantastic! Some of the thoughts were: COVID did not shut us down! We did new things and it is exciting. Older people can be prayer warriors. We need to start teaching our kids about ministry as a job – youth pastors, music leaders, to offer ministry as a calling. To have future ministers in the Unity of the Brethren, we need to start at home with the kids. What is God telling you to do? The camp is important. To become a more praying church – text message friends and pray for people. Being living sacrifices! Doing!

MOTION: by Taylor Brinkley (Ocker) to adjourn the meeting.

SECOND: by Beth Dusek (Wesley). Rev. Joe Emerson ended the meeting with a prayer.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

*Note: Motion in **RED** will go on to congregations for a Referendum decision made at a congregational meeting (Constitution – Art. V. Administration, A.2.).