

Wil Nolen announces his plan to retire in 2008 as president of Brethren Benefit Trust

Nov. 19, 2007, Elgin, Ill. — Wilfred E. Nolen, president of Brethren Benefit Trust since the agency's inception in 1988 and chief administrator and trustee of the Church of the Brethren Pension Board since 1983, has announced that he will retire in 2008.

Nolen informed the full Board of Directors of his decision to retire during the Board's executive session as it met Saturday, Nov. 17, in Lancaster, Pa. While he stated that the decision was difficult to make after nurturing the development and growth of the BBT ministries for more than two decades, he added that the timing for his departure as the agency's top executive and his move into retirement is right for both BBT and for his family.

"The timing of such a decision is never easy as there are always pressing issues that must be addressed," Nolen said following his meeting with the Board. "Nevertheless, BBT is a healthy organization with about \$440 million in assets under management for 6,000 Pension, Foundation, Insurance, and Church of the Brethren Credit Union clients and members. It has a sharp staff and a new strategic plan and is primed for continued success."

In his letter announcing his retirement to Harry Rhodes, Board chair, Nolen offered to retire on Dec. 31, 2008, or on a date mutually determined with the Board.

"To most people, Wil is BBT," Rhodes said. "For 24 years he has given valuable and knowledgeable service to the BBT ministries and his pursuit of excellence has been apparent to all who have worked with him. He has been a good and faithful servant."

Rhodes continued, "We, the church, owe much to Wil for pastors and church staffs having sound retirements; for churches and organizations having their assets under strong management and invested in a way that reflects Brethren values through the Brethren Foundation; and for Credit Union members who receive competitive rates and compassionate service that promotes financial health and good monetary decision making. Wil has also advocated for and has overseen the growth of the Church Worker's Assistance Plan, which assists eligible current and former church workers who are in financial need."

"We also owe much to Wil for the healthcare insurance BBT long provided pastors and church workers, despite an aging employee population and despite the challenges of providing healthcare in the midst of a national healthcare crisis. Even in the wake of Annual Conference delegates declaring that the Brethren Medical Plan for the ministers' group should be shut down, BBT continues to reach out to those pastors who are finding difficulty in obtaining new healthcare insurance and is prepared to provide support for those having to pay much higher insurance premiums."

As part of his leadership for pastors' benefits, Nolen served as president of the Church Benefits Association, a national coalition of 50 denominations and religious organizations.

A CAREER OF CHURCH SERVICE

Nolen graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from Bridgewater (Va.) College. He earned a Master of Divinity degree from Bethany Theological Seminary.

In the mid-1960s, Nolen was selected to coordinate the 1966 Church of the Brethren National Youth Conference. Later that year he joined the Church of the Brethren General Board full time on the Christian Education Commission's youth ministries staff. In 1969, Nolen was named Coordinator of Fund for the Americas (FAUS), which provided grants for minority groups and encouraged Brethren adults to examine the causes of racial injustice. From 1970 to 1973, Nolen served as a Parish Ministries Commission consultant for worship and the arts, in addition to his role with FAUS.

In 1973, Nolen's FAUS assignment was refocused as he was named director of the General Board's SHARE program, which emphasized meeting human needs of economically disadvantaged groups in the United States. In 1978, he also began serving as Coordinator of Development Ministries. These initiatives were phased out by 1981, the year he began serving as director of SERRV, the General Board's handcrafts ministry that benefits artisans from developing countries.

In 1983, he then began serving as administrator of the Brethren Pension Board. In 1988, the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference declared that the General Board and the Pension Board should no longer be composed of the same 25 people. The Pension Board was moved into a new organizational structure, Brethren Benefit Trust, and a new 12-member board was elected to govern the agency. Nolen was heavily involved in this restructure and has served as president of BBT ever since.

As an ordained minister, Nolen has had an active avocation in the ministry of choral music. He has served as director of the Highland Ave. Church of the Brethren (Elgin, Ill.) adult choir for 37 years and has led choirs and congregational singing at Annual Conference and at National Older Adult Conferences, as well as conferences of other denominations. He also has promoted wellness among Brethren as coordinator of fitness and recreational outings at Annual Conferences and at several National Older Adult Conferences. For many years, Nolen has served on the boards of Bridgewater (Va.) College and Mutual Aid Association of the Church of the Brethren. He has also been a board member of the Elgin (Ill.) Choral Union and Praxis Mutual Funds and received the outstanding service award from Bridgewater College in 1993.

“For his 24 years of guiding the BBT ministries, for his 41 years of full-time employment within the Church of the Brethren, and for his participation in promoting the arts and athletics throughout the denomination, Wil should be commended for his dedication, determination, and compassion,” Rhodes said. “His leadership has positively impacted thousands of lives, and for this he deserves the denomination's thanks. In 2008, we intend to celebrate Wil's contributions to the Church of the Brethren.”

PRESIDENT SEARCH COMMITTEE

BBT's president search committee, which was appointed by the Board before its meeting was adjourned, consists of four Board members — Harry Rhodes, Board chair (Roanoke, Va.); Janice Bratton, vice chair (Hummelstown, Pa.); Eunice Culp (Goshen, Ind.); and Donna Forbes Steiner (Landisville, Pa.). Also called to serve on the committee was H. Fred Bernhard (Arcanum, Ohio), former pastor, Annual Conference moderator, and BBT Board member.