

# 10<sup>th</sup> Report of the Christian Education Council of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference 2023-2024

*(for the period covering July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024)*

## **Members of the Council:**

<b>Peggy Chroniger, <i>chair</i>, Alfred Station, NY</b>	(term expiring 2024)
<b>Melissa Brown, Texarkana, AR</b>	(term expiring 2027)
<b>Conlief Lyons, Toronto, ONT*</b>	(term expiring 2026)
<b>Rev. Charles Meathrell, Pataskala, OH</b>	(term expiring 2028)
<b>Carol Scull, Shiloh, NJ</b>	(term expiring 2025)

*\*filling term left vacated by the passing of Rev. Bill Shobe in August, 2023.*

## **Staff:**

**Rev. Nicholas J. Kersten, Director of Education and History**

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## **Introduction & Vision Statement**

The Christian Education Council (CEC) is charged with the development and promotion of educational ministries for Seventh Day Baptists in North America and to oversee those initiatives it creates to that end. The Council is made up of five individuals elected by the General Conference (on staggered five-year terms), who meet regularly throughout the year to address our portion of the General Conference's work to equip individuals and churches to actively advance God's Kingdom.

In our work as a Council, we strive to achieve the broader vision and mission of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of the USA & Canada by *equipping ambassadors to represent Christ's Kingdom*.

## **Continued Response to Changing Times and Needs**

In our report to the General Conference last year, we reported that we had begun addressing apparent changes in the local churches and in the work of Christian Education among Seventh Day Baptists. Forming our continued response has been the work of the CEC again this year as we continue to move forward to accomplish our mission. **This report will demonstrate important ways that our focus and activities have changed in 2023-24.** These changes extend beyond the work itself and into the constituency of our Council as well. **We anticipate further adjustments will be necessary in the coming months and years** as the nature of our changing world becomes clearer as we seek to live into and meet our responsibilities as we seek to accomplish the mission of the Conference and honor the SDB General Conference's Vision Map.

## **Leadership Development Ministries**

One of the largest contemporary challenges before Seventh Day Baptists is to identify and equip the next generation of Kingdom leaders for our churches. This is a sizable challenge because like many other denominations, SDBs are aging demographically and have fewer younger people in our churches than we used to have. **If we are going to be vital in the next generation and in the generations to come, it is critical that we do a good job of discipling those leaders who are already in our midst and to empower them to reach out with the Gospel** to extend our kingdom family to those God desires for us to reach. This demands a strategic and intentional approach to making disciples who are leaders in their local churches and our Conference.

## **Seventh Day Baptist University**

The primary educational ministry in developing SDB ministry leaders is the Seventh Day Baptist University (SDBU) initiative. **Seventh Day Baptist University (SDBU)** provides introductory and intermediate level training to ministry leaders and pastors through church-administered resources for lay leaders and two certificate programs: the Ministry

Leadership Certificate (MLC) program and the Pastoral Leadership Certificate (PLC) program.

SDBU seeks to provide leadership training at a variety of levels to church-identified leaders. SDBU is aimed at making disciples who make disciples and training ambassadors for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

### ***Lay Leadership Training***

Training leaders in the local context is an important part of the work of all SDB churches. We have sought to aid in this work of local churches through the Lay Leadership Certificate program.

**The Lay Leadership Training program is the vehicle we offer local churches who wish to train their congregations broadly for leadership in their local contexts.** This program provides a framework for growth in Bible study, spiritual maturity and awareness, small group leadership, teaching, and distinctive SDB beliefs and modes and is administered by leaders in the local church for leaders in the local church. These materials have been part of the Lay Leadership Certificate program, which comes with a completion certificate if all of the modules are completed. These modules are also available for use individually, however. If you have an interest in reviewing these materials or using them in your local church, please contact the Director of Education.

### ***Spanish TIME Translation***

In late 2022, it became clear that our leadership development efforts were being thwarted among Spanish-speakers in our Conference because of a lack of training materials. **After considering a variety of alternatives, the Conference has joined in a joint project with the SDB Missionary Society to see the updated TIME program translated into the Spanish language over the next few years.**

The translation is being led by Andrea Pozo Velastegui and her team in Ecuador. The first two modules are completed, and the third is underway. We are aware that we will need to develop additional training pathways in Spanish, but we are glad to have some resources to offer for the time being, and that those resources are in use!

### ***Ministry Leadership & Pastoral Leadership Certificates***

**The Ministry Leadership Certificate (MLC) and Pastoral Leadership Certificate (PLC) programs are programs offered to church-identified leaders to be trained online by SDB leaders from around our conference who are content-area experts.** Students in these programs receive intermediate level training to continue their theological and practical education in ministry service and leadership. The MLC

To date, **70 different students have begun a SDBU class in the MLC or PLC programs since the launch of SDBU nine years ago.** We have had **3 graduates from the Ministry Leadership Certificate in 2023-24: Tom Davis, Isaac Floyd and Lora Sweeney.** Other students continue in their MLC track progress. 45 of the students noted above began classes in the MLC track, and 28 have taken classes in only the PLC track, which now includes the classes previously known as Summer Institute (5 students have taken classes in both programs). All the graduates of the MLC program are currently serving in leadership roles in their local churches or in conference ministry, with some ready to continue in the Pastor Leadership Certificate program.

The **Pastoral Leadership Certificate** program launched successfully in 2021-22. This certificate, as noted above, includes the three courses previously referred to as Summer Institutes (now referred to as the SDB Core Classes), as well as several additional classes. For more information about the PLC program, please visit the SDBU website: [www.sdbuniversity.org](http://www.sdbuniversity.org). Due to low demand, we did not teach additional courses beyond the Core Classes in 2023-24. We request that all SDBs pray for those who feel God's call to serve as pastors and leaders in SDB churches to overcome challenges and obstacles to continue in their good service as well as to pursue continued training.

Once again we wish to honor those who serve as **faculty and instructors** in the SDBU program, as without their important contributions the program would not be possible. Current faculty in SDBU are: Rev. Matt Olson, Berlin, NY; Rev. Steve Osborn, Frontier-Carbon Valley, CO, Rev. Andrew Camenga, Salemville (German), PA; Rev. Carl Greene, Milton, WI; Rev. John J. Pethtel, Colorado Springs, CO, Rev. Gordon Lawton, Frontier-Carbon Valley, CO; Rev. Ken Burdick, Auburn, WA; Patty Petersen, Frontier-Carbon Valley, CO; Miriam Lawton-Berg, Frontier-Carbon Valley, CO; and the Director of Education, Rev. Nick Kersten.

#### ***Fellowship of Evangelical Churches Theology Certificate Program Partnership***

In last year's report, we reported an opportunity for Masters-level education through a partnership with the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FEC). Executive Director Carl Greene made a connection with FEC leadership which led to discussions about a possible partnership. The FEC has made an agreement with three seminaries (Denver, Bethel, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) to provide a three-year educational experience for their students in key theological disciplines. We were invited to join with the FEC and have our students participate in this program alongside FEC students with SDB mentors for each of our students. At the conclusion of this three-year program, credits from the program are transferrable to

each of the three participating institutions for a full Master's degree, and credits in the program and after are discounted by 50%.

**In 2023-24, two students, Chris Galarneau and Jeremiah Owen, entered the program and completed the first year of their three-year commitment.** The initial feedback from these students was positive, and so we are optimistic about this option as a way to aid students seeking seminary/Masters level training in the future, as it offers an online option, SDB mentorship experiences and a significant reduction in price for students. We will continue to evaluate and report on this new partnership in the future.

While we do not have new students to join the program this fall, we are seeking interested students to participate in 2025-26 to continue our exploration of this opportunity. Interested parties should contact the Director of Education for more information.

### **Scholarships**

For generations, Seventh Day Baptists have endowed funds to aid in the educational experience of their young people and future leaders. In the area of theological education, there are two scholarships which have been graciously given by ministry families have been used recently to support students in their continued steps to study for ministry. Though these funds are managed by the Memorial Fund, the responsibility for finding candidates rests with the CEC in conjunction with the donors.

The Bond family created **Charles, Margaret, and Levi Bond Seminary Scholarship** to aid leaders seeking seminary education. As we have not had seminary students recently, we have not had the opportunity to grant the scholarships, though we hope that will change soon.

The Lynch family created a scholarship in honor of Alcott Lynch in 2016 for students studying for ministry with special preference for those students who come from diverse backgrounds. **In 2023-24, the Alcott Lynch Pastoral Leadership Scholarship, was given to two recipients, Xavier West and Isaac Floyd, both of whom continued their studies in SDBU.**

We are grateful for both the Lynch and Bond families as well as all others who have given so generously through the years to support theological education among Seventh Day Baptists. **If you would like more information about these scholarship opportunities or other educational funding opportunities, or you would like more information on establishing such a fund,** please contact Director Kersten or the Financial Director, Ron Ochs.

## **Visiting Instructor Program (VIP)**

In collaboration with the Missionary Society, and through the vision of our Executive Director, two visiting instructors from other SDB Conferences came to the United States to aid our studying leaders. **For more information on this initiative and its outcomes, please consult the report of the Executive Director** as well as the report of the Missionary Society.

## **Internships**

One key strategy in discipling young and emerging ministers and leaders is to bring them into life-on-life growth situations with other young and emerging leaders and experienced ministry leaders.

This year, **the Christian Education Council has moved forward with the launch of an internship program which means to simplify and reduce several previously existing programs into a single initiative** which can be more easily accessed by churches, and which is easier to administer. This “new” internship program offers flexible structure which local churches can personalize to their context. This work has been accomplished cooperatively with other stakeholders, including the Women’s Board and the SCSC Committee and training staff.

**In 2023-24, Joshua Coleman (church planting), Dylan Dodd (pastoral ministry), Isaac Floyd (pastoral ministry), Xavier Pethel (Conference service), Holly Probasco (church planting), Denovia McKenzie (Conference communication and media) and, Asabe Miller (Conference administration and legal work) undertook internships** of various kinds which meant to provide meaningful experiences in specific ministry areas which would aid the interns’ future prospects, the local churches and also our General Conference. We look to learn from and build on these internships in the coming year as we seek to offer meaningful internship opportunities, especially for emerging leaders. Information for interested parties can be obtained by contacting the Director of Education.

At the request of the SCSC training director, Amanda Barbee, **Director Kersten facilitated three hour-long virtual roundtable sessions at this year’s SCSC Training.** The three sessions touched on dealing with anxiety and an anxious world, ministering in cross-cultural situations with respect to gender roles, and engaging in the corporate life of the General Conference. In addition, the Director aided the SCSC Committee and Training staff in the use of Canvas, our educational management platform, with an eye towards continued cooperation in the internship space.

## **Cohorts**

Another strategy we are employing which **we are hoping will stimulate growth in our Conference is through the creation of ministry cohorts. Cohorts are small groups of leaders (usually 3-4) who gather regularly for a set, limited amount of time to work together for a stated, limited goal.** Cohorts frequently gather around skill development, book studies, common struggles, and spiritual disciplines. Cohort participants actively engage together as equals in a co-learning environment which assumes that all will teach, all will learn, and all will benefit. During 2023-24, several of these cohorts were meeting.

### ***Emerging Leaders***

As a Conference who has demographic challenges and who is called to make disciples of all nations and generations, **we have a responsibility to identify, develop, and empower emerging leaders.** For the purposes of the work of the CEC and that work carried out elsewhere in the ministries of the Conference, we have generally defined emerging SDB leaders as those who are:

- Between the ages of 18-39;
- Closely engaged as a member or regular attender in a local expression of faith;
- Providing leadership in their local expression of faith in some role or faculty;
- Seeking out training or equipping to grow their ministry and leadership gifts;
- Engaged in SDB life beyond their local church;
- Committed to the growth of their local expression of faith;
- Dealing productively with the standard struggles and frustrations surrounding generational transition in their local expression of faith;
- Valuing our historic identity and are advocating for new and healthy expressions of that identity amid generational change.

Not all emerging leaders are all these things, but **we are actively seeking to grow the ministry and leadership gifts of those who meet several of these criteria.**

Identifying such leaders in our local churches is critical work for our movement in North America.

In 2023-24, **Carl Greene, Nick Kersten, and Miriam Lawton, along with Helen Goodrich and John Pethel, supported a cohort of Emerging Leaders** through regular communications and **a retreat for emerging leaders held October 27-29, 2023** in Janesville and Milton, WI. More information about the retreat and work with this cohort and emerging leaders more broadly can be found in the Executive Director's report and on the SDB Blog

(<https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/2023/12/06/sdb-emerging-leaders-seminar-series/>). A new emerging leader cohort is being planned for 2024-25.

### ***Vital Worship***

Executive Director **Carl Greene** lead a cohort of leaders in 2023 around a discussion about SDB worship modes, funded by a grant from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship. For more information about the work and outcomes of this cohort, please see the Executive Director's report or the SDB Blog.

### ***Vital Preaching***

Following the success of the Vital Worship grant process, ED **Carl Greene** applied for a second grant from the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship and received another grant, which has seen the creation of another cohort gathered around preaching norms in SDB churches. Again, for more information about the work and outcomes of this ongoing cohort, please see the ED's report or the SDB Blog.

### ***DWELL Pastoral Cohorts***

Several years ago, Director of Pastoral Services and Church Planting **John Pethtel** seeded cohorts for pastors in small groups for their edification. Some of these cohorts had long lives and conferred benefits on their members, and effort to continue to seed these pastoral cohorts is ongoing, especially in the work of supporting pastors.

As we continue to move forward, the CEC is interested in supporting the formation of additional cohorts. If you have questions about either internships or cohorts, if you desire to participate in one of these formative experiences, please reach out to Director Kersten.

### **Next Generation Ministry**

One of the long-standing responsibilities of the Christian Education Council has been to provide high quality programs for our children and youth at General Conference and to encourage and aid those doing ministry to children and youth throughout our Conference.

**The local churches of our Conference run regular ministries for children and youth throughout the year which have had enormous impacts** on their communities, our churches, and our world. The CEC desires to aid local churches in their efforts in this indispensable and important work.

Continuing in the momentum built on a youth retreat held on the east coast in 2022-23, there were **two youth retreats over the holiday period this Conference year**. One was held at Camp Joy in Berea, WV, with participants from Appalachian and Eastern Associations, and one was held at Camp Wakonda, in Milton, WI, with participants from North-Central Association. We are excited about the desire for these retreats and grateful for the hard work of those planning them. **Please watch Conference communication channels for more**



information about these retreats. If you are interested in hosting such a retreat, please reach out to the Director of Education for more information. Financial support for the costs of hosting a retreat may be available.

### **Supporting Camping Ministries**

One critical way that Seventh Day Baptists have sought to do ministry for more than a century is through camping ministries. Though camping ministries have been for all ages, there has been a special focus on camps aimed at the next generations of SDBs. **The CEC desires to support SDB camping ministries and network and support those who are committed to doing this ministry.** SDB Camps are facing a variety of challenges in these times, including program and facility obstacles.

**Churches and associations who need financial assistance with their camping ministries are invited to apply for financial grants using the grant application forms on the SDB website.** Conference staff will work with applicants to answer necessary questions before requests are brought for consideration to the SDB Memorial Fund. Those with questions are invited to email for more information at [grants@seventhdaybaptist.org](mailto:grants@seventhdaybaptist.org). Those with questions about camping programs are invited to contact the Director of Education, as well as network with leaders at other SDB camps.

### **Crystal Apple**

As part of our commitment to encouraging vital and thriving educational ministries in local churches, the Christian Education Council has recognized one teacher each year as the Teacher of the Year. The recipient of the honor is selected by a subcommittee of the CEC who considers nominations from local churches. A church whose nominee is selected for the award is ineligible to nominate another teacher for three years after their most recent candidate is honored. Honorees are given the Crystal Apple award to memorialize their excellence in ministry. **After nominations have been sparse in recent years, the CEC has made the decision to discontinue the Crystal Apple award after a final recipient is honored in 2024. We will continue to look for ways to aid local churches in honoring their dedicated and skilled teachers in their local contexts.**

### **Diaconate Training**

There are many ways to lead in a local church. One historic and important way among SDBs is the service of deacons. Healthy diaconates in local churches contribute powerfully to the stability, leadership, and service in a local church. **The CEC has material for diaconate seminars which aid local servant leaders in understanding their roles and organizing for meaningful service in their contexts. We plan to make this material available digitally in 2024-25 as we discontinue in-person diaconate seminars.** For more information about the diaconate training materials, please contact the Director.

## **Gospel Saturation, Public Witness and Disciplemaking**

The work of disciplemaking belongs to every follower of Jesus Christ. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into the world, He sent them into a lost world who did not know Him and asked them to go and be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. This commission to witness was not (and is not) something which only some believers are called to fulfill—it is for all who follow Jesus Christ.

Disciplemaking occurs whenever a follower (however new) takes a step towards following more closely after Jesus Christ. This is the case for believers as we walk with the Lord for all our years, but it is no less true for the new believer who is taking the first step of faith to follow Christ. As such, even **our efforts to make new disciples are ultimately attempts to make disciples**. Because it takes place over an entire lifetime, there are a variety of methods and strategies which can be successfully and fruitfully used to make disciples, including new ones. **No disciple is mature until they are making disciples themselves.**

The Christian Education Council undertakes a variety of strategies to provide support, encouragement, and meaningful resources to local churches as we seek to encourage disciplemaking of all kinds.

## **Helping Hand**

One of the longest Christian Education ministries of Seventh Day Baptists is the *Helping Hand*, a Bible Study quarterly produced in consultation with the Lessons from the Uniform Series committee of the National Council of Churches. **The Helping Hand was first published in 1895** for the purpose of increasing regular Bible study among Seventh Day Baptists. From then to now, it has served honorably as one of the primary methods of Bible teaching among our people.

**The editor of the Helping Hand is Rev. Stephen Osborn**, from Frontier Church – Carbon Valley, CO. Steve has held this position since 2010 and has completed 14 full volumes of the publication over that time, beginning work over this summer on his 15<sup>th</sup> volume. We are deeply grateful for his faithful service to the publication and to SDBs. The editor recruits SDB writers for the publication who are compensated for their contributions. The publication is proudly written by Seventh Day Baptists for Seventh Day Baptists in our Conference and around the world. Individuals interested in writing for the publication are encouraged to contact the editor to evaluate their possible contributions. Rev. Osborn's email is: [helpinghandeditor@gmail.com](mailto:helpinghandeditor@gmail.com).

**All Seventh Day Baptists continue to benefit from the work of the Spanish translation team in Ecuador led by Andrea Pozo Velástegui.** Following the synchronization of the

English and Spanish language versions in 2022, there was an increase in adoption of the publication which has continued to trend upward into 2024. We believe this reflects the desire of our congregations to study together even across languages, which is cause for celebration.

To the extent it is practical and helpful, we encourage all subscribers to consider digital delivery of the publication. **The publication is available as a PDF through the General Conference website ([www.seventhdaybaptist.org](http://www.seventhdaybaptist.org)) and for Amazon Kindle at the Amazon website ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)).**

As promised in last year's report, we instituted a **price increase for the publication** which took effect during 2023-24. We anticipate that further price increases will be necessary, but will do what we can to limit future increases.

**In 2024-25, we intend to change the billing, invoicing, and payment options for the publication to allow for online payments and credit card payments, as well as updating our internal management systems.** Local churches will see no interruption in service, but will be asked to communicate additional information and pay for their subscriptions in advance and in full prior to their delivery. **Communication with local churches about the nature of these changes will take place in the summer of 2024,** and will be implemented with the beginning of the next volume in December. It is highly likely that all subscribers will need to make payment arrangements in the new system by the end of September to insure prompt delivery of their issues for the year. Issues purchased individually will be sent after payment has been received. We believe these changes will simplify the experience of local churches managing their subscriptions and payments as well as cutting the amount of administrative work necessary to sustain the publication.

### **Spiritual Disciplines: Scripture Memory**

Seventh Day Baptists are a Bible people. Our existence is owed to our forebearers carefully reading the Scriptures and coming under conviction about how they should live. The Bible is our most important teacher, and our knowledge of God is intimately tied to it. Because the Scriptures are so central to our lives as Christians and Seventh Day Baptists, **the Christian Education Council continues to promote Bible memorization among our people.** One way we promote this important discipline is through our Scripture Memory Program. The verses and passages for our program are selected by the incoming Conference President and usually center on their theme for the year. The program is broken into three grade levels so that all SDBs from the youngest to the oldest can participate.

For many years, individuals who complete the program have received a certificate, with additional recognition given to those who complete the program for 10 or more years. In

addition, **the church with the highest number of members who complete the program have been honored with the Mary G. Clare Scripture Memory Bowl**, a traveling trophy. Since 2017, **the Andrew J. Camenga Scripture Memory Award has also been awarded to the church with the highest percentage of congregational participation** (minimum 25 reported members).

In 2022-23, **158 individuals from 13 churches and 2 fellowships completed the program and were recognized**. The winner of the Mary G. Clare Scripture Memory Bowl was the New York City SDB church, with 44 individuals who completed the program. The Andrew J. Camenga Award was also won by the New York City church, with 88% of their regular attenders completing the program. Certificates were mailed to those who completed the program in August 2023, along with material promoting the program for 2023-24. The awards were mailed to the winning churches. The awards for this year's program will be announced at the coming General Conference sessions. After General Conference, this year's certificates will be mailed to churches along with next year's program materials.

In the coming Conference year, we are making some adjustments to the program due to shrinking participation. **Beginning with the 2024-25 Conference year, we will discontinue giving out the Mary G. Clare Scripture Memory Bowl and the Andrew J. Camenga Award**. As a result of these decisions, we do not need local churches to submit completion forms, but will instead give the certificate template to local churches so that they can honor those who complete the program in their own contexts locally.

Those with questions about the program are encouraged to visit the General Conference website: <https://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/ministries/christian-education/scripture-memory-program>, for more information.

### **Spiritual Disciplines: Prayer**

In 2022 and 2023, the CEC geared up to encourage all SDBs to pray, and with Rev. Bill Shobe's guidance had looked to create a podcast about prayer which would've released early in 2024. Despite Pastor Bill's health challenges, he was insistent that we continue to plan the podcast. In the middle of the planning stages, Pastor Bill passed away. The efforts to continue moving this podcast forward fell to Director Kersten and Intern Denovia McKenzie, but they were not able to complete the podcast. Hope for it to be completed in the 2024-25 year remain.

### **SDB Wellness Network**

As our churches have reached out for programmatic support to the CEC in recent years, one type of request has dwarfed all the others in terms of its frequency: a request for material around mental health issues in the church. Growing awareness of this important area is

clearly a focus in many of our churches, and we applaud this desire to serve and aid those who struggle with mental health and wellness issues. As a General Conference we have been focused on building healthy churches who are led by healthy leaders, and so addressing this space is central to our long-term goals.

Because the area of mental health is one that touches on many disciplines and specialties in our world, and one which impacts many vocations, though we desire to aid local churches in speaking helpfully and biblically about mental health and wellness, **we have moved more slowly and deliberately to build a community of those with expertise on this complex topic throughout SDB life before we offer or recommend resources broadly.** Following the General Conference Sessions in 2023, Director Kersten continued to build a lineup of knowledgeable individuals with a goal of having bi-monthly Zoom meetings around a variety of mental health and wellness topics. The goal of this network will be to include individuals who have various experience and expertise in mental health and wellness with the goal of helping local churches and individual SDBs to find helpful resources and professionals in these spaces who are aligned with their specific needs. After delays, the Network will launch after this year's General Conference sessions. If you have expertise or experience in the mental health space and would like more information about the launch of this network, please contact Director Kersten.

### **Public Witness/Evangelism**

The future of SDB life in North America is dependent on the discipling and Gospel sharing of this generation of Seventh Day Baptists. This is not a new phenomenon, as every generation bears the responsibility to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel of Jesus to a lost world. Every Seventh Day Baptist in every church needs to be engaged in this work of engaging our world and needs to be trained to that end.

Despite the mandate, there are many ways to publicly witness to Jesus Christ. As a result, the Christian Education Council's approach is to try and make Seventh Day Baptists aware of **a variety of public witness and evangelism strategies** and encourage training in the ways that come most natural to those in our local churches. Support has been rendered to several churches who were seeking outreach materials or who were doing outreach events.

**The evangelism seminar developed several years ago** remains available for churches who are looking to boost engagement in evangelism in their congregation. If you would like more information about this seminar, please contact Director Kersten.

**SDBs once again participated in the Amplify Conference** ([www.amplifyconference.tv](http://www.amplifyconference.tv)) in 2023-24, with four SDBs (Director Kersten, Director Pethtel, Amy Stephan (Good News, NC), and Andres Jara (Anchor of Hope, MN)) attending. Once again, the conference was held in

the autumn (October 17-18, 2023) on the campus of Wheaton College and was hosted by the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton. Feedback from participants was positive, but future participation may be limited because of scheduling conflicts with this fall event moving forward.

**Our director continues to participate in the Evangelism Leaders Fellowship** (ELF; [www.elfellowship.org](http://www.elfellowship.org)), which is comprised of denominational and ministry leaders from across the country who have an interest in evangelism. This group is commissioning research on evangelism and discipling throughout North America and brainstorming new ways to reach the world with the faith we have long professed. We benefit from our engagement with these evangelistic leaders as we search for more ways to promote evangelism and gospel saturation among all the churches of our General Conference. As this group reboots following changes in leadership, we are evaluating our continued participation.

Discipling, public witness, and evangelism are tasks with a long and illustrious history among Seventh Day Baptists. We look forward to aiding Seventh Day Baptists in local churches in carrying forward this important tradition. If you care about discipling and evangelism and desire to be included in online discussions and future equipping efforts, please contact the Director.

### **Gratitude to Peggy Chroniger:**

During this ministry year, the chair of our committee, and a faithful advocate for Christian education among Seventh Day Baptists, Peggy Chroniger, indicated that she would be leaving the Christian Education Council at the conclusion of her current term. Peggy was elected to be a Director and Vice President of the Board of Christian Education in 2011 and served on the BCE through its merger with the General Conference before becoming the first chair of the new Christian Education Council in 2014-15. She served in leadership with wisdom and faith in a time of transition and served all SDBs with grace and a sacrificial spirit as she guided the fledgling Council. We are deeply grateful for her service and wish her all God's best in her life and ministry moving forward.

### **In Memoriam - Bill Shobe**

Shortly after last year's General Conference sessions, on August 19, 2023, Rev. William E. Shobe, Jr. passed away following a year-long battle with cancer. Pastor Bill was an active member of the CEC and was passionate about the work of Christian education among SDBs, encouraging us to study the Word of God deeply and pray in all circumstances in line with the Apostle Paul's instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. He was passionate about young people hearing the Word of God and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit and wanted

all believers to pray boldly for God to work powerfully in our world. His ministry among us was to pray for big things from a place of faith and trust wholly that God would move.

Though Pastor Bill is now with the Lord, we remain committed to those things which he so passionately advocated for and seek to honor him as well as our Lord Jesus in the way that we serve Jesus with passionate faith in the coming days, months, and years.

### **Conclusion**

God's provision in every generation is sufficient for the work he calls them to accomplish in His Name and for His Kingdom. We have every confidence that as SDBs are obedient to the calling to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19-20), we will thrive as a people. We are in a season of needing to disciple new believers and a new generation of leaders who can lead us to where we need to go. The Christian Education Council is committed to this work as the churches guide and direct, and as circumstances and need demand. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the churches of this Conference and look forward to serving you all in the coming year!