

**Resolution:  
Commitment of Accessibility and Inclusion**

**Introduction:** Much like the friends who broke through the roof of the building where Jesus was teaching so that Jesus could heal the paralytic, the Church of the Brethren is encouraged to work creatively to enable all people, including those with disabilities, to have access to God's love, teaching and faith community. The Disabilities Ministry of the Church of the Brethren recognizes that many congregations have worked to incorporate people with disabilities more fully into the body of Christ. At the same time, it urges the church to recognize that more must be done to ensure that all people may worship, serve, be served, learn and grow in the presence of God as valued members of the Christian community.

**Whereas:** one in five Americans lives with a disability that significantly limits one or more major activity, and

**Whereas:** virtually everyone will have a disability at some point in their lives, especially as they reach elderhood, which should garner particular attention within the church since nearly half of the Church of the Brethren population is already elderly, and

**Whereas:** our call to share our faith and reach out to the many people with disabilities who remain unchurched can be accomplished only as we become accessible, and

**Whereas:** some persons with disabilities, who have valuable gifts and energies to contribute to the common good of our church (1 Corinthians 12:7) and can contribute meaningful leadership on denominational, district and local committees, are barred from participating fully, if at all, in the life of our denomination, and

**Whereas:** despite a 1994 Annual Conference Resolution urging "appropriate follow through by the Church of the Brethren congregations and institutions on behalf of persons with special needs in our midst," many of our churches, church-related facilities (including camps and denominational offices), and gatherings remain largely inaccessible or offer significant challenges to persons with disabilities, and

**Whereas:** the attitude of our greater society toward people with disabilities has dramatically changed toward full inclusion of people with disabilities since the national Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, and

**Whereas:** some denominational districts, camps and congregations have made accessibility modifications to facilities, half of the Church of the Brethren congregations, exempt from ADA regulations, still lag behind secular society in making facilities accessible and in integrating persons with disabilities into their communities, and

**Whereas:** barriers continue to exist in architecture; in communication for those with visual, mental or hearing impairments; and in attitudes that reflect a lack of sensitivity or

understanding, which deny persons with disabilities the right to a life of dignity and respect that includes access to education, healthcare, useful work, recreation, spiritual nurture, friendship, freedom, self expression, and service equal to and balanced by the rights of others, and

**Whereas:** the life of Jesus, his works and his teachings, provide a clear basis for our church's commitment to nondiscrimination, integration, and inclusion, and

**Whereas:** we believe God requires the Church of the Brethren to protect these rights and exercise spiritual and moral leadership by its preaching, teaching and practice,

Therefore, we petition the Annual Conference to urge each congregation, agency, institution, facility and gathering of the Church of the Brethren to make a new commitment to enable all people to participate fully in all ministries of the Church of the Brethren. Furthermore, we ask organizations and event planners:

1. To work to ensure that all may worship, serve, be served, learn and grow in the presence of God as valued members of the Christian community.
2. To examine barriers, both physical and attitudinal, that prevent people with disabilities from living fully in church community and work to rectify these situations.
3. To commit that all existing and future denominational office sites be modified or designed to follow the guidelines of the ADA.
4. To request that the Association of Brethren Caregivers continue to make resources available to assist in fulfilling these commitments.

Resolution approved by the Association of Brethren Caregivers Board, meeting on March 25, 2006

**Action of the 2006 Annual Conference:** Annual Conference adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee that the resolution entitled "Commitment of Accessibility and Inclusion" be adopted.