

# CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

## Christian Lifestyle

Two Annual Conference queries prompting this study have asked for a focus on the use of possessions and resources, our response to taxation for war, and the mind of Christ in relation to world citizenship. The request passed on by the General Board has asked the task force to define the problem, to provide a descriptive study of Brethren attitudes, and to make recommendations to the church at large and for implementation by the Board.

### *Where have we been?*

Historically Brethren have identified the "simple life" as an essential element of Christian discipleship. Simplicity has been commended not for its own sake, but for the purpose of seeking first the kingdom (Mt. 6:33). The church has held up the simple life as a means to unity and integrity, to experiencing the transforming will and power of God, and to living out the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Mt. 5:8).

For nearly three centuries our identity as Brethren and Christians has been more closely tied to how we live than it has to creeds and doctrines. At times in the past this has taken the form of rigid legalism. In the present generation we are obsessed with individuals doing their own thing. Neither of these extremes conforms to the mind of Christ. Yet we have found it easier to repent for the legalism of our forebears than for our own sin of indifference and lack of discernment.

### *What's new?*

In researching its assignment, the task force discovered that Annual Conference has repeatedly made significant statements on lifestyle, possessions, wealth, stewardship, taxation, and relationship to the state. Representative excerpts from statements of the last thirty years are included in Appendix A of this report. Especially pertinent are the statements on Economic Problems, 1951 and 1964, The Theological Basis of Personal Ethics, 1966, and Justice and Nonviolence, 1977.

Still there are new areas of awareness that need to be addressed. First, it is new to most Brethren to discover ourselves as possessors of great wealth, consuming approximately eight times our share of the world's food, energy and mineral resources.

Second, only recently have we become sensitive to the fact that about half the federal taxes we pay personally is used for past, present and future wars. Our money destroys life and global resources in defiance of the will of God. We pray

for peace while paying for war.

Third, we are becoming increasingly sensitized to the fact of how much of our time and energy are expended in producing, consuming, and competing for possessions and prestige. There is little time for knowing ourselves, sharing in the lives of others, and standing in the presence of God.

It is especially to these aspects of lifestyle that the study is addressed.

#### *What is our motive?*

Concern for simple living is no longer the exclusive preoccupation of ascetics and pietists. Research indicates that in 1975 about five million people in the United States had already adopted some form of voluntary simplicity, and it is predicted that some 35 million will do so by 1985. A 1977 Harris survey notes that 69 percent of those polled believe the country would be better served by emphasis upon "learning to appreciate human values more than material values."

But our concern as Brethren is more than a drift with popular trends. It is based on an understanding of how God uses power as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Our motivation for examining lifestyle is not primarily a concern for simplicity or economics, but for faithfulness. We believe that God through Jesus Christ speaks directly to the way we live. As participants in a kingdom which seeks the lost, redeems the outcasts, liberates the captives, and proclaims the redistribution of wealth and property in the jubilee year of the Lord, we cannot sit easily in the seats of wealth and power of an oppressive status quo (Lk. 4:16-20).

#### *A call to intentionality*

Most things we do are a matter of habit, conditioning, training, and unconscious imitation. We are programmed by culture, family, and media, seldom questioning why we act as we do, or whether we are doing the things we value most. Many of the Influences which shape our behavior - hedonism, triumphalism, cynicism, legalism - run counter to the lifestyle of the kingdom of God which Jesus lived and proclaimed.

A call to Christian lifestyle is a call to intentionality. It is a call to reject the shifting winds of culture. It is a call to place our lives, our values, our priorities in the control of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit and the support of the brothers and sisters in the community of faith. "Choose this day whom you will serve ..." (Josh. 24:15).

#### *A call to joy and freedom*

A call to Christian lifestyle is not a call to asceticism, grimness or calculation. It is rather a call to celebration, joy and liberation, the result of a single unified focus in our lives. Jesus' call to obedience is at the same time a call to joy and celebration

at the banquet table of the lord.

### *A call to responsible citizenship*

As Christians we recognize that all power and authority belong to God. For this reason we respect authority. However the scriptures warn us of "principalities and powers" that see themselves as independent of God and have therefore become demonic.

As Christians we are called to discernment. Where government or institutions use power as God would, for justice, mercy, peace, help for the needy, and measures to enrich the life of all, we have no conflict. Where government or institutions invest in the destruction of life and resources, in preparation for global holocaust, in neglect or exploitation of the poor, and in stripping away human dignity, there we are responsible to use our power and wealth to resist. The possessions and power entrusted to us are to be expended in conformity to God's will for human wholeness as revealed in Jesus Christ.

### *A call to count the cost*

Most of us are very comfortable in our affluent society. Lifestyle changes are not without cost to individuals, to communities and to the church as a whole. Jesus charged his disciples to count the cost of the commitment they were undertaking. If as Brethren we are committed to searching for a Christian lifestyle it will cost more than approving an Annual Conference Statement. What price are we willing to pay for our commitment to Christ?

### *What is a Christian lifestyle?*

Living as Christians calls for constant reexamination and recommitment. We seek "an obedient devotion that transcends legalism and remains open to new situations" (Personal Ethics Report of Annual Conference, 1966). Without presuming to be all inclusive, we observe that Christian lifestyle embraces the following concerns:

- 1) *engaging in community* as a way of sharing, making decisions, empowering growth through the Holy Spirit, and providing support for Christ-centered living. The life to which we have been called is that of unity in body and spirit, and of meekness, patience, forbearance and love (Eph. 4:2-3).
- 2) *conforming our use of power to the life and teaching of Jesus*, not only in the use of wealth, but in all the places where we make decisions and are given responsibility for other persons. Jesus manifests his greatness not in exercising lordship but by his presence as one who serves (Lk. 22:25-27).
- 3) *fostering both change and nonviolence*. The church is called to bring about change where persons are devalued and exploited. Yet promoting change

- may cause the hidden violence of the status quo to erupt. "The world confronts us with the temptation to use violence in war, to acquiesce and participate in structural violence, and to support violent revolution against structural violence... To these three types of violence we make a uniform response: the Scriptures call us to reject all forms of violence and to undertake nonviolent acts to exercise our commitment to human liberation and justice" (Justice and Nonviolence, Annual Conference, 1977).
- 4) *building caring relationships*. Can we think of the "poor" as brothers and sisters rather than as problems? Are we free to treat our spouse, children, friends, employers, employees as persons apart from their function or role? Are we able to enter into the joy and pain of others? If we walk by the Spirit, there will be no conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy, but we will be able to bear one another's burdens, fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 5:25-6:2).
  - 5) *stewarding of time*. Time is a resource, non-renewable and irreplaceable, a gift from God. Time is life, our very existence. Like the people of ancient Israel, we need regular Sabbath periods for laying aside the past, renewing our spirits through worship, and deepening our trust in God (Ex. 20:8-11). In heeding the injunction of Eph. 5:16 for "making the most of the time," we need both long-term goals and daily priorities. Without the stewardship of time there can be no stewardship of life.
  - 6) *respecting the body as God's gift*. Healthful living includes our getting adequate physical exercise, practicing sound nutrition, appreciating our sexuality, and in our high pressure world, learning to manage stress. It follows that physical inactivity, overeating, abusing sexuality, and turning to alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with stress are contradictions to a Christian style of life. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).
  - 7) *adopting a norm of sufficiency*. Are we satisfied with "enough"? Can we reject incessant advertising built on appeals to greed, envy, and egotism? "Unless there are conscious efforts to the contrary, wants will always rise faster than the ability to meet them" (E.F. Schumacher, *Good Work*, Harper & Row, 1979). To scale down, to be free to give away our material substance or leave it for others may be seen as an act of defiance, a provocative witness. It is also a very positive act "to pursue God's intention of enough for all...on the basis of harmony with nature and steady movement in the direction of equality in the human family" (William Gibson).
  - 8) *living in unity with the natural order*. We need to discern violent attitudes toward natural resources as well as toward persons. Trees, grasslands, water supplies, minerals, wildlife and farmlands are resources which must be conserved by conscious effort. Beyond conserving, we need to foster

reverence for God's ongoing process of creation. "The whole creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19).

*What are we already doing?*

A survey was undertaken to discover ways in which Brethren already are responding to the concern for lifestyles. The survey was not a representative sampling of all Brethren. It was rather a largely self-selected group of approximately 250 individuals and families who chose to fill out the survey sheet in the August 1979, Messenger. The task force opted for this type of survey in the belief that it would be more helpful to the church at large to know what concerned members are doing rather than to reflect on what is not being done. The survey results and analysis found in Appendix B indicate that a corps of Brethren is actively involved in lifestyle concerns.

*What are some other options?*

Descriptive examples of individuals, communities, or churches in rural and urban settings are provided in Appendix C as models which may help others who are seeking a more responsible lifestyle. Additional models are described in the special issue of Messenger commissioned by the task force, "Simplicity and Solidarity," November 1979.

*Action recommendations*

The Goals for the 80s is a call to individuals, congregations, and the denomination as a whole to embody a more creative and responsible lifestyle. "To do justice, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly" inevitably raises the question for individuals and institutions, "How am I (or we) using life's resources?" Toward enabling the church to deal with this question, we present these recommendations:

- 1) *Covenant Groups.* We recommend that the General Board provide leadership to assist pastors and laity in the formation of local covenant groups that focus on faithfulness to God as the basis for assessing lifestyles. Such Christ-centered community is needed to support families and individuals dedicated to radical faithfulness. A covenant group formulates its own pledge for working toward lifestyle change. Study materials are available to assist the reflection/action process.

To work at lifestyle in covenant groups will involve tension and risk. This especially will be the case in economic matters, a realm most of us treat as private and confidential. It will not be easy to subject information about how much money we have and how we spend it to a group of brothers and sisters for scrutiny and counsel about how we can be more faithful. Yet it is time to renounce our individualism, acknowledge our dependence on and confidence in one another, and commit our lives in the economic sphere as in

other dimensions of life.

- 2) *A Network for Sharing Information.* We recommend the General Board and other program agencies assist in the exchanging of information about Brethren individuals and groups intentionally working at lifestyle change. Several possibilities commend themselves:
  - a) lifestyle themes for Annual Conference and district conferences,
  - b) regional or area workshops centering on specific issues,
  - c) continued use of Messenger and Agenda to highlight salient developments, perhaps regularly offering pages or columns where individuals and groups share names, addresses, and resources on lifestyle change,
  - d) worship resources on Christian lifestyle, including new hymns and lyrics,
  - e) displays and resources by the Association for the Arts, and
  - f) a packet of lifestyle resources updated periodically.
- 3) *Solidarity with the Powerless.* We recommend that districts, local churches, voluntary groups and individuals each find at least one tangible way to stand with and for the powerless, as a response to biblical teaching. Such a search may lead to:
  - a) vocational or voluntary service in prison ministry, in community organization, in service to the battered and abused, or in advocacy with persons traditionally discriminated against -- women, the poor, and ethnic minorities,
  - b) the adoption of affirmative action goals and a system for monitoring progress in the employment and training of minorities in business and institutions,
  - c) taking up residence in the inner city or among the rural poor, entering fully into the life of the neighborhood and working for community revitalization, and
  - d) one congregation joining in partnership with another across cultural or social lines, working toward mutual ministry.
- 4) *Wealth and Possessions.* We recommend for the study and practice of Brethren such measures as

- a) a self-selected limit on expenditures for personal or family consumption,
- b) support of such consciousness-raising activities as the Global Women's Project,
- c) adoption of the graduated tithe which calls for an increased level of giving as the level of income rises,
- d) the sharing of tools, transportation, land and energy to conserve resources,
- e) counseling within the congregation on such aspects of Christian stewardship as family financial planning, wills and estate planning, land trusts, and
- f) investments only in banks, corporations, or institutions whose efforts support life-enhancing enterprises rather than militarism, economic exploitation and social injustice.

Further, in the present global transition from an age of growth to an age of scarcity we recommend the General Board provide leadership and resources for widespread study of the scriptural implications of economic life. Particular attention is to be given to economic systems that are dependent upon excessive consumption, waste, and planned obsolescence, and that make unjust claims on the raw materials of underdeveloped countries. At the same time, models for transforming economic relationships are to be lifted up.

5) *Taxation and Militarism.* We recommend Annual Conference strengthen and extend the denomination's historic peace witness through the following actions: (Points a through e are based on recommendations of the New Call to Peace-making Conference, Green Lake, Wisconsin, October 1978).

- a) to call on congregations, districts, and the General Board to place high priority on study and discussion of:
  - 1) war tax resistance, including Biblical examination of the Christian responsibility to civil authority,
  - 2) consideration of refusal to pay the portion of their federal taxes used for militarism as a response to Christ's call to discipleship and obedience,
  - 3) pledging by congregations and individuals of spiritual, emotional, legal, and material support to members who resist war taxes,

- 4) exploration by the General Board, congregations, and church-related agencies for release from the current legal requirement to collect taxes by withholding the income taxes of employees, especially that portion of taxes used for military purposes,
- b) to affirm that the open, non-evasive withholding of war taxes is a legitimate witness to our conscientious intention to follow the call of discipleship to Jesus Christ,
- c) to consider the creation of a peace fund by congregations, the General Board, or the New Call to Peacemaking for handling the alternative "tax" payments of members who are conscientious objectors to war taxes.
- d) to lend support to members who as a peace witness choose a lifestyle that reduces taxable income or increases their tax-deductible contributions to minimize tax liability,
- e) to call on congregations, districts, and the General Board to participate in research and planning in local areas aimed at the conversion of plants from the manufacture of weapons to the production of civilian goods.

Also with reference to taxes for war, Brethren are urged to work for legislation that will enable alternative tax arrangements for persons conscientiously opposed to war. Annual Conference previously endorsed such efforts in 1973, in the Statement on Taxation for War, and in 1978, in the Statement on the World Peace Tax Fund.

- 6) *Stewardship of Natural Resources.* We commend the General Board for expanding its stewardship education program to encompass the stewardship of creation. We recommend this program accent the interdependence of all living forms and teach a conservation ethic for the care and use of resources.

We further recommend that

- a) energy audits and corrective steps be taken in our local churches, church-related institutions, places of employment, and individual homes,
- b) the church seek out opportunities for utilizing solar and wind power and self-reliant, intermediate forms of technology,
- c) the General Board and Pension Plan use any investment holdings in utility companies to influence responsible energy decisions,

- d) districts and congregations join efforts to safeguard water and air resources and to preserve prime agricultural land for farming, and
- e) local churches and districts organize and sponsor ecological and environmental educational programs.

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In bringing these recommendations the task force is convinced that if concerns on lifestyle are pursued from the perspective of biblical theology, the questions raised will be radical. The task force further believes that guidelines for simpler lifestyles will be developed most meaningfully by individuals and groups as they are led by God to confront their own situation and in encounter with one another.

Thus a report such as this is but an initial effort to bring together the concern for biblical justice with the reality of the world situation. By uncluttering our lives and participating more fully in disciplined living, we stand to strengthen our common life in the church and our witness to the gospel in the world.

Let us begin.

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**APPENDIX A: EXCERPTS FROM PAST ACTIONS**

The following are excerpts from minutes of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference and General Board since 1950, excerpts having particular relevance to Christian lifestyle concerns.

**STATEMENT OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN ON ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**  
 Adopted by Annual conference 1951, reaffirmed continuing relevance at the 1967 Annual Conference.

The Church of the Brethren believes that the economic perplexities of our time require the church to give spiritual and practical guidance. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be more fully and successfully applied in this as in all areas of human life. It is doubtful whether any other area affects the individual more tangibly and immediately. Yet the church, which has often sought to guide or regulate more trivial aspects of the

individual's conduct, has been slow and even fearful to speak on these larger issues.

## I. The relevance of the Gospel

... The New Testament emphasizes the supremacy of the spiritual. But it does not support the idea that material concerns have no bearing on the spiritual. The cases of the young man with great possessions (Mt 19:16-22), of Ananias (Acts 5:1-11), and of the pious Pharisees who devoured widows' houses (Mt. 23:14) show how certain economic motives and practices can be fatal obstacles to spiritual achievement.

## II. The Present Economic Situation

... A final characteristic of our present world is the continued existence of misery and want... The gospel teaches Christians to share with those less fortunate than themselves ... The church must encourage constructive criticism of any system, however excellent, which continues to be trailed by want, ignorance, and despair.

## III. Christian Economic Principles

... The Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, the twelfth chapter of Romans, the letter of James, and, in fact, the entire New Testament give us not only specific precepts but also a general atmosphere and spirit which is the spirit of Christ. The church can bless only those economic beliefs and practices which harmonize with this spirit.

The Church of the Brethren presents the following applications of basic Christian principles to our economic life:

1. It is not the church's place to ally itself with any particular system. The name of a system is not important; what it does is very important. The virtues and the faults of any system must be examined in the light of Christian teaching...
6. Efficient and ample production of wholesome commodities is desirable. The benefits of such production should be enjoyed by society as a whole, not merely by a small minority...
7. The desire for security, economic advancement, and prestige must be subject to Christian self-control to avoid injury to others or to society as a whole. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Mt. 22:39). For the sake of his neighbor the Christian will limit his personal wants.
9. The idea that the profit motive is and must be the mainspring of human endeavor is contrary to the Christian teaching.
10. The possession of wealth out of all proportion to a person's needs or to his contribution to society cannot be easily reconciled with the spirit of Christ.

Neither can unusual degrees of economic power or control. The legitimate possession of wealth or economic influence must take the form of a stewardship which is sensitive to God's will and the needs of mankind.

12. Since production for war purposes leads either to the destruction of goods and resources (not to speak now of human lives) or to the stagnant waste of these goods, neither war nor preparation for war can be defended on Christian principles.

#### IV. Recommendations for Action

4. The church must keep its own economic house in order. Since the church itself acts as employer, purchaser, and owner of property, its own practices with respect to wages, hours, pensions and rentals should be in harmony with Christian principles. A sharing of burdens between those parishes which enjoy few advantages and those which have many should be increasingly practiced in the distribution of leadership, financial aid, and quotas for giving.

#### THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF PERSONAL ETHICS

Adopted by Annual Conference 1966.

##### *Life and Property*

Life and property are gifts to man from God... Life and property assume their rightful significance when man recognizes that he is to be a good steward of God's gifts, using them in nourishment of and care for his fellowman...

In an affluent society in which many persons are seeking security through possessions, it must be affirmed again and again that life does not consist of the abundance of things and that the Good Life is not found in material possessions. Christians must see affluence as either a potential blessing in the establishment of the Good Life among all men and nations, or a possible peril greater than poverty. Luxurious living must not be allowed to crowd out involvement in social issues such as civil rights, poverty, or urban decay, nor must materialism divorce us from the great issues of our day. In his search for security the Christian is called to resist the many pressures of our materialistic living and to practice the "simple life" as God's faithful stewards of our time: To purchase within his reasonable financial means; to beware of excessive deficit spending and long-term, high-interest installment buying; to renounce luxuries which are inconsistent with the life of service and suffering; to set aside first his responsible giving to the church and its world ministries.

#### JUSTICE AND NONVIOLENCE

Report of the General Board, Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, June 1977;

adopted by the Annual Conference.

Our understanding of the biblical view of justice and peace leads us to affirm these principles:

The church in its concern for all people, the poor, the powerless, the rich, the powerful, is not called to defend the riches of the rich or to preserve the power of the powerful.

The church has specific responsibility to defend and respond to the rights and needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, and those with insufficient power to assure their rights.

No person is created for poverty, but all are born for a full place at the table of the human family.

The church is to witness to the responsibility of the ruling power for the administration of justice by crying out against persons or governments that abuse justice and misuse their power. . .

### *Justice Violated*

In a world beset with degradation and misery, most members of the Church of the Brethren sit with others at the pinnacle of the global structure of wealth and power. Many middle-class persons in the United States possess and consume far more wealth than their numbers would allow if the resources of the world were shared compassionately among the people of the world. Many Christians, although committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ and solidarity with neighbors, are implicated in structural violence.

### TAXATION FOR WAR

Adopted by Annual Conference 1973.

### *Recommendations*

Although the Brethren cannot agree as to whether tax withholding is proper, they all can recognize the propriety of using the means of dissent which the social order itself recognizes and provides. We recommend, therefore, that all who feel the concern be encouraged to express their protests and testimonies through letters accompanying their tax returns, whether accompanied by payment or not, in correspondence with appropriate legislators and officials, and in other such ways.

We recommend, also, that both the denomination and individual Brethren give strong and active support to appropriate legislation providing alternative tax arrangements for peaceful purposes for those persons conscientiously opposed to war.

### OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Adopted by Annual conference 1969.

### *Obedience to God Comes First*

... In any forced option between loyalty to God and loyalty to the state, the choice for Christians is clear. Obedience to God is their first and highest responsibility, their supreme loyalty, their positive beginning point, their plumb line for decision-making. It is a case of positive obedience to God, though the state may negatively call it "civil disobedience."

### *Some Guidelines for Action*

Christians are called to obey whatever the cost. Christian faithfulness may bring on or require civil disobedience. This is a serious and drastic step which should be thought through carefully, prayed about, and fully discussed. Its legal and other consequences should be understood, and the state's authority to punish law violators recognized. . .

The emphasis of the action should be upon faithfulness to God and the affirmation of clear moral issues rather than upon the negation of law and civil disobedience as an end in itself.

### "THE MISSION REFOCUSED"

Adopted by Annual Conference 1973.

A statement of Goals and Priorities presented by the General Board listed a series of items to "get first claim upon Board funds and personnel." Included were:

"Programs to explore total lifestyles (goals and values), recognizing we do not live by bread alone and are called to be good stewards in our use and sharing of the resources of earth God has given to us."

### WORLD HUNGER CONCERN

Adopted by Annual Conference 1974.

Affluence and consumption, especially of the industrial countries, is a major difficulty. Rising affluence is a major claimant on world food resources. This can best be illustrated by its effect on the consumption of cereals which dominate the world food economy. About 70% of the world's crop area is in cereal production. In the poor countries, comprising two-thirds of the world's people living in 98 countries, the annual consumption of grain averages about 400 pounds per person. This grain is consumed directly to meet minimum energy needs. Little can be spared for conversion into animal protein...

### REPORT ON WORLD HUNGER CONCERN

Adopted by Annual Conference 1975 as follow-up to the 1974 Paper.

We have also learned that the common assumption that the developed world is self-sufficient and the poor or developing world is dependent is not necessarily

true. In reality, we note that the developing countries are currently importing only 7% of their food products while Japan and Western European countries import 20% more grain than all the under-developed nations combined. The United States has a net import of milk products and last year imported one billion pounds of meat. According to a Michigan State University report, the rich nations import more protein from the poor world than they export to it. One-third of the African peanut crop is imported into Europe to be fed to livestock.

## CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP: RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM

Adopted by Annual Conference 1985.

We have been given much: life, bodies, and abilities. The natural resources to sustain life are available to us in trust for our use now and for the use of generations to come. The knowledge of what God has done and continues to do for us through Christ is a most precious gift.

All we have has been given to us in trust. The implications of this for the "faithful and wise steward" are considerable. We are accountable to God for all that has been entrusted to us, and we are accountable to each other for our faithfulness to God. Stewardship means conscious, thoughtful, and purposeful decisions about the use of everything.

Every day, every moment of life is an account to be used to the fullest. The number of days we each have is not allocated evenly. As with the talents in the parable of the three servants (Matt. 25:14-30), it is not the amount of time we are allocated, but the use that is made of the allocation that is significant. The irreplaceable resource of time is not to be spent casually.

Our physical bodies are marvelous gifts from the Creator: unique, everchanging, with expandable capabilities. The care of our bodies affects our ability to function as stewards. Balanced nutrition, proper exercise, adequate rest and relaxation, temperance in all things, and avoidance of harmful or dangerous circumstances are concerns of the responsible steward. As stewards, we also consider opportunities to give blood, donate needed organs at death, and observe funeral practices marked by dignity and simplicity.

Every living being is unique. The skills and creative abilities of each of us are woven into the fabric of life. To lose the contribution of any one person because of apathy, feelings of inferiority, or fear of failure is to reduce the whole. God's plan calls for the full use of the gifts that we have been given.

Stewardship of our energies becomes increasingly important as the community calls forth our gifts. One person cannot do everything, but every person can do some things. Living as a member of the household of God means careful apportionment of responsibilities. Finely honed energies are more effective than random ones.

Earth and its resources are delicately balanced. Much of nature is finite and non-renewable. Faithful stewardship calls for the careful and respectful use of what God has provided in the natural order for the enhancement and continuance of the natural systems. Stewards care about the preservation of the environment, clean air and water, the soil, plants, animals, and every other aspect of creation. Resources are to be used considerately, valued above profit, and shared with the rest of the world. As stewards, we care for and preserve the physical universe.

More fundamentally, stewards are entrusted with the preservation of life itself. Environmental pollution, toxic contamination, and the existence of life-destroying weapons are contrary to that trust. Human good and the good of the rest of creation are bound together. Stewards are the caretakers of life.

Stewardship of the gospel is a natural response of the stewards of God. The opportunity to know and study the good news of God's love is a gift to be shared. The faithful steward does not leave that to happenstance, but joyfully witnesses through word and deed with other members of the faith community.

#### STATEMENT ON EVANGELISM

Adopted by Annual Conference 1972.

*The Best News Comes to Us in Jesus Christ and Makes Things Happen ...* In every person.

... Things happen when people discover they must be stewards of their personal resources. Everything — finances, books, tables, cars, recreational equipment, travel opportunities — is regarded prayerfully so that its use may be for God's glory and a neighbor's good.

*The Best News Challenges the Church to Be Evangelistic*

8. *Let our evangelism be incorporated in actions.* Through deeds of service, through evidences of personal concern, and through programs and policies that enable persons to become whole and fully human, the gospel is communicated and authenticated. The good Samaritan and the evangelist are not different persons. Individuals and congregations cannot divorce what they do from what they say. By taking a stand when basic issues are at stake; by rendering service when it may be unpopular to express concern for the oppressed; by challenging evil systems that demean and destroy human personality; by creating a caring community — in ways such as these the good news is translated into a language of deeds that everyone can understand.

#### CONCERN ON THE USE OF ENERGY AND RESOURCES

Church of the Brethren General Board Resolution, February 1975.

### *Statement of Problem*

"Added to the problem of limited supplies is the serious problem of maldistribution wherein the United States with 6% of the world's population uses about one-third of the world's energy. As standards of living and energy demands around the world increase, the United States will become increasingly a target of hostility due to its excessive energy use. Not only does the United States use more than its share of energy, but some of it is consumed in a very wasteful manner."

### *Judeo-Christian Heritage*

Our Judeo-Christian heritage calls us to be good stewards of the earth's resources placed here for our use and benefit. The privilege of their possession carries with it the responsibility of using them wisely and conserving them intelligently. Resources must not be squandered now to the detriment of future generations nor be hoarded by one segment of the earth's people to the detriment of others. In order for all people to live abundantly as God intends, we must share our bounty with others because we believe in love and justice.

Other Conference actions since 1950 related to lifestyle concerns include:

Statements on Alcohol, 1952 and 1976

Statement on Tobacco, 1952

Stewardship of Accumulated Possessions, 1954

The Church, State and Christian Citizenship, 1967

Ecology, 1971

The Farm Issue, 1974

Life Stewardship, 1975

World Peace Tax Fund, 1978

The Farm Crisis, Church of the Brethren General Board Resolution,  
March 1985

Resolution on Rural Community in Crisis, 1985.

### **APPENDIX D: SELECTED READING**

Eller, Vernard. *The Simple Life: The Christian Stance Toward Possessions*. Eerdmans, 1973. 122 pp., \$2.25. The teachings of Jesus and the writings of Soren Kierkegaard provide a background for interpreting the Christian's attitude toward material things.

Finnerty, Adam D. *No More Plastic Jesus: Global Justice and Christian Lifestyle*. Orbis Books, 1977. 225 pp., \$3.95. Relates global problems to ideas for action.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration Of Discipline: The Path To Spiritual Growth*. Harper and Row, 1978. 180 pp., \$7.95. The role of spiritual disciplines in deepening the

inner life and heightening the sense of joy. See especially the chapter, "The Discipline Of Simplicity ".

Gibson, William E. *A Covenant Group For Lifestyle Assessment: Participant's Manual*. United Presbyterian Program Agency, 1978. 111 pp., \$2.95. A guide to examine the hunger/ecological/justice crises in light of the freedom and the responsibility given by the Gospel.

Gish, Arthur G. *Beyond The Rat Race*. Herald Press, 1973. 192 pp., \$1.45. A look at the poverty of affluence and alternatives for spending less and enjoying it more.

Gish, Arthur G. *Living in Christian Community*. Herald Press, 1979. 360 pp., \$8.95. Insights into the risks and joys of living in Christian community.

Hessel, Dieter T. (ed.) *Beyond Survival: Bread And Justice In Christian Perspective*. Friendship Press, 1977. 222 pp., \$4.25. Nine essays backgrounding the lifestyle of Christian faithfulness.

Hessel, Dieter T. (ed.) *How to Become a Poor Church (And Save Faith)*. United Presbyterian Program Agency, 1978. Newsprint tabloid, 16 pp., 5 copies \$1.75. Proposals for a simplified church as a model for institutions in a new society.

Schumacher, E.F. *Good Work*. Harper and Row, 1979. 223 pp., \$9.95. A critique of society's cynical stimulation of greed and destruction of the dignity of labor, along with creative examples of alternatives.

Shoemaker, Dennis E. *The Global Connection: Local Action For World Justice*. Friendship Press, 1977. 142 pp., \$3.95. A handbook chronicling what local groups are doing in behalf of global economic justice.

Sider, Ronald J. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*. Paulist Press, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1977. 246 pp., paper \$4.95. A profoundly Biblical look at global hunger from the perspective of evangelical social action. Included is a model for a graduated tithe.

Smith-Durland, Eugenia. *Voluntary Simplicity, Study-Action Guide*. Alternatives, 1973. 96 pp., \$3.00. A small group resource that probes the New Testament direction on lifestyle and justice concerns.

Taylor, John V. *Enough Is Enough*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1975. 120 pp., \$3.50. A biblical call for moderation in a consumer-oriented society, for more "Cells of Joyful Dissent."

Ziegler, Edward K. *Simple Living*. The Brethren Press, 1974. 128 pp., \$1.25. What simple, uncluttered living means as seen historically through the values and practices of the Church of the Brethren.

**Action of 1980 Annual Conference:** The paper was presented for the General Board by Estelle Boggs Horning with other members of the General Board Task Force present. *The paper was adopted with the addition of one amendment which is incorporated in the preceding wording.*

## **BACKGROUND STATEMENT**

Queries from the Northern Plains District on Wealth and Possessions, and on Lifestyle and Taxation from the Michigan District of the Church of the Brethren were assigned by the 1977 Annual conference to the General Board for study and report back to the Conference. Due to the similarities of the concerns, the Conference directed that the two queries be studied together.

The Executive Committee of the General Board appointed a design committee of three persons - Paul Keller, Laurie Kingery and Wilfred E. Nolen - to propose ways for the study to be done. A design was suggested and the General Board in 1978 appointed Ina Ruth Addington, Cordell Bowman, Estella Homing, H. Stephen Mohler, Ramona Smith Moore, and Howard E. Royer (convener) to carry out the study on Christian Lifestyle.

The two appendices that appear here are updated. Two other appendices, a survey on lifestyle change and lifestyle models, were in the approved report and hence are published in the official Conference Minutes.

## **APPENDIX D (ADDITIONS SINCE 1980): SELECTED READING**

Bodner, John, (ed.), *Taking Charge of Our Lives, Living Responsibly In the World.* Harper and Row, 254 pp., 1984, \$8.95. Surveys areas of life where people are most hooked by the pseudo-creed of consumption and are most eager to make changes. Provides values clarification exercises and offers practical suggestions for change.

Bhagat, Shantilal P., *What Does It Profit...? Christian Dialogue On The U.S. Economy.* Brethren Press, 144 pp., 1983, \$6.95. Looks hard at the twentieth century Christianity in a global economy. Examines economic systems that do not serve common good.

Foster, Richard J., *Freedom of Simplicity.* Harper and Row, 1981, 200 pp., \$13.45. Sets the quest for simple living in the context of holistic Christian maturity and explores the complicated decisions and disciplines involved in living a faithful life today.

Friesen, Delores Hinstead, *Living More With Less Study/Action Guide.* Herald Press, 1981, \$5.95. This book is designed to accompany Doris Janzen Longacre's *Living More With Less* as a study guide for ecumenical groups, church school classes, neighborhood groups or home study groups exploring lifestyle changes.

Hessel, Dieter T. (ed.), *Congregational Lifestyle Change For The Lean Years*. United Presbyterian Program Agency, 1981, \$4.00. Eight-session study on the importance of responsible stewardship, new attitudes toward church development, changes in leadership style, and congregational lifestyle assessment.

Hessel, Dieter T. (ed.), *Shalom Connections In Personal And Congregational Life*. Ellenwood, Ga.: Alternatives, 1986, 176 pp., \$7.50. Designed to help individuals, groups, and whole congregations to develop life habits that express justice to the poor, care for the environment, and rebuilding of community.

*Hunger In A Land Of Plenty: A Study And Action Guide*. Bread for the World, Washington, D.C., 1985, 103 pp., \$4.50. Leader's Manual, \$2.00. A seven-session study/action guide for group learning on hunger in the United States. A leader's manual provides guidance for discovery activities, learning methods, and timing.

Longacre, Doris Janzen, *Living More With Less*. Herald, pbk, pp. 296, \$6.95, 1980. Longacre's practical style invites readers to explore living simply. Suggestions are offered for doing justice, learning from the world, nurturing people, cherishing the natural order, and living freely.

Shettel, Doris Lee, *Lifestyle Change For Children And Intergenerational Groups*. United Presbyterian Church Program Agency, New York, 1981, 65 pp., \$3.50. Six sessions concerned with careful examination of lifestyle issues, the need for change and methods for change.

Sider, Ronald J. (ed.), *Lifestyle In The Eighties*. Westminster, pbk., 1982, 256 pp., \$10.95. Contributors from around the world discuss the topic. They believe that Christians in affluent nations, by living a moderately simple life, could make an enormous contribution.