

## **2. DIMINISHING MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN**

The Missouri District Board in its July 8, 1978 meeting, voted to pass this query from a Membership Committee appointed by the Board on July 9, 1977, to the 1979 Annual Conference.

We the people of the Missouri District Conference, assembled at the Rockingham Church, September 9, 1978, are deeply concerned about the diminishing membership of our district and of the Church of the Brethren at large. We feel something must be done about this. We all have been called into the ministry of Jesus Christ when we made our confession of faith, and one of the charges then put to us is "go and tell the Good News." Therefore, we petition the Annual Conference of 1979 at Seattle, Washington to study this question of diminishing membership.

Signed: Cindy Weber-Han  
Lawrence Kienberger  
Herbert Thomas  
Harold Beach  
S. G. Hoover

The Missouri District Conference, September 9, 1978, voted to pass this query on to the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, meeting in Seattle, Washington, July 3-8, 1979.

James H. Baile, Moderator  
Sandra Gardner, Clerk

**Action of 1979 Annual Conference:** The recommendation from Standing Committee was presented by Joe Reeves:

Standing Committee recommends that the concern of the query be approved and assigned to the General Board. It also requests the General Board to involve districts and local groups in making the study, and to report to the 1980 Annual Conference with specific recommendations for dealing with the problem of diminishing church membership.

The following amended statement was adopted by the delegate body:

Annual Conference recommends that the concern of the query be approved and assigned to a study committee of seven (7) persons appointed by the Annual Conference officers. The study committee is to involve districts, local churches, and the Parish Ministries Commission of the General Board in making the study; it is to report to the 1980 Annual Conference with specific recommendations for dealing with the problem of diminishing church membership.

The Committee members selected are: Dorothy Fry, Marilyn J. Koehler, Olden D. Mitchell, Owen G. Stultz, Cynthia Weber-Han, Lorele Yager, C. Wayne Zunkel, Matthew M. Meyer, Staff liaison.

### **1980 Report of the Committee**

The report of the committee was presented by Olden D. Mitchell and interpretative media supporting the study was demonstrated by C. Wayne Zunkel. After consideration had been given by the Conference to the progress report of the committee,

the motion by the committee was approved by the Conference to grant an additional year to complete the study.

**Action of the 1980 Conference:** *The delegates adopted the motion recommending that the first part of the report from the committee as printed in the 1980 Conference booklet be received as a progress report, and that the committee be given another year to complete the assignment with major focus being given to “specific recommendations for dealing with the problem of diminishing church membership.”*

## 1981 REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

### INTRODUCTION

In studying the query and the action of the 1979 Annual Conference, the committee observed two major concerns: 1) to discover the basic reasons for the diminishing membership and 2) to propose specific recommendations for dealing with this problem. In its endeavor to fulfill both assignments, the committee decided to focus its study first on discerning why the decline in membership and, in light of these findings, bring recommendations for resolution.

### I. STUDY AND RESEARCH

**A. How The Church Has Grown.** For the first 232 years of its history, the Church of the Brethren experienced steady, significant, and sometimes impressive growth. About 1940 the *rate of growth* began to decline so that for the first time in its history, the Church's increase no longer kept pace with the growing population. The 1960's was a time of loss of membership in the Church. That loss has continued to the present.

**B. Scope of the Study.** To discern how Brethren feel about the diminishing membership and related factors, the committee: 1) conducted interviews with many pastors and lay persons, the Elgin staff, the Bethany Seminary faculty, the district executives, and with the director of evangelism of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria, Brother N. K. Mamza; 2) held a hearing session at the 1980 Conference and heard the discussion from the Conference floor; 3) received many letters from across the Brotherhood; and 4) studied questionnaires from the following persons and groups: a) members of the General Board, the staff, and the district executives; b) persons from growing and from declining congregations, as selected by the executive of each district; c) those receiving the packet of *Source* materials sent out by the Elgin staff; and d) those receiving the January, 1980 issue of *Messenger*.

The committee members did extensive personal study in the areas related to the decline in membership and the resolution of this problem; 1) reading and research; 2) interviews and correspondence with leaders of other denominations; 3) participating in seminars, retreats, workshops and special classes; 4) studying some denominations with a decline in membership and some that are growing.

Some assistance was given the committee by two Bethany Seminary students who were involved in research for the committee, and one student from the Elkhart Mennonite Biblical Seminary.<sup>1</sup>

## CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN MEMBERSHIP

(See original document for graph)

The percentage of gain or loss by decades between 1850 and 1970 is as follows:

### Percentage of Gain or Loss by decades

(See original document for graph)

**C. Questionnaires and Responses.** The committee sent questionnaires to the following persons and groups: 1) General Board, staff, and district executives; 2) selected persons in growing and in declining congregations; 3) those reading *Source*; 4) those reading *Messenger*. The responses are presented in the following graphs.

#### 1. Response of Brotherhood and District Leaders

THE DECLINE IN MEMBERSHIP IS SERIOUS		
	Agree	Disagree
General Board	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXX
Elgin Staff	XXXXXXXXXXXX	X
District Executives	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	X
IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH TO GROW		
	Agree	Disagree
General Board	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XX
Elgin Staff	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	-
District Executives	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XX

#### 2. Response of Selected Persons in Growing and in Declining Congregations

(See original document for graph)

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<sup>1</sup> A. Lee Kinsey and Fredric Jenkins of Bethany, "The Church of the Brethren: Decisions Upon Reaching Kadesh-Barnea," and Earl F. Cater of Elkhart Seminary, "Church of the Brethren Evangelism in Theological Perspective."

3. Response to SOURCE Questionnaire

MEMBERS LOST TO YOUR CONGREGATION IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS THROUGH		
Transfer to another denomination	XXXXXXXXXXXX	2308
Dropping	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	4235
Death	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	3532
PARTICIPANTS IN YOUR CONGREGATION BY AGE		
Children	XXXXXXXXXXXX	10,769
Youth	XXXX	5,551
Young Adults (under 30)	XXXXXXXXXX	8,613
Adults	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	23,090
Retired Adults	XXXXXXXXXXXX	10,347

4. Response to MESSENGER Questionnaire (see graph 4, next page [this was located on the next page in the original document – see original document for graph])

5. Some Observations Drawn From the Responses to the Questionnaires:

a. The leadership of the Church of the Brethren – as represented by those responding of the General Board, the staff, and the district executives – feels that the decline in membership is serious, and that growth is important, for the church.

b. Those in growing congregations have more positive feelings regarding the Church of the Brethren, their own congregations, and their own personal growth than those in declining congregations.

c. Those in both growing and declining congregations indicated that faithful church attendance, feeling good about the worship and preaching, caring and fellowship, does not necessarily result in feeling good about reaching and winning new members.

d. More members were lost to the church by being dropped from the rolls than by death.

e. Many feel that a major cause for the decline in membership is that “We’re apathetic, satisfied with the status quo.”

f. Many of the reasons given for the decline in membership are more nearly symptoms than causes. The committee endeavored to differentiate between the

two, and find the basic causes of diminishing membership in the Church of the Brethren in order to bring responsible recommendations.

#### **D. Why The Decline – Exploring The Problem**

1. While aware of contextual factors in our society over which the church has little control, this committee attempted to concentrate its study on national and local institutional factors that relate to church growth and decline. Many reasons for the diminishing membership in the Church of the Brethren have been explored and evaluated. From these, in our 1980 report, seven basic causes were listed:

- a. We are lacking in a warm, vital, personal relationship with, and commitment to, Jesus Christ;
- b. We have lost a clear sense of purpose or reason for existence as a Church;
- c. We have an incomplete and inadequate understanding of Christian discipleship;
- d. The commission to “Make Disciples” is not a high priority for our church;
- e. We do not have any plan or strategy as a church for faith sharing;
- f. During the past two decades we have failed to continue establishing new congregations on a regular basis;
- g. We have failed to adequately respond to the convulsive change in our society and culture;

2. In work done for the committee by two Bethany Seminary students they report that “The last four decades have seen the Brethren transformed from a denomination still aware of its sectarian heritage to one that maintains only a superficial acknowledgement to their unique contributions to the Christian faith. It is our contention that it is this basic loss of our identity combined with acute acculturation that has contributed to our decline in membership. We have embraced a stance that supports nothing with conviction.”<sup>2</sup> (Sharing some of this concern, the committee encourages congregations and individuals to give special study to APPENDIX A, “Some Perspectives on the Faith and Life of the Church of the Brethren” and to APPENDIX B, “Some Views on the Identity of the Church of the Brethren.” The committee is convinced that it is crucial for a growing church to know who they are, whose they are, and what they are about as Christians.)

3. Our study of membership loss in some other denominations has taught us that there are many factors contributing to their decline. The same holds true for the Brethren. But the primary reason for membership decline among the Brethren seems to be that, while we have witnessed effectively through a strong social ministry, we have not witnessed as well for Christ with our words and in leading people to accept Him as Savior and Lord.

#### **E. The Road Back**

1. There may be times when a loss of membership is evidence of faithfulness. There are congregations which, because of prophetic witness or special ministries or conditions of location, will not grow. For others, growth will be minimal. However, they too can help fulfill the Great Commission among other peoples in other places.
2. Growth can come to the Church of the Brethren as we reaffirm who we are. It

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<sup>2</sup> Kinsey and Jenkins, op cit.

will not come by copying others but by rediscovering what is of most value in our own tradition, and by being true to our own best understanding of the Gospel.

3. If our church is to grow again it will share unashamedly such basics as the following:
  - No creed but Christ.
  - The New Testament is our rule of faith and practice.
  - All war is sin.
  - In Christ there is neither male nor female, neither white nor yellow nor black nor red nor brown.
  - Moderation in things good; abstinence from things harmful.
  - The New Testament ordinances:  
believers' baptism; anointing for healing; the love feast with its meal and washing.
  - Christ calls us to a simple lifestyle, to service to our neighbors, to integrity of speech.
  - Nonconformity to the world (conformity to Christ).

## **II. SOME NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVES**

It is our conviction that both the cause and the solution to the problem of diminishing membership in the Church of the Brethren is very closely intertwined with our faith. Our faith has brought us where we are as a Church, and our faith determines our future. "According to your faith will it be done to you," was the assurance expressed by Jesus.

As we study the New Testament and the faith of the early Church we see that for them "being disciples" and "making disciples" headed their agenda.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16, 17) Following his baptism, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit...led by the Spirit...returned in the power of the Spirit" and stated in the words of the Prophet Isaiah his own sense of call and mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news...to proclaim...to set at liberty...to proclaim." (Luke 4:1-19)

As Jesus began his ministry he called the twelve and said, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." Throughout his ministry Jesus called and trained co-workers to be with him, and gave them the power and the authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, preach the good news of the Kingdom, to prepare the way for his continued ministry. (Mark 1:17; 3:14-15; Luke 10:2; 9:1-6).

In Luke 15, Jesus used a parable to confront some who are more concerned about being faithful than about lost people. He presented some of the ways in which persons are lost and are restored. But his central emphasis, at the end of the parable as at the beginning, was that also caught up in the lostness are the good and faithful people who do not share the Father's concern for restoring their lost brothers and sisters.

The New Testament writers portray the resurrected Christ as sharing four primary concerns: 1) to assure his followers that he is alive, that God has given to him all authority and power, and that he will be with them always; 2) to all the world they must go to witness, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to

all peoples,” to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe all that he had taught (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:44-49; Matt. 28:16-20); 3) love for their Lord would be expressed in more than words; it must also be demonstrated in the care given the lambs and the sheep of his flock (John 21:15-18); 4) they will all be filled with power for their mission when the Holy Spirit comes upon them; but they must wait until they are ready to be filled and empowered and led by the Spirit (Acts 1 and 2; Luke 24:49).

In the early church there seemed to be a clear understanding of the primary intent of Jesus for them as his disciples, and they were committed to it. They had news, too good to keep, so they shared it everywhere. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” “The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly.” Their love for Christ impelled them to share him, and the making of disciples became their first order of business. And they did it with a sense of excitement and enthusiasm! (Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31)

The Apostle Paul’s commitment to making disciples for his Lord was expressed in all he did and said, and in all he wrote. “So naturally, we proclaim Christ! We warn everyone we met, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him, so that, if possible, we may bring every one up to full maturity in Christ. That is what I am working at all the time, with all the strength that God gives me.” (Col. 1:28, 29)

“I am a free man, nobody’s slave; but I make myself everybody’s slave in order to win as many people as possible. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them. In the same way, when working with the Gentiles, I live like a Gentile, outside the Jewish law, in order to win the Gentiles. Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all people, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible.” (I Cor. 9:19-22)

### **III. CREATING THE CLIMATE FOR DISCIPLESHIP RESPONSE**

The Apostle Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (I Cor. 3:6) While God through the Holy Spirit moves persons to become disciples of Jesus Christ, we have an important responsibility to help create the climate or conditions for response.

Church growth leaders and religious social scientists agree that the matter of church growth is quite complex. There are many factors which influence persons to respond or not respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Studies of church growth and decline in the U. S. indicate there are national and local *contextual factors* (external economic, social and political factors) over which we have little control. There are also *institutional factors* both national and local (including priorities, mission outlook, leadership, attitudes of members, etc.). Over these there is control through decision by the denomination and by congregations.<sup>3</sup> All denominations and congregations operate under both contextual and institutional factors that influence growth.

Principles listed below are important factors in growing churches. Their application helps create the climate for growth.

#### **A. Some Principles Which Help Create the Climate for Growth Are:**

1. *Strong and enthusiastic affirmation of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord,*

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<sup>3</sup> Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, editors, *Understanding Church Growth Decline 1950-1978*. (Pilgrim Press, 1979).

*holding the scriptures in high esteem, and fervent prayer for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.*

This affirmation of our faith is fundamental to the church and its mission.

2. *Making Disciples as a Top Priority.*

The matter of our relationship to God is the central business of the church. No other institution deals with this. Making disciples must have a top priority status. Obedience to the gospel involves the church in many important ministries but none should overshadow helping people commit their lives to Christ as growing, serving disciples.

Sometimes it is feared that an adjustment of denominational priorities and resources to place making disciples as a top priority may weaken our much needed social and prophetic ministries. Studies indicate that this is not the case. Church growth either does not affect or affects positively the accomplishment of other goals. "...growth has little impact, either positive or negative, on the congregation's achievement of other goals. If anything, growing churches appear to be achieving other goals a bit better than those that are stable or declining in membership."<sup>4</sup>

3. *Believing that God Wants the Church to Grow, and Definite Planning For the Church to Grow.*

This means planning for reaching new people for Christ. It is not a question of faithfulness *or* evangelism. Faithfulness involves us in good planning for growth, recognizing that God produces the growth.

4. *A Vigorous Program of Starting New Churches.*

New churches reach more new people for Christ than older churches. Older churches find new vitality as they engage in starting new churches. Studies indicate that starting new congregations is vital to the growth of the church.<sup>5</sup>

5. *A Sense of Identity, Clarity of Purpose and Strong Leadership.*

We need to be able to tell in a positive and forthright manner why we are Christian and why we belong to the Church of the Brethren. Strong pastoral and lay leadership is essential to equipping and motivating the church for mission.

6. *A Recognition of God's Differing Gifts to Persons.* (I Cor. 12:1-31)

In the growing church, the abilities and skills of persons are recognized, affirmed and used in an integrated manner for the total good of the church. "...His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers...for equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11, 12).

Christ's ministry takes many forms and utilizes all of God's gifts. Loving Christian witness helps create the climate for people to respond to Christ. We rejoice in the many witness and service ministries in the

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<sup>4</sup> Hoge and Roozen, op cit., p. 207.

<sup>5</sup> Hoge and Roozen, op. cit., p. 345.

Church of the Brethren. These can be very helpful in creating the climate for persons to respond to Christ.

7. *An Orientation of the Congregation Which is Outward.*

The congregation that grows is one which serves its local community in a helpful way and participates in the world-wide mission of the church. Through service ministries the love of Christ is expressed but never as a substitute for making Christian disciples.

8. *Strong Emphasis on Worship, Preaching, Christian Nurture and Fellowship.*

It is essential that there be strong Biblical preaching in worship services that are planned so the congregation can be involved in expressing their gifts and talents to the glory of God. We also need to belong to a group where we know one another, and experience mutual caring and supportive relationships, and where in-depth study and sharing can take place. When there is deliberate planning for many fellowship and face-to-face groups within the larger worshipping congregation, the climate is created in which growth can take place. Churches grow by multiplying groups within the church. Consolidation of groups normally leads to decline.<sup>6</sup>

9. *A Compassionate Loving Spirit with Openness to New People and New Ideas.*

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) Genuine love for persons must be unmistakable. A church fellowship in which there is unity and a warm caring spirit is conducive to growth. Unresolved hostilities are discouraging to church members and repel non-church people.

For the church to grow, new people are sought out because we are Christ’s disciples and He wants all persons to have “abundant life” in Him. Openness to new persons also means a willingness to allow them to become decision-makers in the congregation. New people can bring freshness and vitality of both insights and spirit.

10. *Faith With a Willingness to Take Risks.*

Faith realistically assesses existing circumstances but sets goals which reflect that “with God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26). Faith means we are willing to adjust priorities in order for the church to grow. Faith means we set goals based on what we believe God wants done, not on the basis of what we feel assured will succeed.

11. *A Balance of Ministry*

It is not a choice between evangelism and meeting human needs. The two go together. Jesus asked persons to follow Him, but he also healed the sick and fed the hungry. Donald E. Miller of Bethany Theological Seminary, speaks of “...hospitality evangelism: an

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<sup>6</sup> Carl S. Dudley, *Where Have All the People Gone?* (Pilgrim Press, 1979), P. 71. Carl Dudley refers to a strong correlation of the church school to membership growth or decline. “The importance attached to the church school is second only to public worship...the trend of church school participation in one year will be repeated in denomination membership five years later.”

evangelism in which telling and caring belong together; an evangelism in which discipling and nurturing are done together. We are a hospitable people, as God intended, but we should be a lot more intentional about reaching out, caring, sharing with others in the name of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **B. God is Creating a Climate For Growth In the Church Of The Brethren**

The kairos moment seems to be here to move with renewed determination to make disciples in the name of Jesus Christ.

In recent years we have studied at Annual Conference the meaning of creative discipleship, our Brethren understanding of the Bible, and our new interest in missions. A number of conferences related to the Holy Spirit in the life of the church have been held. There is evidence of a new openness to the Spirit.

The responses to our questionnaires, especially in *Messenger*, indicate a growing interest in facing the problem of diminishing membership. The Goals for the 1980s are calling the church to new endeavors to grow, to plant new congregations, to grow in membership by adding new disciples.

The General staff and the district executives are actively engaged in seeking ways to strengthen our mission through coordinated planning. Pastors and local church leaders are becoming more enthusiastic and excited about the possibilities of making disciples and again becoming a growing church.

The hearings and the discussion at the 1980 Annual Conference indicated a high level of interest and readiness for working at ways to become once more a growing church.

We rejoice in the new interest in creative discipleship in the Church of the Brethren. We are excited in hearing anew the call of Christ to make disciples, and to respond with new commitment as the Spirit moves in the life of the church.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN**

“As a part of the total Christian fellowship, the Church of the Brethren has been entrusted with a message – the best news of God’s love for all persons. We have also been enlisted in His ministry of reconciliation. But for far too long we have allowed our uncertainties to inhibit our evangelism and we have been hesitant to share enthusiastically our convictions about God’s love and grace. Surely we are called to be more positive in affirming our loyalty to Jesus Christ and more aggressive in seeking commitments to Him, to His church and to His Kingdom. As persons, as congregations, as a brotherhood, we prayerfully anticipate the renewal of faith that will be reflected in the desire to grow, to be fruitful and multiply – both for the glory of God and our neighbor’s good.” (A Statement on Evangelism for the Church of the Brethren – passed by 1972 Annual Conference).

It will take more than passing a statement at Annual Conference to change the trend of diminishing membership in the Church of the Brethren. The question is: Are we willing to pay the price? The revision of priorities has begun. This revision will need to be further reflected in budget, organization and staff, and a willingness to let the Holy Spirit lead us in being and in making disciples.

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<sup>7</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Brethren Life and Thought*, Autumn 1980 issue, (Brethren Press) p. 247.

The Brethren *Goals for the 80s* state that we plan “to love tenderly by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ through proclamation and example.” This goal must have a top priority if we are to become a growing church!

**A. Recommendations to the General Board and Staff:**

We affirm the direction that has already been given by the General Board through *Goals for the 80s* planning which include some measurable growth objectives. We recommend:

1. That the General Board, in cooperation with the districts, develop a comprehensive strategy for denominational growth that emphasizes skills for caring ministry, renewal from within, and a relevance that will attract and hold new members.
2. That we accelerate the establishment of new congregations within the decade of the 80s to an average of one per district every two years by 1990.
3. That the general objective of 3% annual growth by 1984, as set by the General Board, be pursued with 5% annual growth by 1990 suggested as a guide.
4. That there be increased promotion of designated gifts and special offerings for the establishment of new congregations.
5. That provisions be made for adequate staffing and budget to enable the fulfillment of the denomination’s church growth strategy.
6. That to help prevent indiscriminate dropping of inactive members by congregations, consideration be given to a method other than per capita goals for stewardship designations.
7. That *Messenger* have a monthly section devoted to the interpretation and implementation of the denominational growth strategy.
8. That Brethren Volunteer Service orientation continue to include the basic elements of the Christian faith as understood by the Church of the Brethren, and the sharing of that faith by both word and deed. Also, that BVS projects continue to provide opportunities for volunteers to engage in both faith sharing and social service.
9. That every year through the decade of the 1980s, the Board include in its report and exhibits at Annual Conference the progress being made on the comprehensive growth strategy.

**A. Recommendations to Annual Conference Central Committee**

We recommend:

1. That the Central Committee include Annual Conference themes and programs during the 1980s which promote the denomination’s growth strategy.
2. That workshops related to denominational growth be scheduled annually as Insight Sessions during the 1980s.

**B. Recommendations to Bethany Theological Seminary**

Since leadership is so essential to church growth, and pastors are key leaders, Bethany Theological Seminary is in a strategic position to help change our denominational direction to one of enthusiastic expansion. We recommend:

1. That the Seminary undergird the denominational strategy for growth by

providing courses in such areas as: the Biblical mandate of faithfulness and evangelism; growth in the New Testament and the early church; principles of church growth; preparing pastors to make disciples and train the laity to make disciples; establishing new persons in the life of the church; working constructively with inactive membership; the teaching role of the pastor in Christian discipleship – membership classes, study groups, gifts discovery; training pastors in establishing new congregations.

2. The Bethany Extension School include courses focusing on discipleship, making disciples, and developing leadership for facilitating growth.

### **C. Recommendations To Districts**

1. That districts set goals and develop strategies in consultation with the brotherhood and congregations. The general objective of 3% annual growth by 1984 and 5% growth by 1990 is suggested as a guide.
2. That each district plan to establish at least one new church by 1984, and develop plans which will result in starting at least one new church every two years by 1990.
3. That districts give aid and support to urban churches desiring to serve integrating neighborhoods.
4. That training be provided for pastors and lay leaders on the Biblical mandate to make disciples, church growth principles and working constructively with inactive members through workshops retreats, seminars, etc.<sup>8</sup>
5. That a group of capable resource persons be chosen and trained who will be available to help local congregations. They should be theologically informed church specialists who can assist churches in diagnosing their condition and finding their way to health and growth.
6. That the camping program include a strong focus on Brethren history, belief, polity and witness, aimed at developing identity with the Church of the Brethren.
7. That seminars be required for licensed ministers, and pastors transferring from other denominations, on the doctrine, heritage and polity of the Church of the Brethren and on the scope of witness of the district and brotherhood.
8. That districts provide a person, other than the pastoral placement executive, to be responsible for pastoral care of the pastoral family.
9. That able persons be challenged to accept and prepare well for the Christian ministry, including both full-time and part-time pastoral ministry.
10. That a week-long or weekend retreat be provided periodically for new church members.
11. That each year through the decade of the 80s, the district board include in the report and exhibits at District Conference the progress being made on these recommendations.
12. That the action of the 1981 Annual Conference on this report be made a

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<sup>8</sup> Resources for working with inactive members might include leadership and writings of such persons as John S. Savage of LEAD Consultants. A helpful study guide in developing a ministry to the inactive members has been developed by Jay E. Gibble, *Reaching Out to the Missing Ones – A Ministry to Inactives*, (Brethren Press, 1980)

matter of serious study in the district.

**D. Recommendations To Congregations**

1. That every Christian be challenged to create the climate for at least one new person to come to Christ each year. This might be a neighbor, relative or acquaintance. A continuing relationship of acceptance and caring must be maintained with each person, keeping clearly in mind that the goal is to help that person become a disciple of Christ and a growing, serving Christian in the fellowship of the church.
2. That Bible study groups in the local church focus on Christ as Lord and Savior and His directive to share the good news.
3. That the making of disciples be a top priority of the local congregation.
4. That every church develop ways of communicating the existence of the congregation and the ideals of the Church of the Brethren.
5. That there be realistic assessment of the local community's needs with goals set and plans developed to meet these needs, based on the congregation's gifts and faith in what God can do.<sup>9</sup>
6. That plans for growth include a systematic way of discovering and cultivating new people who move into the community. (A follow-up visit is essential within 48 hours to those who come to worship or to a group meeting for the first time.)
7. That every congregation be challenged to begin at least one new outpost. This may be a Bible study group, a group of persons geographically distant or another cultural group.
8. That continuing training be provided in Christian discipleship for all members, and especially new members, to develop church identity and sense of mission.<sup>10</sup>
9. That a group of people, including the pastor, be trained in each congregation in the skills of listening, trust building and creative use of conflict to facilitate the health of the faith community.
10. That every family unit in the congregation regularly receive *Messenger*.
11. That congregations maintain good communication with all members who move from the church community, and use the services of Brethren Lifeline to facilitate their becoming active members of another Church of the Brethren congregation, or, if not possible, of a congregation of another denomination. Brethren who move into an area where there is no Church of the Brethren should be encouraged to explore with district and brotherhood leadership the feasibility of establishing a new Brethren fellowship.
12. That each year through the decade of the 1980s the church board report in writing to the congregation the progress being made on each of these recommendations.
13. That this report, following the action of the 1981 Annual Conference, be made a matter of serious study in the local church.

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<sup>9</sup> We suggest that congregations use the *Congregational Goals Discovery Plan* with the assistance of an "outside" resource person.

<sup>10</sup> See the list of suggested resources in Appendix C of this report.

## **CONCLUSION**

The committee has endeavored to fulfill the assignment given to it by the 1979 Annual Conference. In both areas of the assignment the committee has much more that could be shared. This report includes those items that seem to be most essential for the life and mission of the Church of the Brethren in the years ahead.

In all areas of its work the committee has prayerfully sought the wisdom, the guidance and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The report is now presented to the Conference for study and action as the Spirit Leads.

## **STATEMENT OF DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT**

As a committee, we invite the Annual Conference and the entire Church of the Brethren to join with us in the following dedication:

We believe that the vital ministry of servanthood, a distinctive identity in the Anabaptist tradition, and a unique peace witness in all its facets is needed in a world concerned with military power and armaments, self-centeredness, and worship of pleasure and material goods.

We dedicate ourselves to:

1. Develop and practice a more disciplined encounter with Jesus Christ.
2. Rethink our purpose in light of the Great Commission.
3. Make Christian discipleship and church membership more demanding.
4. Give high priority to the Commission of Jesus to “go and make disciples.”
5. Develop a denominational plan for evangelism, church renewal and growth, including a major program for new church development.
6. Become knowledgeable, sensitized and willing to act upon global concerns and the changes which are occurring in our society and in our communities.

We commit ourselves anew to our faith, the whole faith; the faith which sustains us and brings joy in our most personal moments; the faith that compels us to care about a hurting humanity; the faith we have in Jesus Christ which burns within us and must be shared.

Olden D. Mitchell, Chairman  
Dorothea Fry  
Marilyn J. Koehler  
Owen G. Stultz  
Cynthia Weber-Han  
Lorele Yager  
C. Wayne Zunkel, Secretary  
Matthew M. Meyer and Merle Crouse,  
Staff Liaison

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## Resources for Continuing Study by Congregations and Individuals

### APPENDIX A

#### SOME PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAITH AND LIFE OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

##### A. The Faith of the New Testament Church

The faith of a person or group is far more than, and different from, a set of beliefs. “It is what one believes in most profoundly, is most deeply involved in and most willing to sacrifice for.”<sup>1</sup> A person’s faith is that to which he or she gives supreme devotion, highest loyalty and first allegiance.

At the heart of the faith of the New Testament Church there was a center from which everything else derived, a core with a magnetic pull, Jesus Christ. “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new world,” according to Paul.

It was their faith that Christ called them into a covenant relationship, not only with himself, but also with one another, to be united in their endeavor to “seek first the kingdom.”

The life of the community of faith, the church, was sustained, directed and enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Only as the Holy Spirit was in control of the church was it truly the Body of Christ. In the unity of the Spirit, members of the Body were sent forth into the world to love, to serve, to witness, to preach and to bear much fruit.

The faith of the New Testament Church has been succinctly stated by William Beahm: “Christianity is primarily a religion of a Person. It has a book of sacred scripture. It has many doctrines and precepts. It has organization and ritual. But beyond all of these is its center of interest and devotion – ‘the man Christ Jesus’. Its view of God centers in him. Its view of man’s true nature derives from him. The life of the church flows through him. Its hope for the world lies in him, as does its assurance in the world to come.”<sup>2</sup>

##### B. The Faith of the Church of the Brethren

The Brethren have, from the beginning, aspired to be a church with a sound New Testament faith, a people seeking the mind of Christ. The Church of the Brethren grew out of in-depth Bible study, especially the New Testament where the “mind of Christ” could be discerned most clearly as the guide for their lives. Their study became the impetus for the commitment to obey and to do, not just to know.

“The central factor in Brethrenism...is a commitment to follow Christ in ‘radical discipleship’.” “Radical discipleship is the effort to discover and practice the mind of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The early Brethren felt that seeking the mind of Christ could be done in personal Bible study, but much more effectively sought when the intimate community of

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<sup>1</sup> Warren F. Groff and Donald E. Miller, *The Shaping of Modern Christian Thought* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1978) p. 477

<sup>2</sup> William M. Beahm, *Studies in Christian Belief* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1958) p. 35

<sup>3</sup> Donald F. Durnbaugh, ed., *The Church of the Brethren Past and Present* (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1971) pp. 39, 42

faith met together in small groups to share insights, test convictions, experience the discipline of the group in love under the leading of the Spirit.

In the faith of the Brethren from the beginning stress has been given to Christian discipleship. The Brethren have always insisted that their faith must be life-centered – an expression in the church and in the world of their personal relationship with their living Lord. “Discipleship is a following after the Lord as he goes on his way...It is our following after the Christ who is the leader-Lord making his way (and a way for his people) through the world toward the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Long before the change in the name of the church in 1908 to Church of the Brethren the members of the church were known as “the Brethren” because of the closeness of the fellowship, the sense of being a family in Christ. An essential element in the faith of the Brethren is that belonging to Christ and his body means belonging one to another, living with a deep sense of love and care and mutual concern which is manifested wherever Brethren meet.

Across the years the Brethren have been strongly sectarian and at the same time strongly ecumenical. While holding dear many special ideals, insights, teachings and practices, the Brethren have also from the beginning largely accepted the general doctrinal strand of most of Protestantism. (The Brethren have allowed a much greater freedom and divergency in interpreting these doctrines than most denominations.)

### **C. Integrating Our Faith and Our Practice as Brethren**

“In every age the meaning of the Christian faith must be re-examined so as to bring it to bear upon the changing thought and experience of men.”<sup>5</sup> “The new direction in theology is toward a closer connection between the truth of faith and the truth of general experience...It has to do with the accuracy of our assertions in relation to the way things really are.”<sup>6</sup>

In the past half-century we Brethren, like many other churches and people, have undergone tremendous change. In the process of trying to cope with this change some of our distinctive qualities and unique identity have been altered. Today when people ask, “Who are the Brethren?” some of our members struggle to try to answer.

It is our conviction as a committee that the time is over-due for the entire Church of the Brethren to appreciate its heritage, to treasure its values, to clarify its identity, to recognize its unique qualities of faith and life. We Brethren need to see more clearly our basic faith, our mission in today’s world, and the uniqueness of our interpretation of the faith and way of Christ. We have entrusted to us a treasure worth keeping and worth sharing by every congregation and every member.

We must confess that too much of the treasure entrusted to us lies as a talent buried in a field. Our church will be strengthened, and her mission enhanced, as we integrate more fully our faith and our practice as Brethren. We suggest the following as areas of this needed integration.

1. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that Christian discipleship means living in a loving covenant relationship with Christ and with one another in his church. It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to provide

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<sup>4</sup> Durnbaugh, *ibid* pp. 40, 41, Statement of Vernard Eller

<sup>5</sup> Beahm, *op. cit.*, p. 27

<sup>6</sup> Groff and Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 477

the nurture and loving discipline that enables every member to keep the two-fold covenant with integrity and devotion.

2. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that Jesus had a clear sense of purpose for himself and for all those who would be his disciples. It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to discern Christ's mission and purpose for it, and to enable each member to participate with joy and enthusiasm in fulfilling this mission.
3. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that Jesus was concerned with persons in every area of their lives – mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, personal, social – and that for him and us there can be no “personal gospel” and “social gospel”, but one whole, united ministry to the total needs of persons. It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to keep its entire life and ministry in proper focus on the total, loving concern of Jesus for persons, and to enable every member to share fully in this total ministry in which discipling and nurturing are intertwined.
4. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that Jesus was aware of the lostness of persons, like “sheep without a shepherd,” and was deeply concerned about finding and restoring them (and celebrating). It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to cultivate among all members an awareness of and a concern for lost people; and to assist the members in finding effective ways of reaching and restoring those who are lost.
5. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that Jesus did not react to the changing culture in which he lived, did not allow it to shape his lifestyle and his values. Rather, with firm convictions he began to initiate change, saying, “You have heard that it was said...but I say unto you...” It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to act rather than react in facing the convulsive changes in our society, to project and plan and assume leadership roles in loving tenderly, walking humbly, and bringing justice in our world.
6. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that the primary concern of Jesus was for the Kingdom of God to fully come to all people – that we are to pray for the coming of the Kingdom, to seek first the Kingdom. “Jesus’ ultimate analogy of the Kingdom is calling people in from the highways and byways to join in the banquet.”<sup>7</sup> It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to see that its total life, and especially the Sunday services of worship, study and Christian fellowship, should be comparable to the banquet with Christ as the host and every member calling and taking others with them to share in the feast.
7. *It is the faith of the Brethren* that when the resurrected Christ gave the commission to “go make disciples” he was not intending that this be the work of just the group on a hill in Galilee, nor of just some congregations, nor only of selected members. Rather, it was to be the primary work of every congregation, every member, everywhere. There is a belief among us that we witness to our faith, make disciples, with our lives – and in essence, that we

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<sup>7</sup> Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., *Understanding Church Growth and Decline* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979) p. 304, Statement in chapter 13 by Robert A. Evans, referring to parables of Jesus in Matt. 22 and Luke 14

do it so well that we don't need to witness with our words. It is the privilege and responsibility of every Brethren congregation to give a top priority to making disciples and nurturing them, and to enable every member to share with joy and enthusiasm their faith in and experience of Christ as they participate in this mission.

We, as Brethren, aspire to be a church with a strong New Testament faith, a church ever seeking to find and follow the mind of Christ. We have a noble heritage of faith and life. As we face the years ahead it seems imperative that every congregation and every member endeavor to "integrate our faith and our practice as Brethren."

## APPENDIX B

### SOME VIEWS ON THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN

Some Sources of the Church's identity and renewal are:

#### A. MAINTAINING CONTINUITY WITH OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE<sup>1</sup>

Faithful following of Jesus Christ and obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures have led the Brethren to some emphases which they believe are central in true discipleship. Among them are:

1. Deep commitment to *peace and reconciliation*, a love for neighbors and enemies that leads to forgiveness, mutual aid and creative peacemaking in families, society and the world.<sup>2</sup>
2. Total discipleship with compassionate sharing, and a modest, uncluttered, *simple lifestyle*.<sup>3</sup>
3. *Stewardship of self*, the total person, which includes moderation in things good and abstinence of things harmful. Stewardship of the earth means not only caring about a healthy environment but also caring about the physical and spiritual well-being of the earth's people.<sup>4</sup>
4. *Integrity of speech* which means that the simple truth needs no embellishment.<sup>5</sup>
5. Maintaining stable, wholesome *family life* with present emphasis on Christian forbearance and love in maintaining enduring relationships,<sup>6</sup> in ministering to those experiencing brokenness, and affirming those who are single.
6. *The Priesthood of all believers*. "...baptism is ordination to ministry."<sup>7</sup>
7. Belief that the Christian life must be one of fruit-bearing which has led to great emphasis on *service* to our neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emmert F. Bittinger, *Heritage and Promise*, Brethren Press, p. 134

<sup>2</sup> Edward K. Ziegler, "Tell Us About the Church of the Brethren", Brethren Press, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth L. Gible, *Becoming God's People*, the Brethren Press, p. 86

<sup>5</sup> Ziegler, p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> "Baptism and Church Membership," *194<sup>th</sup> Church of the Brethren Minutes*, p. 95 (1980)

<sup>8</sup> Bittinger, p. 135.

## B. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE LIFE OF CHRIST.<sup>8</sup>

The Church of the Brethren views the New Testament, interpreted under the creative guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the only *creed* needed,<sup>9</sup> which is lived through *radical discipleship*.

## C. A TRUST COMMUNITY AMONG THE BRETHERN<sup>10</sup>

*Agape relationships* with the brothers and sisters of the faith community are of prime importance. The anointing service offers opportunity for intimate sharing of faith in a small circle of believers, and the love feast expands the circle of love to include all members of the church.<sup>11</sup>

## D. SENSITIVITY AND MINISTRY TO THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN TODAY'S WORLD.<sup>12</sup>

The Brethren believe that the Church is the *body of Christ present in the world today* with a mission of witness, service, and reconciliation.<sup>13</sup>

Our calling is to be faithful not only to the Brethren Heritage, but – more importantly – to Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

## APPENDIX C

### SOME RESOURCES IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHERN

- Beahm, William M., *Studies in Christian Belief*. Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1958
- Bittinger, Emmert F., *Heritage and Promise – Perspectives on the Church of the Brethren*. Elgin: Church of the Brethren General Board, 1970
- Durnbaugh, Donald F., ed. *The Church of the Brethren Past and Present*. Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1971
- Eller, Vernard, *His End Up*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969
- Eller, Vernard, *Outward Bound*, Verden Press, 1980
- Fackre, Gabriel, *The Christian Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979
- Gibble, Jay E., *Reaching Out to the Missing Ones – Ministry to Inactives*. Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1980
- Gibble, Kenneth L., *Becoming God's People*. Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1979
- Gish, Arthur G., *Beyond the Rat Race*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973
- Groff, Warren F., and Miller, Donald E., *The Shaping of Modern Christian Thought*. Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1968

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<sup>8</sup> Bittinger, p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> “The General Board,” “The Faith That Is in Us.”

<sup>10</sup> Bittinger, p. 136

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth L. Gibble, *Becoming God's People*, Brethren Press, p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Bittinger, p. 137-138

<sup>13</sup> Ziegler, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Bittinger, p. 147

Jeshke, Marlin, *Discipling the Brother*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press  
 Kraybill, Donald B., *The Upside Down Kingdom*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978  
 Kurtz, D. W., *Studies in Doctrine*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1919  
 Mow, Anna B., *Springs of Love*. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1979  
 Schaller, Lyle E., *Assimilating New Members*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978  
 Sider, Ronald J., *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1978  
 Snyder, Graydon F. and Shaffer, Kenneth, Jr., *Texts in Transit*. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1976  
 Wallis, Jim, *Agenda For Biblical People (A New Focus for Developing a Life-Style of Discipleship)*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976  
 Ziegler, Edward K., *Simple Living*. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1974  
 Zeigler, Edward K., *Tell Us About the Church of the Brethren*. Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press

#### MAGAZINES FOR REGULAR USE

*Brethren Life and Thought*, published quarterly by the Brethren Journal Association and by Bethany Theological Seminary, Butterfield and Meyers Roads, Oak Brook, IL 60521  
*The Other Side*, published monthly by Jubilee, Inc., 300 W. Apsley St., Philadelphia, PA 19144  
*Sojourners*, published monthly by People's Christian Coalition, 1309 L St. N. W., Washington, DC 20005

#### APPENDIX D

##### SOME RESOURCES FOR USE IN EVANGELISM, MAKING DISCIPLES, AND THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Bales, Harold K., *A Comprehensive Plan for Evangelism*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1978 (Local Church Planning Guide)  
 Bartel, Floyd G., *A New Look at Church Growth*. Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, and Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1979 (also Leader's Guide)  
 Benjamin, Paul, *The Growing Congregation*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1972  
 Dudley, Carl S., *Where Have All the People Gone?* Pilgrim Press, 1979  
 Fackre, Gabriel, *Do and Tell: Engagement Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973  
 Fackre, Gabriel, *Word in Deed – Theological Themes in Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975  
 Hall, Douglas John, *Has the Church a Future?* Westminster Press, 1980  
 Hoge, Dean R. and Roozen, David A., eds., *Understanding Church Growth and Decline*. Pilgrim Press, 1979  
 Holloway, Fred G., *New Testament Foundations for Christian Evangelism*. Nashville:

- Tidings, 1965
- Hunter, George G., *Finding the Way Forward*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1980
- Hunter, George G., ed., *Focus on Evangelism*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1978
- Hunter, George G. III, *The Contagious Congregation*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1979
- Kraus, C. Norman, ed., *Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980
- McGavran, Donald A. with Arn, Win C., *How to Grow a Church*. Glendale, CA: Regal Division of G/L Publications, 1973
- McGavran, Donald A. and Arn, Winfield C., *Ten Steps for Church Growth*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977
- Robinson, Paul M., ed., *Call the Witnesses* (Perspectives on Evangelism in the Church of the Brethren). Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1974
- Stokes, Mack B., *The Evangelism of Jesus*. Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1960
- Wagner, C. Peter, *Your Church Can Grow* (Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church). Glendale, CA: Regal Division of G/L Publications, 1976
- Zunkel, Wayne and Stern, Irvn, *Invitation to Adventure* (A Study Action Course on Church Growth). Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1979

#### MINORITY REPORT

This paper is written because we feel the need to lift up and affirm the Church of the Brethren concept of *total discipleship*. We believe fulfilling that concept will alter diminishing membership in the denomination.

Studying the reasons for diminishing membership is very important. The small church, however, is not necessarily a problem. It can be all right to be small. John Douglas Hall in *Has the Church a Future?* writes that the church in the future may be small churches as yeast throughout the world. *The Church is called to be Christ's body in the world.* (Eph. 1:22, 23) For some congregations, fulfilling this call, will not result in numerical growth due to circumstances over which they have no control; while other congregations, embodying Christ, may experience numerical growth.

Throughout the study, growth materials, Brethren responses to questionnaires and other persons in the Brotherhood seemed to focus, in our interpretation, on *six major needs* related to diminishing membership in the Church of the Brethren. The need:

1. To understand the Christ-centered purpose for the Church.
2. To have a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of discipleship.
3. To understand and identify with the denomination and its beliefs and practices.
4. To have enthusiastic, skilled leadership.
5. To emphasize sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through proclamation and example.
6. To have structures that are not determined by culture but that develop sensitivity to and ministry with all peoples.

Further study, on our part, revealed that the Brotherhood has been working to meet those needs for several years. A few of the relevant resources we found are:

*Becoming God's People*, Kenneth Gible, 1979.  
*Heritage and Promise*, Emmert F. Bittinger, 1970.  
*Manual for New Church Members*, The General Board, 1976.  
1957 Annual Conference Report "Reporting Church Membership in the Yearbook".  
1972 Annual Conference "Statement on Evangelism".  
1975 Annual Conference Report "The Ministry: Ordination and Family Life".  
1976 Annual Conference Report "Discipleship and Reconciliation".  
1980 Annual Conference Report "Christian Lifestyle".  
1980-1981 Annual Conference Report "World Mission Program".  
"Goals for the 80s", The General Board.

Results of the study indicate that many persons and congregations are unaware of the wealth of resources provided by Annual Conference, the General Board, and the Elgin Staff for use in local congregations. (This problem of communication, too, has been addressed in the 1976 Annual Conference Report "Brotherhood Understanding".) *We urge* local congregations and district boards to make concentrated study and use of the policies, recommendations, and values in the resources listed above.

The Church of the Brethren, with its emphasis on total discipleship, is called to proclaim and exemplify, in mutual mission, the love of Christ for all persons. The New Testament, previous Annual Conference decisions, study courses, and the Goals for the 80s provide a solid foundation for the Church of the Brethren to fulfill its calling. *We charge each congregation and every member*, through your delegates and pastors, with the responsibility for understanding, experiencing and expressing the Brethren New Testament message.

Jesus asked the crippled man at the Sheep Gate pool if he wanted to recover; then Jesus instructed the man to pick up his bed and walk. (John 5: 2-10) *The choice of life* belongs ultimately to the local congregation in meeting needs, in recognizing its unique gifts and opportunities, and in fulfilling its potential as a vital part of the Body of Christ.

Dorothea Fry  
Lorele Yager

**Action of 1981 Annual Conference:** The report from the study committee was presented by Olden Mitchell. The members of the committee were present. *The delegate body adopted the paper with three amendments* which are incorporated in the preceding wording of the paper. The Appendix and the Minority Report are printed for information.