

**Standing Committee**  
**Forms Reception Committee**

Annual Conference  
**Church of the Brethren**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
2011

# Forms Reception Committee

- The Forms Reception Committee was a three person sub-committee of Standing Committee
- The FRC was charged with summarizing material pertaining to the Special Response process outlined by the 2009 paper *Structural Framework for Dealing With Strongly Controversial Issues* and deliver their report to Standing Committee

# Introduction

## The Forms Reception Committee

- Shirley Wampler, Ken Frantz, and Jeff Carter (ch.)
- Began work in the Fall 2010, met in Manassas (VA.) in April 2011, and shared in many, many conference calls
- Handled over 1200 pages of material
- Delivered the final report on June 20, 2011

Structural  
Elements

Common Themes  
and Statements

**Methodology**

lines 46-57

Contextual  
Elements

Wisdom  
Statements

# Structural: lines 64-112

## Hearing Highlights

- More than 6,600 participants
- Over 120 hearings
- More than 380 small groups
- Gender  
(when provided)
  - 2,260 males
  - 2,206 females

## Letters

- 54 total letters
  - 10 form letters
  - 11 sign-on letters (representing 609 individuals)
  - 9 sign-on letter

## E-mails

- 208 e-mails

# Letters: lines 105-110

- Letters included:
  - Books
  - Pamphlets
  - Sign-on letters
  - Form letters
  - Signed letters
  - Anonymous letters
  - Letters from individuals, congregations, and small groups

## E-mail : lines 94-104 (example 1)

“The practice of the COB has been to issue recommendations, not mandates, knowing that we are not of one mind and that the Spirit continues to move and speak. The current statement, however, is in effect a mandate, because it prevents gays from ordination in the church. I believe each congregation should be able to choose...”

## E-mail : lines 94-104 (example 2)

“What God defined as ‘an abomination’ has not changed in thousands of years. If the Church of the Brethren had let the prevailing social standards define it over the past 300 years, we might as well allow military recruiters to teach our youth and petition the local governments for licenses to open slots parlors. Those who wish to enter the set apart ministry must repent from those sins the LORD has ALWAYS railed against.”

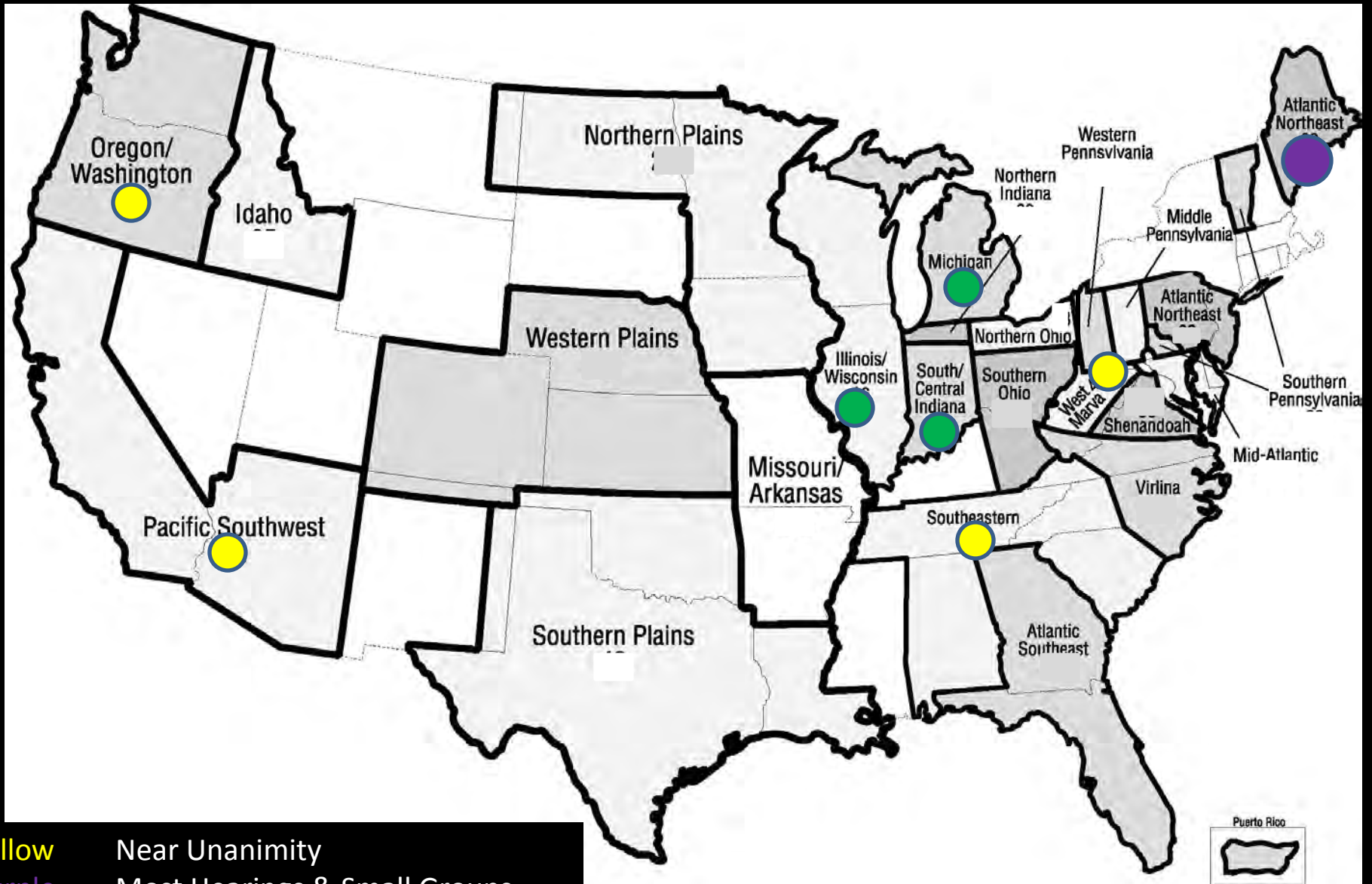
## E-mail : lines 94-104 (example 3)

“I don’t believe the two camps will ever reach an agreement. This is an issue that we will always disagree on... But I think it says something much deeper when we are honest in saying, ‘We don’t know what to do with this issue, but we love our sisters and brothers, and together, we will be the church.’”

# Reflections on Process: lines 113-152

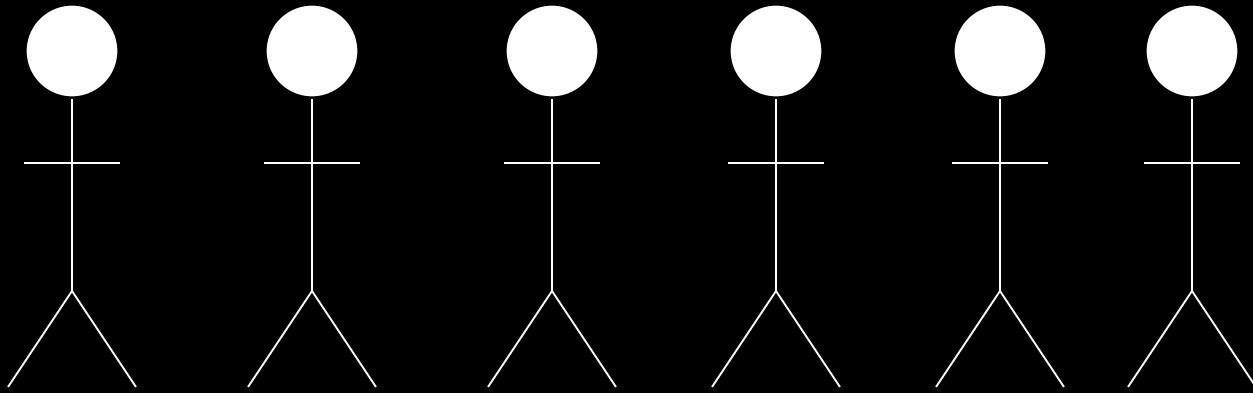
- Remarks were characterized by respect
- Hearing guidelines and facilitator reflection forms aided uniformity of data reporting
- Where there was the greatest diversity of opinions, the more dynamic the discussion
- Insightful comments resulted most often from those who had studied resource materials, attended a Bible study, and who were part of a diverse hearing group

# **SPECIAL RESPONSE HEARINGS**

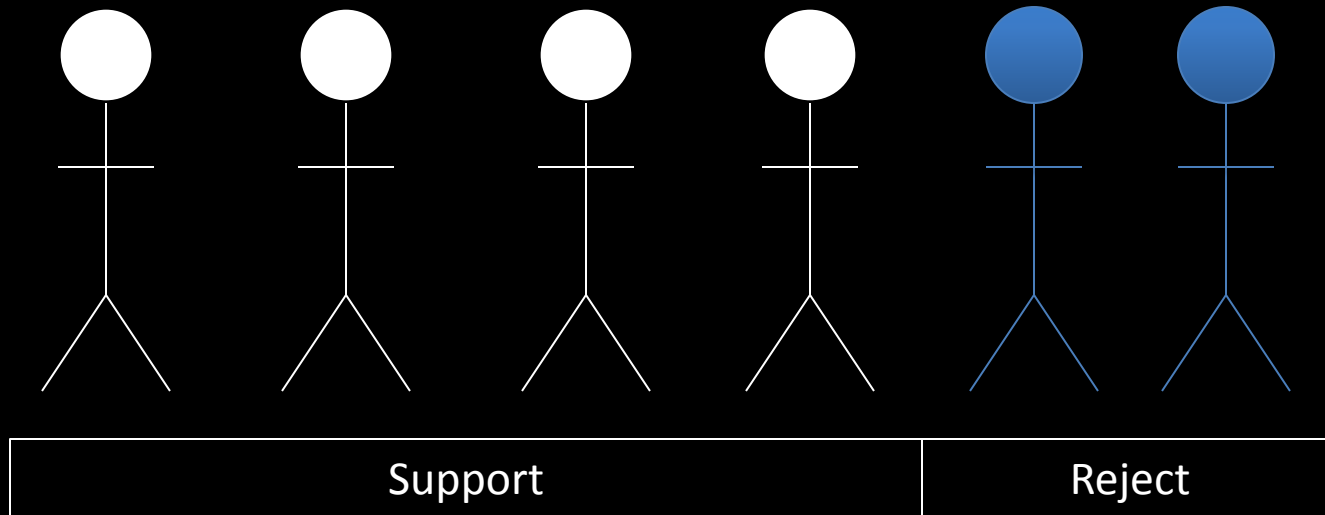


Yellow Near Unanimity  
Purple Most Hearings & Small Groups  
Green Most Diverse

# Difficulty of Voting

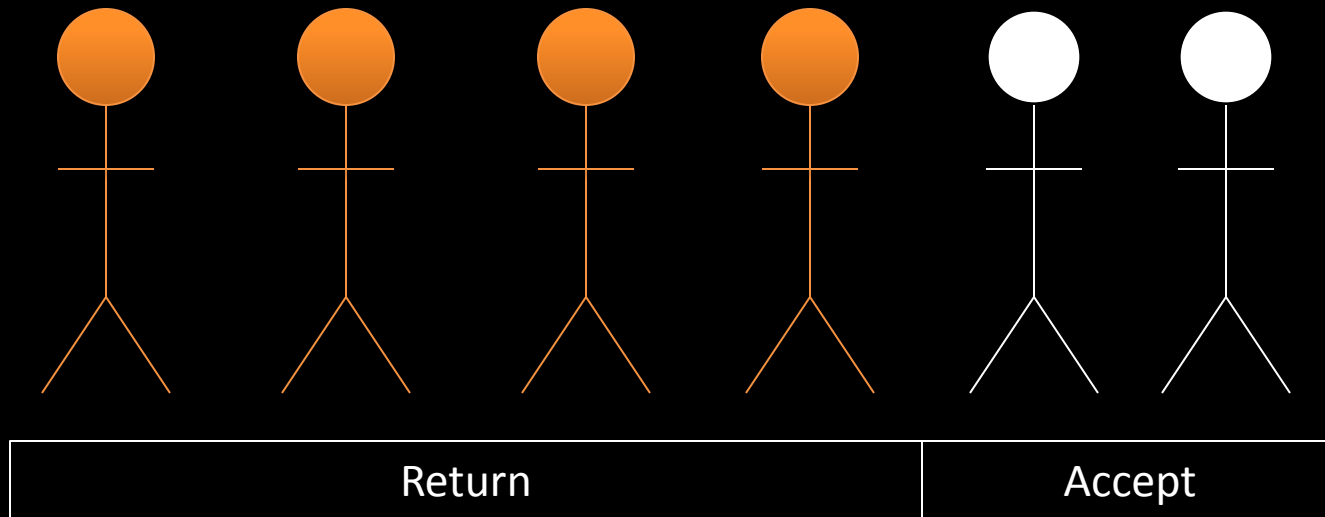


# Statement



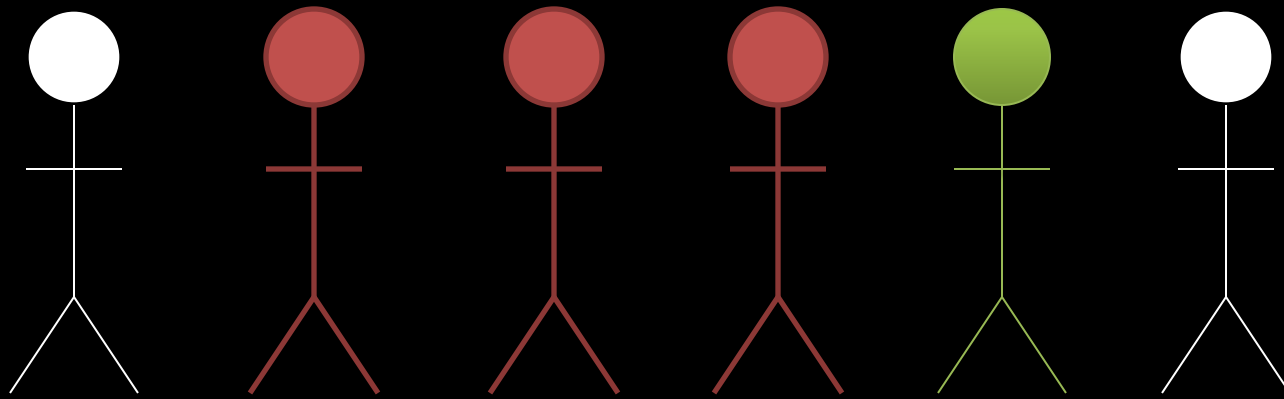
*If asked, "Do you support the Statement of Confession and Commitment?"  
Two thirds of small groups responded "yes". For some, the yes is unequivocal. For others, their yes includes permission for those who disagree to follow their conscience. For others, their personal answer differs from what they see as a suitable answer for the Church of the Brethren.*

# Query



*If asked, "Do you accept the Query: Language On Same –Sex Unions " Two thirds of small groups responded "no". For some, their no is unequivocal. For others, they fear a yes/no vote and the division that might come from trying to find a singular answer . For others, a certain weariness is present.*

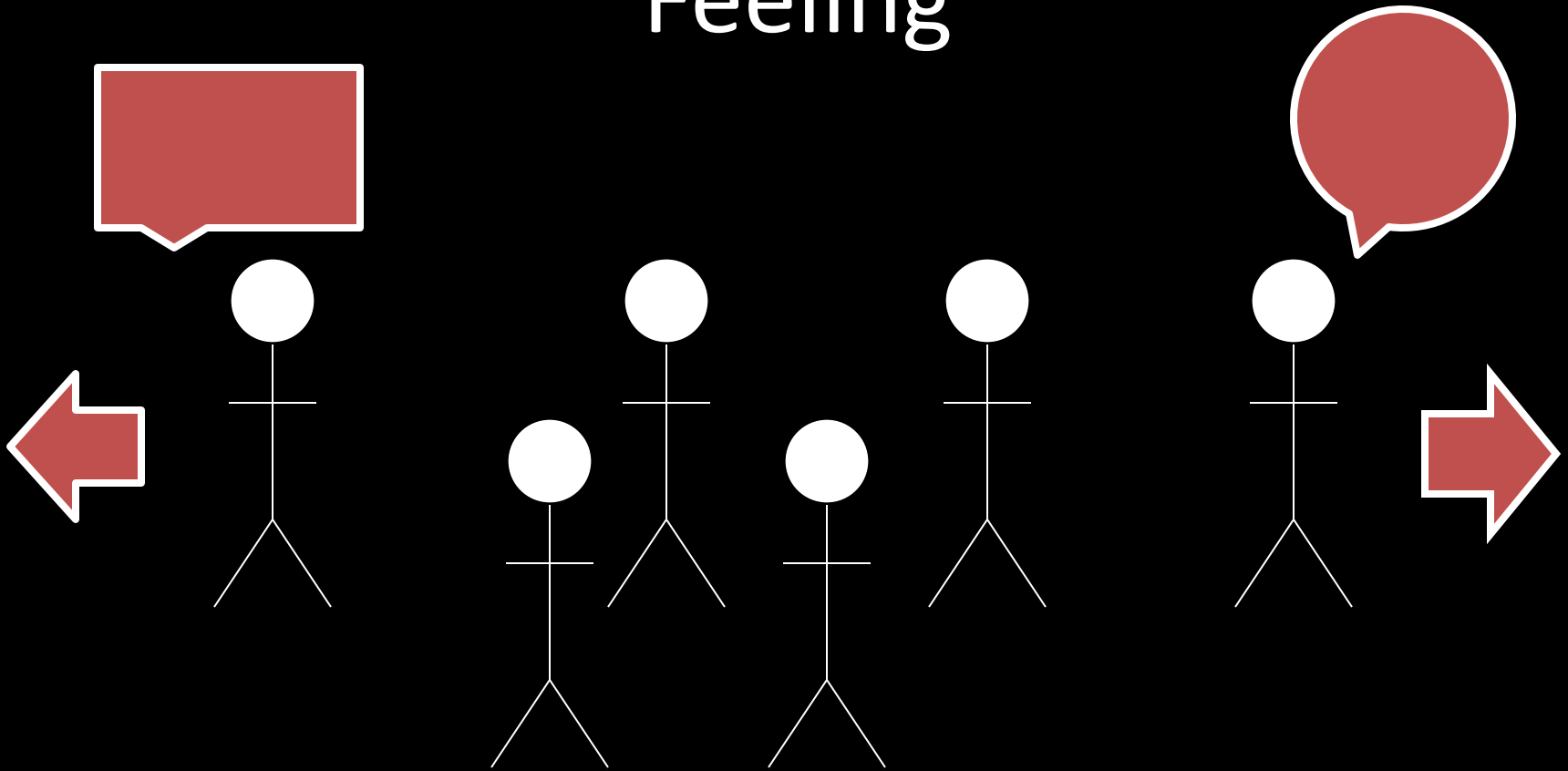
# Difficulty of Voting



Unanimity	Not of One Mind	Unanimity
	Maintain Unity Polity Options Personal vs. Corporate Understanding	

*Two-thirds of the small groups were not of one mind. On either extreme there was unanimity. The two-thirds in the middle are proportionately divided in support of the statement and return of the query or acceptance of the query and rejection of the statement. The two-thirds that are not of one mind value qualify their answers regarding the statement and query. For example, within the middle two-thirds are some who value church unity or freedom of conscious over a yes/no vote on human sexuality.*

# Feeling



*The perception of many hearing participants is that vocal extremes are calling the church in particular directions, often threatening division and possible schism.*

# Voices from the Hearings

- “No one changed position based on debate during the hearing.”
- “[I] could not support a person in leadership who possesses *any* sin.”
- “Our group (re)affirmed the 1983 paper although many had not read it!”
- “...in scriptural division there is strength... [I’m] not worried about the church falling apart.”

- “I would like Standing Committee to hear most fully that we are not of one mind... For the last 100 plus years we have found something to disagree about. That’s the reality of who we are.”
- “I would like SC to help us understand how we should view AC papers. Are they authoritative or just a statement of our understanding at the time?”
- “I would like to see us resolve the issue without creating a lasting division. I think we can do this.”
- “The Church has an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that even though we are not of one mind we can still be the Church together.”

- “This is most worthless piece of paper I have seen.”
- “The group (~40) responded very positively about the process and it was good to see people with differing opinions talking respectfully to each other after the hearing.”
- “Program and Arrangements Committee should take ownership and simply allow booth space...”

- “Those who chose not to do the study missed out.”
- “There are a lot of people in the middle who aren’t heard, who may not speak up because the extremes are so loud.”
- “Have faith in the process and in prayer.”
- “Once this group got past the initial awkwardness and tension... they were gracious toward one another and able to express divergent views without any intimidation or rancor.”

- “Hope Standing Committee can find a way to resolve.”
- “Does the entire membership need to be drug into Standing Committee’s problem?”
- “This group believes that this conversation should not continue and it’s a waste of time.”
- “This group believes [the congregation bringing the query] and leaders in it need disciplined for creating division. District leadership also needs disciplined as well.”

- “This is a very touching issue. Jesus left us with 2 marks; [1] Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; [2] Love your neighbor as yourself. We too often try to legislate what is right or wrong.”
- “[I] support Standing Committee in tackling this issue. Willing to take on monumental topic. Glad we don’t have a pope telling us what to believe.”

- “[The] COB believes that community is important. Don’t try to speak with one voice.”
- “As I grow older, I see my own sins more clearly, and I see others’ sin less clearly.”
- “Christian bodies struggle with this issue just as we do. What a wonderful witness if we could resolve this issue [in a way] that would be a light to [others]. Why *can’t* we just say we are not of one mind?”

Lines 200-224

Undergirds 83  
Paper

Names Our  
Brokenness

# Statement

Statement is  
Ambiguous, Hazy,  
Biased

Encourages  
Discussion/  
Questioned Its  
Role

Questionable  
Intent of John 8  
inclusion

Lines 225-251

Weariness of  
Debate

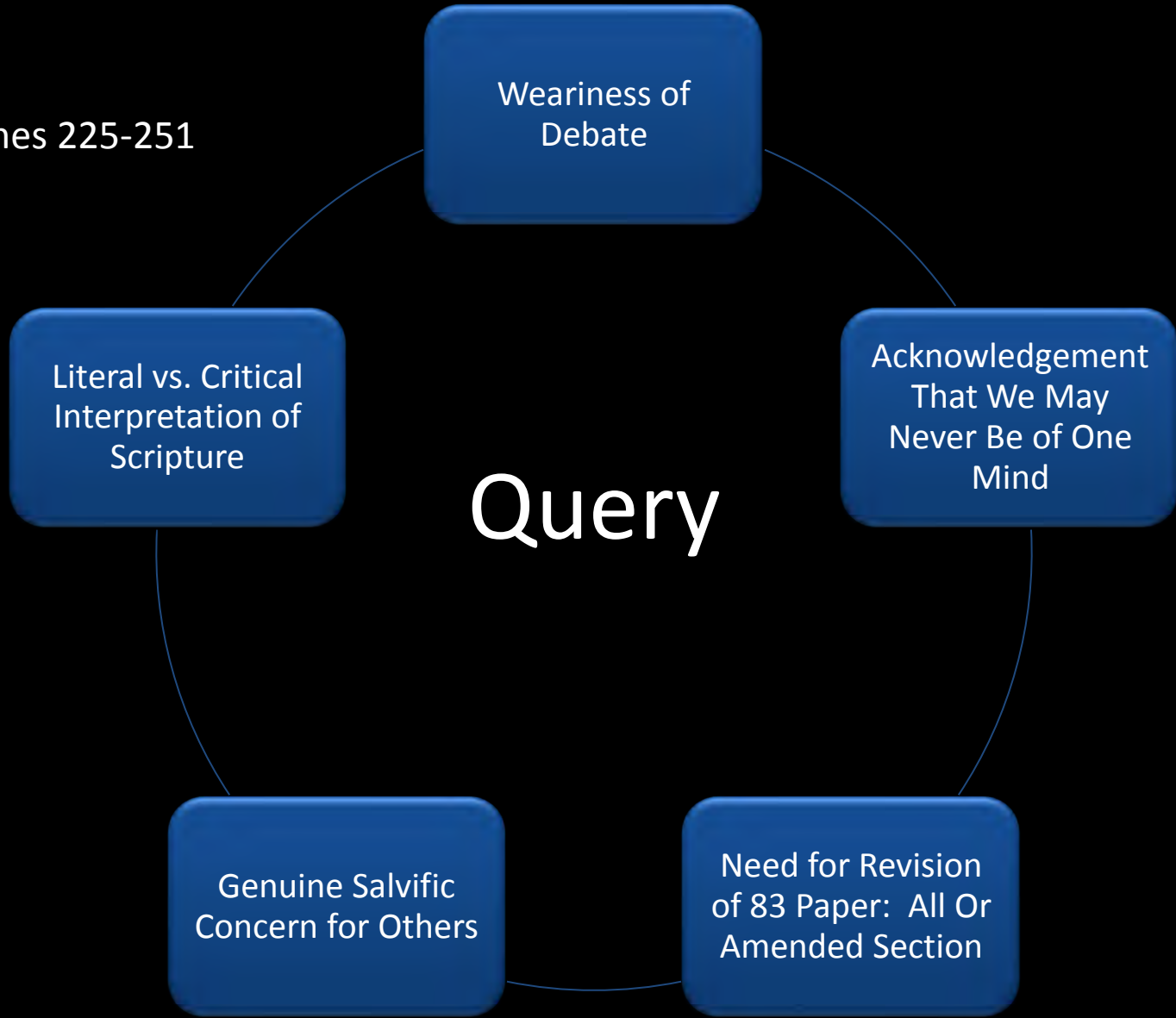
Literal vs. Critical  
Interpretation of  
Scripture

Acknowledgement  
That We May  
Never Be of One  
Mind

Query

Genuine Salvific  
Concern for Others

Need for Revision  
of 83 Paper: All Or  
Amended Section



Lines 255-271

Prayers for  
Standing  
Committee and  
Officers

Is There A Polity  
Solution? Can We  
Agree to  
Disagree?

Deep Love for the  
Church

## Direction to Standing Committee

Return the  
Statement and  
Accept the Query

Accept the  
Statement and  
Return the Query

# Two Primary Issues: lines 275-365

## Scripture & Polity

*1979 Biblical  
Inspiration and  
Authority*

*1968 Church Polity*

*2004 Congregational  
Disagreement with  
Annual Conference  
Decisions*

*2008 Urging  
Forbearance*

# Response to the Statement: lines 373-382

- Many suggested that ***A Statement of Confession and Commitment*** should be affirmed by the Annual Conference body, primarily for its perceived restatement of support for the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* and the particular phrasing related to same-sex covenantal relationships.
- Others feel that the Statement is overly broad, something that cannot be agreed upon and that will only complicate a call for consensus regarding its content.
- Still others view the Statement as having accomplished its purpose and intent of generating much-needed discussion in order to come to terms with the issues, yet with little compelling need to act in an official way towards the document. In that respect, the Statement might be tabled, withdrawn, or set aside by Standing Committee, allowing for more vital discussions to occur in our limited time together at Annual Conference.

# Responses to the Query: lines 383-389

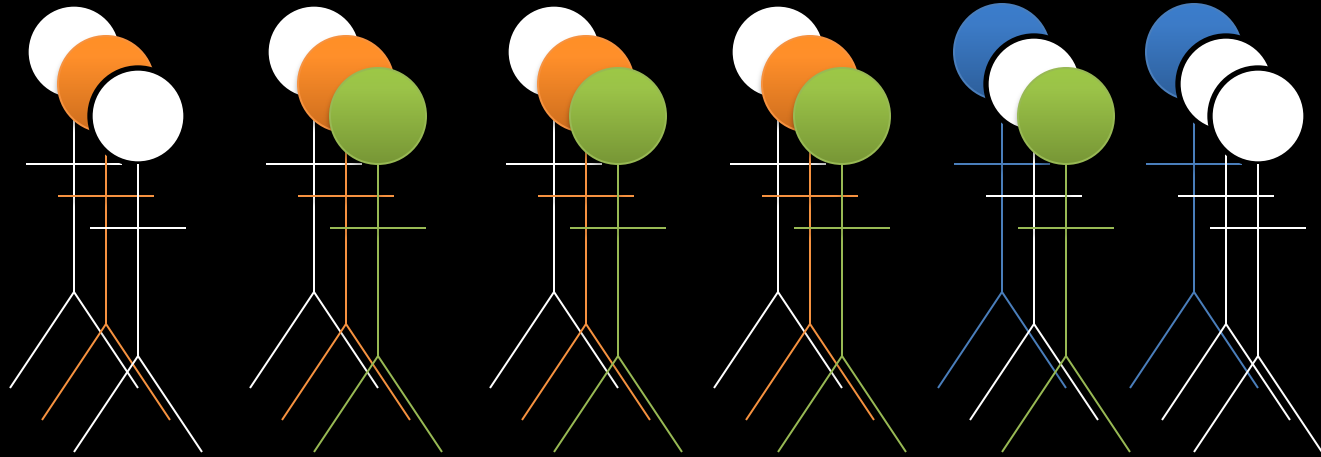
- **Query: *Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships*** was viewed as somewhat more straightforward. It was suggested that the Query could be entertained and forwarded to a study committee or returned to the originating congregation.
- Some have called for the censure of those groups raising questions concerning the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*. In the church's understanding of Brethren polity, censure is not consistent with either Brethren faith or practice.
- The threat and fear of splitting the membership by enacting a vote are very real and cause deep sadness in the hearts of many. Many cautioned against such a vote.

# Most Common Thread: Lines 414-417

One of the most commonly shared statements out of the hearing process was that we are called to love and care for one another as members of God's creation. It was the hope of many that that observation would serve as a guiding principle as we deliberate these concerns.

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

*Ephesians 4:1-6*



# Conclusion

Within the Special Response process, the Statement and the Query have served their purpose in allowing Standing Committee to take the "temperature" of the denomination as it relates to homosexuality and same-sex unions. In the end, participants affirmed the known differences in biblical interpretation and expressed a desire and willingness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**QUESTIONS**