



Church of the Brethren

FOREWORD

When controversies arise in human relationships and within the church, it is important to take time to carefully and intentionally listen to God and to each other lest the matters at hand become adversarially destructive. In 2009, the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference received a query and a statement as items of business related to homosexuality. The Conference identified these items as matters of such controversial nature that they referred them to a special response process. This process asks that congregations and districts devote attention to studying the query and statement before delegates to Standing Committee and Annual Conference make responses to them. Persons are invited to check the Annual Conference website for a more complete explanation of the special response process and its timeline.

As indicated in the process, a special Resource Committee was appointed by Standing Committee to prepare resources to assist in the study. This study guide and bibliography are the result of their work. They provide our congregations, districts, church groups, and members with materials to engage each other in conversation and study with the Holy Spirit using scripture, prayer, and the bonds of covenant. These resources not only will guide our study but will help lead us in an environment that builds on our common desire to take Jesus seriously.

Participation in this study—along with hearings at the 2010 Annual Conference and in our districts related to the statement and query—will help Standing Committee and Annual Conference delegates respond to these business items at our 2011 Annual Conference. However, the benefits of using this study guide reach beyond the immediate business of Annual Conference. Our study will help cultivate an atmosphere of respect and understanding for whatever controversial issues we face.

We extend our appreciation to the Resource Committee for their work in preparing this study guide and bibliography: John E. Wenger, chair; Karen Long Garrett, recorder; Jim Myer; Marie Rhoades; Carol Wise; and Jeff Carter as liaison from Standing Committee.

As moderator and moderator-elect, we commend these resources to our congregations and members for the building up of the Church of the Brethren in the coming years. May God the Holy Spirit use them effectively as we desire to take Jesus seriously.

In Christian care,

Shawn Flory Replogle, moderator
Robert E. Alley, moderator-elect

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Introduction

This study was created to assist in exploring two papers from Annual Conference as part of the Special Response Process. The papers are *A Statement of Confession and Commitment*, adopted by Standing Committee in 2008, and *Query: Language on Same-sex Covenantal Relationships*.

A committee was assigned the task of preparing resources to assist congregations in study of the statement and query. It was decided that grounding our study in scripture was important. The committee struggled with the selection of biblical passages, finally selecting passages emphasizing the unity of the church in times of tension, a passage speaking directly of homosexuality, and passages named in the 1983 Annual Conference statement, *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*.

Biblical passages are intended to challenge our thinking, reflect concerns raised in the statement and query, explore how Christians of passionate faith and deep commitment to God’s Word can perceive different priorities in living out God’s call, and seek the mind of Christ for our life together. Brethren New Testament scholars Rick Gardner and Dan Ulrich assisted the committee by preparing the historical and literary context pieces for the Biblical passages in this study. The following scripture texts are part of the guide (the texts in parentheses are suggested for further study on identified themes):

1. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is included in *A Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues* and is central in the *Framework for Conversation*, a guided discussion led by Standing Committee. (Ephesians 4:1-16, Romans 12:1-8)
2. Acts 10:1-33 guides us in how we are to understand and form our church community. (Luke 19:1-10; Romans 14:1-12)
3. Romans 1:18–2:11 represents one of the texts raised in the 1983 *Human Sexuality* paper for our discernment in light of the statement and query. (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:1-12)
4. Luke 10:25-37 challenges us to consider the life and teachings of Jesus. (John 4:1-42; 1 John 4:7-21)
5. John 8:1-11 is referred to directly in the *Statement of Confession and Commitment*. (Mark 7:24-30; 1 John 1:5-10)

Concerned about rising tensions in the church, the 2008 Annual Conference adopted a *Resolution Urging Forbearance*. This resolution urges us to “continue to treasure both faithfulness to truth and openness to new light.” It calls us to “commit ourselves to forbearance which recognizes and respects differences of opinions and differing degrees of spiritual insight.” It urges us to resolve “that we agree to see our difference,

not as discord, but as the blessing which can come when we openly discuss our disagreements, address our conflicts, and share our faith perspectives." It commits us to resolve "that we pledge ourselves on matters where we are not of one mind to let the Holy Spirit draw us together to be of one heart."

We do not seek to eliminate conflict. We do not believe that strict conformity is our goal in Bible study or congregational life. Rather, our goal is to cultivate understanding and establish a more respectful approach as we continue to deal with our differences. We believe Jesus modeled this behavior when dealing with his opponents, even those who wished to put him to death, in his dialogue and respect for all individuals.

With this in mind, throughout the study you will be invited to respond to a number of questions intended to broaden our perspectives and deepen our unity. We hope that mutual commitment to the covenant statement (discussed in Session 1), read corporately at the beginning of sessions 2–8, will allow open and honest sharing that represents the openness we seek in the church, without fear of judgment from anyone.

Facilitator's Introduction to the Study

The study's eight sessions are designed to follow a particular outline. Select a facilitator as convener and interpreter of the process for those participating in the study. The primary role of the facilitator is to hold the covenant before the group, inviting each voice to be present and heard.

If the facilitator plans to participate in the conversation, it is important that there is a distinction between the two roles of facilitator and participant. This might be represented by having two separate chairs—one to sit in as facilitator and one to move to as participant—or by verbally acknowledging the shift in roles—"speaking now as facilitator." It may be helpful to have a second person appointed to serve as facilitator when the primary facilitator is in a participant role. This person would hold the covenant and purpose of the study before the participant facilitator.

Each time a group meets, participants will engage in the following outline and focus on a particular passage (covenant, scripture, statement, or query). Developing a familiarity with the process should help participants engage one another more fully and share more deeply in focused discernment. Each session will follow this general outline:

- I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.
- II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.
- III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.
- IV. Silent reflection and prayer.
- V. Reading of passage.
- VI. Sharing the context of the passage.
- VII. Reading the passage for a second time.
- VIII. Consider questions.
- IX. Reading the passage for a third time.
- X. Consider questions.
- XI. Silent reflection.
- XII. Closing prayer.

The facilitator guides the group through each of these steps.

The covenant and closing prayer should be spoken by the entire group. The facilitator should make sure copies of these pieces are shared with each person.

Each passage will be read three times during the course of each session. If facilitators are concerned that the group may not have enough time allotted for all of the readings, it is encouraged that either a second meeting

is held for that session or that “Reading the passage for a second time” (VII) is skipped. Facilitators are encouraged to invite different persons to read the scripture aloud for the group. Hearing the passage read by multiple voices encourages participation and discernment (the passage to be heard without a particular person’s interpretation). The context of the passage should also be read aloud.

When considering questions, the facilitator should raise the question to the group. It is the facilitator’s responsibility to make sure that all voices may emerge. This requires the facilitator to consider the diversity of the group, dynamics of power present (due to theological training, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and interpersonal preferences (introvert vs. extrovert). Some tips for facilitating sharing include:

- Remind the group of the covenant, creating a safe place for sharing.
- Participants should listen without interrupting.
- Each person should speak only for themselves.
- Sitting in a circle, invite each person to share one at a time giving everyone an opportunity to share or pass.
- Allow for a couple moments of silent reflection before inviting persons to share.
- Encourage persons to bring a journal, allowing a few minutes for people to sketch or write responses.
- The facilitator should check in with persons to see how they are feeling in the course of the discussion. Allow space for a person to pass on sharing.
- While these discussions are not confidential, the facilitator should encourage discretion when participants share something deeply personal.
- For more resources on facilitating a difficult conversation, refer to the bibliography at the end of this guide.

Facilitators should encourage people to share from their own perspective and experience, avoiding statements such as “the Bible says...” or “scripture is clear...” or “science says...” or “all the young people...” or even “everyone in my church....” For this study we need to use such statements as “my interpretation of this scripture...” or “I believe that...” or “from my experience...” or “my viewpoint is....” Using I-statements means we need to decide what we think for ourselves, not speak for others, and give others permission to think for themselves. The facilitator should introduce this practice in Session 1.

There are two moments of silence in the session outline. These moments are intended for individual prayer and reflection—in gathering and in sending.

In preparation, it is recommended that facilitators read through the materials in the appendix, including *A Statement of Confession and Commitment, Query: Language on Same-sex Covenantal Relationships*, and *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*.

Because facilitating a meeting can take a lot of energy and requires constant awareness, facilitators are encouraged to spend some time in prayer and preparation before each session. It is important that the facilitator enter the meeting with intention, renewed faith, and a discerning spirit.

Session 1 Covenant

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting.

Recognizing that some issues are highly charged and potentially adversarial, the 1988 Annual Conference adopted a statement, *A Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues*. This action enabled Conference to handle particular issues outside of the normal Robert’s Rules of Order framework. The statement outlined a Special Response Process, designed to ensure greater discussion and more intently explore differences in search of reconciliation and mutual understanding. The process was updated and a revised paper with the same name was passed by the 2009 Annual Conference.

With the framework in place, the delegates at the 2009 Annual Conference approved submitting two items of business to this special process. The two items were *A Statement of Confession and Commitment*, produced by the 2008 Standing Committee and affirmed by the 2009 Standing Committee, and *Query: Language on Same-sex Covenantal Relationships*. In accordance with the process guidelines, a five-person Resource Committee was named and charged with the task of developing study materials and a discussion guide for use in congregations, districts, and denominational groups. The materials were to include the biblical and theological aspects of the issue as well as a bibliography for further study.

The Resource Committee struggled with how to best enable respectful and faithful conversation about the two items of business. It was decided that a Bible study offered the most effective way of facilitating the conversation and reflecting the spirit of the Special Response Process. In addition, the committee felt it would be valuable to ground the study in the context of a covenant that highlights a commitment to honesty, care for one another, trust and openness.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of the covenant.

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:
...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.
...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.
...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.
...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.
...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.
...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

VI. Sharing the context.

A covenant, in its most general sense, is a solemn promise or agreement between two parties. It has a rich biblical history beginning with God's covenant with the people of Israel and extending to the new covenant represented in Jesus. The Hebrew word for covenant, *berit*, appears 135 times in the Torah. The concept is continued into the Greek New Testament as *diatheke* where it appears over thirty times, highlighting the importance of covenant in the relationship between God and human beings.

Because of the sensitive and sometimes difficult nature of the conversation in which the church is engaging, the study sessions begin with the recitation of a covenant. Values of respect, careful listening, openness, confession, and anticipation are promised in order to create a space where participants can safely share with one another and better discern God's desire for the church. The covenant is designed to bind participants together in a mutual relationship of trust and expectation.

VII. Read the covenant for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

One way to uphold the covenant is to agree to avoid statements like "the Bible says..." or "scripture is clear..." or "science says..." or "all the young people..." or even "everyone in my church..." For this study we need to use such statements as "my interpretation of this scripture..." or "I believe that..." or "from my experience..." or "my viewpoint is..." Using I-statements means we need to decide what we think for ourselves, not speak for others, and give others permission to think for themselves. Practice making I-statements as you answer the following questions.

- A. What feelings does reading/hearing the covenant evoke for you?
- B. Are there particular words that speak to you?

IX. Read the covenant for a third time.

X. Ask.

- A. What doubts and fears do you bring to this process?
- B. What do you need in order to participate or feel safe?
- C. How can we engage in respectful conversation?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 2

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

*As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:
...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.*

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³

and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

VI. Sharing the context of the passage.

First Corinthians was written to early Christian house churches in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth. Emerging from the missionary efforts of Paul and his co-workers, and later Apollos, these groups were wrestling with internal divisions, to which differences in social status likely contributed. Specific issues included rivalry over spiritual gifts, divisive conduct and worship, and divergence from core convictions. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to address this situation, appealing in the name of Christ “that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1:10).

Paul’s vision of unity is developed at length in chapter 12, as part of a longer discussion of spiritual gifts (chapters 12–14). After noting the varieties of gifts that believers receive “for the common good” (12:4–11), Paul proceeds to describe the church with the metaphor of a human body (12:12–27). Like our physical bodies, the body of Christ consists of many parts or members, each playing a distinctive and important role. Further, these many members are interconnected and interdependent, such that whatever affects a part of the body affects the whole. Harmony within the body is thus essential to its health.

Other ancient writers also used this metaphor to depict social or political bodies, often to give a rationale for differences in social status: Human bodies have greater and lesser members, and so does society. Thus persons of lower status should be content with their lot. Paul, however, takes the metaphor in a very different direction: The seemingly lesser members of our physical bodies turn out to be indispensable, and we value and honor them all the more. So it should be, Paul argues, in the body of Christ.

VII. Read the scripture text for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is happening in this text?
- B. Who are you in the text? With whom do you identify in the text?
- C. What is the tension represented in the text?
- D. How do you see that tension today?
- E. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the scripture text for a third time.

X. Ask: What does the text require of me/us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 3

Acts 10:1-33

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:

...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of Acts 10:1-33.

¹ In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. ² He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. ³ One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; ⁶ he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, ⁸ and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." ¹⁵ The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. ¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. ¹⁸ They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. ²⁰ Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them." ²¹ So Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" ²² They answered, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." ²³ So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him.

²⁴ The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." ²⁷ And as he talked with him,

he went in and found that many had assembled; ²⁸ and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. ³¹ He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' ³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

VI. Sharing the context of the passage.

The book of Acts portrays the beginnings and expansion of the early Christian movement. As the story proceeds, many boundaries are crossed, most notably the boundary between Jews and Gentiles. According to Acts, it is God's own Spirit who leads the church to undertake a mission to the Gentiles, enabling them to share fully in the life of God's people. The fascinating drama of Peter and Cornelius lays the groundwork for this mission.

The drama unfolds in eight scenes, the first five found in Acts 10:1-33. Scene 1: Cornelius, a righteous Gentile, receives a vision affirming his piety and instructing him to send for Peter. Scene 2: Peter also has a vision, disturbingly un-kosher, but a voice tells him not to disparage what God has made clean. Scene 3: Cornelius' messengers find Peter, and the Spirit tells him to accompany them. Scene 4: Peter arrives at Cornelius' home, finds an audience waiting, and asks why he was summoned. Scene 5: Cornelius recounts his vision and tells Peter that those gathered are eager to hear God's message. In subsequent scenes, Peter preaches to his Gentile audience (10:34-43), they receive the gift of the Spirit (10:44-48), and the church in Jerusalem hears the news (11:1-18).

At one level this is a story about the conversion of Gentiles. At another level it is a story about the conversion of the church to become more inclusive. As Peter's vision reveals, this was no light matter. Separation from Gentiles and their dietary habits helped to distinguish God's people from the world around them. But now all this needed to change. God's Spirit was calling the church to expand its horizons on whom God deems acceptable. God's Spirit was calling the church to welcome Gentiles as fellow believers.

VII. Read the scripture text for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is happening in this text?
- B. Who are you in the text? With whom do you identify in the text?
- C. What is the tension represented in the text?
- D. How do you see that tension today?
- E. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the scripture text for a third time.

X. Ask: What does the text require of me/us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 4

Romans 1:18–2:11

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:

...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of Romans 1:18–2:11.

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; ²¹ for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools; ²³ and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. ²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, ²⁷ and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameful acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. ²⁹ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty,

boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents,³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.³² They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

2:¹ Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ² You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." ³ Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ For he will repay according to each one's deeds: ⁷ to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

VI. Sharing the context of the passage.

Paul's letter to the Romans addressed a conflict that threatened to split the early church. Some leaders, like Paul, welcomed Gentile believers without expecting them to obey the Law of Moses. Others welcomed Gentiles but insisted that they obey God's commands, including circumcision, a kosher diet, and sabbath rest. Paul was aware that believers in Rome disagreed about such issues (Romans 14:1–15:13). He wrote to prepare for a visit, explain his understanding of the gospel, and appeal for peace.

Before giving ethical instructions (Romans 12–15), Paul laid a theological foundation for unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. He began by declaring that the gospel offers salvation to both groups (1:16-17). Both have participated in humanity's rebellion against God (1:18–3:20), and both receive righteousness from God as a gift, not a reward (3:21-30). Paul's argument in 1:18–3:20 included a twist designed to challenge readers who were proud of their morality. His list of vices that stem from idolatry would have been familiar to Jews as a description of the Gentile world; Paul, however, charged that Jews and Gentiles do similar things, so no one should judge.

Paul's vice-list contains the New Testament's longest description of same-sex relations (1:26-27). This description is consistent with Jewish laws against men lying with men (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). It also parallels the views of Stoic philosophers (such as Seneca and Dio Chrysostom) and a Jewish philosopher (Philo), who argued that same-sex relations were lustful, degrading, and contrary to nature. These authors did not have a modern concept of sexual orientation and did not address the possibility that same-sex relations could be natural for some people. Regardless of what Paul would say about sexuality today, the context of his words suggests that he would seek reconciliation in the church.

VII. Read the scripture text for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is happening in this text?
- B. Who are you in the text? With whom do you identify in the text?
- C. What is the tension represented in the text?
- D. How do you see that tension today?
- E. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the scripture text for a third time.

X. Ask: What does the text require of me/us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 5 Luke 10:25-37

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:

...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of Luke 10:25-37.

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

VI. Sharing the context of the passage.

The law commanding love of neighbor is frequently cited in the New Testament (see Mark 12:31; Romans 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8), and comes from Leviticus 19:18. There “neighbor” carries the meaning of a fellow Israelite. Love for neighbors is expanded to include resident aliens in Leviticus 19:33-34. It did not extend, however, beyond these boundaries, and views differed on whether or when to show love to one’s enemies. In Jesus’ day, some groups narrowed the scope of the love command even further, limiting love to those who met their criteria for faithfulness.

It is against this backdrop that the lawyer poses the question in Luke 10:29: “And who is my neighbor?” The form of the question indicates that this interpreter of Torah distinguishes neighbors from non-neighbors. And he solicits Jesus’ opinion on where to draw the line, hoping to validate his own practice. Jesus will have none of it. Instead he tells a story, the parable of the good Samaritan, inviting hearers into a world where boundaries fall by the way. As the story unfolds, what requires a response is a victim in dire need, irrespective of his identity. Further, the one who aids the victim and fulfills the love command is a despised Samaritan! (Jews and Samaritans both worshiped the God of Israel, but had a history of bitter rivalry, including disputes over the Samaritans’ ancestry and the correct site for worship.)

Through this story the hearer learns that the lawyer is asking the wrong question. For Jesus, the category of neighbor knows no boundary or limit. The real question is whether, like the Samaritan in the story, one chooses to be a neighbor, to show compassion to others without distinction. Jesus himself embodies inclusive love such as this (see Luke 7:36-50; 19:1-10). And he calls his followers to do likewise.

VII. Read the scripture text for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is happening in this text?
- B. Who are you in the text? With whom do you identify in the text?
- C. What is the tension represented in the text?
- D. How do you see that tension today?
- E. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the scripture text for a third time.

X. Ask: What does the text require of me/us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 6

John 8:1-11

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:

...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of John 8:1-11.

¹ [But] Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

VI. Sharing the context of the passage.

The story of the woman caught in adultery has a different history than the rest of the Gospel of John. It does not appear in the earliest or most reliable manuscripts, and most scholars agree that it was not originally part of that Gospel. The story does, however, reveal much about Jesus. Early Christians handed it down by word of mouth, and later scribes included it at various places in John 7-8.

The context they chose for the story draws a sharp contrast between two ways of judging. In John, the Jewish authorities judge by appearances, and they have already decided to condemn Jesus (7:1, 24, 47-52). Indeed, he will be their next candidate for stoning (8:59). Jesus, meanwhile, sees what is inside a person, including the authorities' failure to keep the law (2:25; 7:19; 8:26). God has given him authority to judge (5:22, 27), but he prefers to come as light into the world, allowing people to judge themselves through their responses (3:16-21; 8:12). His mission is not to condemn but to give abundant life, which includes freedom from sin (5:14).

In John 8:3-5, the authorities confront Jesus with a case of adultery, which they would have defined as a man having sex with another man's wife or fiancée. Adultery was a serious offense against her husband, shaming his household and casting doubt on the paternity of his children. Since the law called for stoning both the adulterer and the woman (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-27), the authorities' failure even to mention the other guilty party is striking. As John 8:6 indicates, their goal is not to do justice but to catch Jesus making a statement against the law. In the ensuing drama, Jesus avoids their trap, forgives and frees the woman, and reveals God's wisdom and grace.

VII. Read the scripture text for a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is happening in this text?
- B. Who are you in the text? With whom do you identify in the text?
- C. What is the tension represented in the text?
- D. How do you see that tension today?
- E. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the scripture text for a third time.

X. Ask: What does the text require of me/us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 7 *A Statement of Confession and Commitment*

Participants in this session are encouraged to read the 1983 Annual Conference statement, Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective, prior to following the outline.

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

*As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:
...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.
...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.
...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture,
...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.
...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.*

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Read aloud *A Statement of Confession and Commitment*.

The issue of homosexuality continues to bring tension and division within our Body. We are not of one mind on this matter. We believe it is time to name the brokenness. Open sharing between persons with different perspectives and beliefs about homosexuality often seems impossible. Too often discussions in the life of the Body on this issue are marked by disrespect, meanness, and anger. We confess our brokenness.

Too often our actions and words toward one another on this issue neither honor our 300 years of Brethren heritage, nor follow the guidance of scripture and our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess our brokenness.

We affirm the 1983 paper on Human Sexuality. The paper contains an honest tension. In its guidance to the church it calls for “open, forthright conversations with homosexuals” and “advocating the right of homosexuals to jobs, housing, and legal justice.” It also states: “Covenantal relationships between homosexual persons is an additional lifestyle option but, in the church’s search for a Christian understanding of human sexuality, this alternative is not acceptable.” It is inappropriate for anyone to quote one of these parts of the paper without also referencing the other. These positions are not meant to be used to “beat” an opposing viewpoint.

The tension between these points is not undesirable. Like balancing the Anabaptism and Pietism of our heritage, this tension provides a healthy, if uncomfortable, growing edge that turns us toward one another and toward Christ rather than away from each other.

This tension is also present in Scripture. In the John 8 passage, a woman caught in the act of adultery is brought before Jesus. Our Lord first addresses those who were ready to stone the woman to death. “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Then he addresses the woman with a response in tension, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” (John 8:1-11)

We own this tension. We acknowledge that in our fallenness we may not reach uniformity on this issue. But may we strive for unity in love, mission, ministry, and witness in Christ.

Our ability to show respect even in our differences may draw an onlooker to Christ. Our meanness and fighting will certainly never draw anyone to Christ.

We also confess and ask forgiveness. For over 20 years we have allowed the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee to be a “lightning rod” for controversy on this issue. There have been many mean-spirited, unkind attacks leveled against these faithful servants. This unchristian behavior must stop.

The 1983 paper remains our official position. We trust that it was guided by the Holy Spirit. We commit to continue to wrestle with its tension, to truly listen to one another, to disagree in love, to avoid unkindness toward those with whom we differ, and to continue to seek the mind of Christ together.

VI. Sharing the context/background of the passage.

A Statement of Confession and Commitment comes from Standing Committee, which consists of 1-5 delegates from each of our 23 districts and has the task of recommending to the full Annual Conference delegate body how the church might best handle business items.

At the 2008 Conference, Standing Committee received a “request for counsel” from the Annual Conference Program and Arrangements Committee (P&AC), in which P&AC expressed its anguish over the dissonance related to the 1983 statement on *Human Sexuality*, particularly as it affects P&AC’s task of deciding whether to grant exhibit space to the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC).

For over twenty years Program and Arrangements Committee has not granted Brethren Mennonite Council exhibit space for a variety of reasons, including the 1983 statement that covenantal relationships between homosexual persons are unacceptable and P&AC’s belief that the exhibit hall is not the best venue for engaging the denomination in a dialogue on homosexual concerns. P&AC has felt increasing pressure—both from those who believe it a matter of justice to include BMC alongside other church ministries and from those who believe it contradicts scriptural teaching to grant such exhibit space. Each

side believes that the *Human Sexuality* paper requires a decision in its favor. Trying to listen and respond graciously has consumed an exorbitant amount of P&AC's time and energy. P&AC is convinced that the church as a whole needs to deal with these concerns.

Initially, Program and Arrangements Committee proposed a query to Standing Committee asking if it would be possible for the denomination to engage in study and dialogue in order to clarify the church's response to homosexual persons. After discovering that P&AC cannot initiate a query, it was presented to Standing Committee as a request for counsel. In response, the 2008 Standing Committee initially considered a motion to return the request to P&AC unanswered. When that motion failed by a very narrow margin, a committee of diverse Standing Committee delegates wrote *A Statement of Confession and Commitment*, which was adopted by Standing Committee without opposition or abstention. Standing Committee delegates prayed that the whole denomination might work through these issues with the kind of mutual respect and individual integrity they had experienced, as they recommended that the statement be adopted by Annual Conference the following year. In 2009, however, Standing Committee recommended and Annual Conference agreed that the denomination should study the 2008 Standing Committee statement through this special response process before the larger delegate body decides how to proceed.

VII. Read the statement a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What are the tensions represented in the statement?
- B. How do you see that tension today?
- C. How are we being called to live with this tension?

IX. Read the statement a third time.

X. Ask.

- A. In what ways do brokenness and tension seem negative/destructive? In what ways do brokenness and tension seem positive/healthy?
- B. How have you experienced these tensions personally? Within the church?
- C. What will our denomination look like in ten years if seeking "the mind of Christ" leads us to opposing viewpoints/perspectives? To similar viewpoints/perspectives?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Session 8

Query: Language on Same-sex Covenantal Relationships

Participants in this session are encouraged to read the 1983 Annual Conference statement, Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective, prior to following the outline.

I. Welcome those gathered by extending the handshake of fellowship.

II. Introduce purpose of meeting together and covenant.

Read together:

As a person of faith, sincere in my commitment to heal and care for the body of Christ, I covenant with this group:

...to respect the dignity and intrinsic worth of each participant.

...to honor moments of tension between us as opportunities for the Spirit to teach and lead.

...to be open to the varied insights emerging from our shared study of scripture.

...to be honest about my own doubts and fears.

...to listen carefully, speak gently, and prayerfully consider perspectives that are different from my own.

...to begin from a place of trust that God will be present with us in this process.

III. Light a candle representing commitment to discernment in the presence of God and one another.

IV. Silent reflection and prayer.

V. Reading of the query.

Whereas the Church of the Brethren has a history and practice of seeking reconciliation; and

Whereas the Church of the Brethren has experienced deep division and brokenness related to the language from the 1983 Human Sexuality Paper that same-sex covenantal relationships are not acceptable; and

Whereas members of the Church of the Brethren are not of one mind on what it means to practice and promote justice in human relationships, especially same-sex covenantal relationships;

Therefore, we, the Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, gathered in Council on May 18, 2008, petition Annual Conference through the Northern Indiana District to consider whether it is the will of the church that this language on same sex covenantal relationships will continue to guide our journey together.

VI. Sharing the context.

The Church of the Brethren has a policy whereby any member, congregation, or district has the right to raise questions or concerns that relate to the Christian life or the mission and work of the church. Official agencies of the church can also bring such questions or resolutions. Such a question is called a query. Ideal queries should give a brief description of why the matter is being raised and conclude with asking a single question. No answers should be suggested. When a query begins at a local level, it should be processed through a local congregation and District Conference. And only if it cannot be answered satisfactorily at these levels should it be passed on to the Annual Conference.

The Standing Committee, which is a small legislative body of Annual Conference made up of representatives from each district, studies all queries and items of new business and recommends answers to the delegate body. The Standing Committee is not allowed to change the wording of new queries. Depending on the answer that is given, some type of implementation may be necessary throughout the church. The Annual Conference is considered the highest legislative authority in the denomination.

The query in this study will return to Annual Conference for consideration in 2011.

VII. Read the query a second time.

VIII. Consider questions.

- A. What is the tension represented in the query?
- B. How do you see that tension today?
- C. How are we being called to engage this tension?

IX. Read the query a third time.

X. Ask.

- A. Where have you experienced reconciliation in the church?
- B. What does it mean to practice and promote justice in human relationships?
- C. How does language create tension? How is this seen in interpretations of the 1983 statement on *Human Sexuality*?
- D. Is it the will of the church that this language on same-sex covenantal relationships continue to guide us?

XI. Silent reflection.

XII. Closing together in prayer.

Read together:

*Creator of a new creation in Christ,
we have gathered as your people
to seek new things revealed to us in scripture.*

*As Christ reconciled us to you,
may we be witnesses to the ministry of reconciliation
in our covenant with one another
to heal and care for this body.*

Amen.

Closing

We appreciate your willingness to participate in this learning experience. We encourage you to participate in district discussions held by Standing Committee throughout 2010–2011.

For your ongoing education, resources are listed in the bibliography. We hope you will continue to seek out respectful dialogue with others throughout our denomination.

Selected Bibliography

The following is a list of additional resources to assist congregations in the work of discernment and growth. The resources have been selected for their ability to inspire thoughtful conversation. All of these materials are available through Brethren Press.

A. Process Resources - Conflict that is engaged in creative and thoughtful ways can offer opportunities to grow in understanding, deepen human relationships, create justice, and transform faith. The following resources are useful in assisting individuals and congregations in processes of discernment and conversation.

Annie Clark. *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Interpersonal Peacemaking*. New Windsor, MD: On Earth Peace Assembly, Inc., 2008.

In the face of differences, Brethren Annie Clark offers practical ideas, helpful stories, and cautious advice about building understanding and relationships in the midst of significant diversity and disagreement.

John Paul Lederach. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003.

Lederach is a leading figure in conflict studies. Grounded in an Anabaptist religious-ethical framework, he views conflict as an opportunity for life-giving, positive change. In this deceptively simple booklet, Lederach explores how conflict transformation seeks to build right relationships while creating social structures that reduce violence and increase justice. Rather than asking, "How do we end something not desired?" Lederach addresses the question, "How do we end something destructive and build something desired?"

Karen P. Oliveto, Kelly D. Turney, Traci C. West. *Talking About Homosexuality: A Congregational Resource*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005.

The authors are United Methodist and employ the Wesleyan quadrilateral of scripture, reason, experience, and tradition in their resource. They offer a six-session course with numerous exercises, mediation/prayer pieces, and discussion guides. A facilitator's guide is included in the book.

B. Scripture and Theological Resources - Committed Christians of good conscience disagree on what the Bible has to say to the church today about gay and lesbian people. The following resources reflect biblical and theological conversations between individuals with differing perspectives.

Robert A. J. Gagnon and Dan O. Via. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

The two theologians, one Presbyterian and the other United Methodist, offer differing biblical perspectives on the practice of homosexuality in this scholarly analysis.

Ted Grimsrud and Mark Thiessen Nation. *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008.

Grimsrud and Nation are Mennonite theologians who have different perspectives about the meaning of scripture and how congregations should relate to gay and lesbian people. The book reflects public conversations that they have held in which they offer their personal positions and engage one another in rigorous critique. Each writer offers an annotated bibliography.

Michael King, ed. *Stumbling Toward a Genuine Conversation on Homosexuality*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2007.

This is a thoughtful collection of essays from Mennonite writers with a broad array of experience, position, and perspective.

C. Church of the Brethren Resources - Our denomination has Annual Conference statements that can assist in guiding this conversation. In addition, there are independent organizations that can provide resources and support from more specific perspectives.

Biblical Inspiration and Authority, Annual Conference Statement, 1979
www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/

Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective, Annual Conference Statement, 1983
www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/.

Resolution Urging Forbearance, Annual Conference Statement, 2008
www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/

Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests
www.bmclgbt.org

Brethren Revival Fellowship
www.brfwitness.org

On Earth Peace
www.onearthpeace.org

D. The LGBT Experience - A responsible conversation must be informed and respectful and must include the voices of those who are most affected by any decision. It remains true that many people do not know what it is like to be a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) person, particularly within the church. While not a substitute for face-to-face conversation, these resources will assist congregations in their understanding of the lives and experiences of LGBT people.

Kevin Jennings. *Always My Child: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter*. New York: Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Jennings' career as an educator is put to good use in this very helpful and practical guide for parents or anyone genuinely interested in the needs and experience of young LGBT people.

Roberta Showalter Kreider, ed. *The Cost of Truth: Faith Stories of Mennonite and Brethren Leaders and Those Who Might Have Been*. Gaithersburg, MD: Chi Rho Press, 2004.

In this third book in a series, through the sharing of stories, Kreider explores the loss of talent and leadership when LGBT people are not able to share their gifts and faith within Brethren and Mennonite churches.

Roberta Showalter Kreider, ed. *Together in Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Couples*. Gaithersburg, MD: Chi Rho Press, 2002.

Kreider offers a collection of personal stories from predominately Brethren and Mennonite LGBT couples, voices that are frequently missing in the church's debate.

Andrew Marin. *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Marin, an evangelical Christian disturbed by the quality of the conversation, calls upon his fellow Christians to build bridges to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community, beginning with a commitment to dialogue and love.

E. Resources from Other Denominations - The Church of the Brethren is not alone in its struggle to conduct a respectful and educated dialogue regarding the church's response to LGBT members in particular or human sexuality in general. These resources may be helpful to congregations who are interested in the broader Protestant conversation.

Christian Community, Inc., *Taking a New Look: Why Congregations Need LGBT Members*. Fort Wayne: LifeQuest Publications, 2008.

This adds a new dimension to the usual conversation by asking congregations to also consider the risks of not welcoming LGBT people.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Journey Together Faithfully*. Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1996 and 2003.

This is a two-part study developed by the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality at the request of the Churchwide Assembly. The first study looks at sexuality in general and the second study considers how the church should respond to requests to bless same-sex unions and to ordain or commission people in committed same-sex unions. They are available online at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney.

Mennonite Church, *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love: Commitments in Times of Disagreement*. Wichita Assembly, 1995.

The Mennonite Church adopted this statement at its Assembly in 1995. It outlines approaches to handling and understanding conflict that are both practical and consonant with the call to be Christian peacemakers. It is available online at www.mennoniteusa.org.

The United Methodist Church, *The Church Studies Homosexuality*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

The result of a 1992 General Conference mandate, this curriculum uses a balanced approach within the context of the official position of The United Methodist Church stated in its Book of Discipline. A leader's guide is available.

William Paulsell, ed. *Listening to the Spirit: A Handbook for Discernment*. Indianapolis: Chalice Press, 2001.

This resource from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination helps congregations think and talk together through a positive experience of discernment regarding the church's relationship with its gay and lesbian members. It is a practical and thoughtful guide.

Appendix

All documents listed in this appendix are available at www.brethren.org/ac.

Framework for Conversations

A Statement of Confession and Commitment

Query: Language on Same-sex Covenantal Relationships

Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective

Resolution Urging Forbearance