

Unfinished Business

1. 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.

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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.

Adopted by Standing Committee, July 14, 2008, and passed to the 2009 Annual Conference

Action of the 2009 Annual Conference: Annual Conference approved a motion that the Statement of Confession and Commitment from the 2008 Standing Committee be approved as a Special Response Statement, using the procedure for dealing with strongly controversial issues. (*Note: In a later action, the concern of New Business Item #2 was combined with this study of a special response issue. See #2 above.*) The item will be carried on successive Conference agendas as unfinished until the special issues response is completed.