

Recommendations of Standing Committee to New Business Items

Motion from Standing Committee to be put on the floor before the delegate body is invited to consider NB 1:

Standing Committee recommends that the delegate body of the 2016 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren, aware of previous delegate action “to continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process,” agree to accept the query from West Marva District listed as NB 1 as an item of business.

Standing Committee has determined that this item requires a simple majority vote.

NB 1. Query: Same Sex Weddings

In responding to the query, Standing Committee reviewed the following decisions of Annual Conference:

“The Standing Committee acknowledges that it is not of one mind at this time. Nevertheless, in order to function together effectively as a denominational body, we must set a standard for our life together.”¹

The statement by the 2014 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren titled “Congregational Ethics Polity” states: “Annual Conference has identified several specific responsibilities of the districts that are directly related to congregational life, such as the authorization, discipline, and placement of ministers....”²

In the service of Ordination of Ministers in *For All Who Minister*, the fourth set of questions to be asked by the district representative is: “Do you affirm your devotion to the church of Jesus Christ, and specifically to the Church of the Brethren, which calls you to ministry? And do you promise to live in harmony with its principles, ordinances, and doctrines, being at all times subject to its discipline and governance?”³

“The congregation shall covenant to support faithfully the program of the Church of the Brethren, recognizing Annual Conference enactments of the Church of the Brethren as having governing force in its life.”⁴

“The prayerful conclusion not to support a denominational position...should be a matter of anguish, not competitiveness or superiority.”⁵

“Disagreement with particular actions of the denomination does not give a congregation the right to disparage the whole church or individuals.”⁶

“Congregations are to help establish, support, and abide by the policies and decisions of the district. They are to welcome and work with the district executive or other appointed representatives of the district. They are to cooperate with and give encouragement to other congregations in the district.”⁷

“The gathered body, in the form of Annual Conference and district conferences, is the place for discussion of differences, the hearing of collective wisdom, and the discernment of the mind of Christ. This, then, is the nature of authority among the Brethren. ‘Authority is held accountable within the community, which in turn diligently seeks the “mind of Christ” in study of the scrip-

tures, in dialogue with brothers and sisters, and in openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit.”⁸

The 1983 Annual Conference statement “Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective” was reaffirmed at the 2002 Annual Conference: “We understand that paper to conclude that homosexual practice is unacceptable behavior in the church and therefore implied to be sin. We also understand the 1983 paper to have strong encouragements for the church to be open and welcoming, and to develop helpful and compassionate ministries toward homosexual persons. We would urge that the balance represented in these two primary components of the 1983 paper be maintained in the Church of the Brethren.”⁹

The 2002 Church of the Brethren statement on “Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren” continues, “We consider it inappropriate to license or ordain to the Christian ministry any persons who are known to be engaging in homosexual practices, and will not recognize the licensing and ordination of such persons in the Church of the Brethren.”¹⁰

Standing Committee once again acknowledges that it is not of one mind at this time. Nevertheless, in order to function together effectively as a denominational body, we must set a standard for our life together.

Standing Committee recommends to the 2016 Annual Conference that the conduct expectations of the general membership, as stated in the 1983 Annual Conference statement “Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective,” which was reaffirmed at the 2011 Annual Conference, and the conduct expectations of licensed and ordained persons, as stated in the 2002 Annual Conference statement “Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” make it clear that for credentialed ministers to officiate or provide leadership at a same sex wedding is to go against the stance of the Church of the Brethren. It shall be considered a matter of pastoral/ministerial misconduct. The districts shall respond with discipline, not with allowances based on personal conscience. The consequence for officiating or providing leadership at a same sex wedding is the termination of the ministry credential of the one officiating or providing leadership at a same sex wedding. This shall be for a period of one year, pending review by the district ministerial leadership team.

Standing Committee has determined that this item requires a 2/3 majority vote as a controversial issue. If this recommendation is approved, the proposed new polity would become an item of new business at the 2017 Annual Conference and would require a 2/3 majority vote to be adopted as a change in polity as of the 2017 Conference.

¹ 2002 Minutes (2000-2004), “Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” [page number to be added].

² 2014 Minutes, “Query: Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper,” 262.

³ *For All Who Minister: A Worship Manual for the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1993), 299.

⁴ *Manual of Organization and Polity*, chapter 4, “Congregational Structure,” 2, cited in 2014 Minutes, “Query: Guidelines for Implementation of the Congregational Ethics Paper,” 261.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, quoting from the *Manual of Organization and Polity*, Overview, “Introduction,” 4, which is part of a section from 1968 Minutes (1965–1969), “Church Polity, Including Referendum on Merger and Coordination of Ecumenical Concerns,” 337.

⁹ 2002 Minutes (2000-2004), “Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” [page number to be added].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

NB 2. Query: On Earth Peace Reportability/Accountability to Annual Conference

NB 5. Query: Viability of On Earth Peace as an Agency of the Church of the Brethren

Recognizing that the Review and Evaluation Committee has the responsibility to consider the balance and unity of denominational agencies, Standing Committee recommends that the 2016 Annual Conference refer the “Query: On Earth Peace Reportability/Accountability to Annual Conference” and the “Query: Viability of On Earth Peace as an Agency of the Church of the Brethren” to the Review and Evaluation Committee for their consideration.

Standing Committee has determined that this item requires a simple majority vote.

NB 3. Query: Continuing the Study of Our Christian Responsibility to Care for God’s Creation

Standing Committee recommends to the 2016 Annual Conference that a Creation Care study committee be appointed to work with Brethren Benefit Trust to develop ways to support and extend our knowledge of renewable energy production with our financial investments and involvement in community projects to reduce our contributions to greenhouse gas concentrations and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. The study committee shall consist of 3 members elected by Standing Committee.

Standing Committee has determined that this item requires a simple majority vote.

NB 4. Query: Living Together as Christ Calls

Standing Committee recommends to the 2016 Annual Conference that the concern of the query be adopted and be referred to the Mission and Ministry Board.

Standing Committee has determined that this item requires a simple majority vote.