

3. Query: Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren

Whereas: The 1983 Annual Conference statement on Human Sexuality indicates that in the church's search for a Christian understanding of human sexuality, the homosexual lifestyle is not acceptable, and

Whereas: Annual Conference has delegated the authority to license and ordain persons to the District Ministry Commission and the District Board, and

Whereas: an action taken by a District Board to ordain an individual is done so on behalf of the entire denomination, and

Whereas: there has not been consistent interpretation of the 1983 statement on Human Sexuality, to the point that some District Ministry Commissions, District Boards, congregations, and individuals seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum of understanding regarding this issue, and

Whereas: the wide divergence of interpretation that currently exists within the denomination threatens to destroy the trust that is necessary for systems of ministry training, credentialing, and pastoral placement, and

Whereas: a clear definitive answer of interpretation from Annual Conference would provide beneficial guidance for all districts, congregations, and individuals.

The delegates of the Northern Ohio District Conference, meeting on Saturday, August 11, 2001, do hereby bring the following query: Is it appropriate in the Church of the Brethren for a District Ministry Commission and/or District Board to License and/or Ordain any person who has a homosexual orientation and who is not celibate or has not experienced conversion to a heterosexual orientation?

The Northern Ohio District Board, meeting on August 10, 2001, approved a motion to recommend this Query to the District Conference.

Arlen Longanecker, District Board Chairperson
Sue Richard, District Secretary

The Query passed to Annual Conference by the Northern Ohio District, meeting on August 11, 2001.

Glen D. Whisler, District Moderator
Helen J. Taylor, District Clerk

Action of the 2002 Annual Conference: James Myer, a Standing Committee member from Atlantic Northeast, presented the Standing Committee recommendation that follows:

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.

Standing Committee recommends to the 2002 Annual Conference that the 2002 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren continue to affirm the 1983 decision known as “Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective.” 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.

In answering Query #3 on the licensing and ordination of homosexual persons, we recognize that the 1983 paper does not address this particular issue. However, it is our understanding that the conduct expectations of the general membership, as stated above, should most surely also be expected of those licensed or ordained. Therefore, 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. *The delegate body, by a two-thirds majority vote that was recommended due to the controversial nature of the query, adopted the Standing Committee recommendation.*