

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POSITIVE ACTION Related to the Conditions of Childhood

*From Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statement and Recommendations for Positive Action on Conditions of Childhood in the United States, 1986*

“Since its beginnings, the Church of the Brethren has believed in the gospel of God's love and concern for the whole person. The Brethren have a tradition of peace and reconciliation in a world broken by war, violence, and human suffering. Over the years, much attention has been given to Christian nurture and love in the home and the church. Additionally, the Brethren have believed that all persons are inseparably joined together and so have taken a deep interest in the welfare of all God's children.

Therefore, the church is uniquely equipped to reach out with compassion to all children in need. We hold that whenever a child is abused, the church, as the body of Christ, suffers. Whenever a child is neglected, the whole body laments the blows to self-esteem.

In 1984, the Church of the Brethren recorded its opposition to abortion, stating: "We hold ourselves accountable to develop constructive, creative alternatives to abortion in the communities of which we are a part." Should not the church be likewise accountable to develop constructive, creative alternatives to child abuse and neglect? Is not a denomination that takes a strong anti-abortion stance equally obligated to take a strong anti-child abuse stance?

The church's historical concern for family life prompts response to the problem of child abuse and neglect. In the family, persons learn respect for self and others. Abuse within the family destroys the family's ability to fulfill its nurturing role. If the family does not promote good relationships within, then the ability of family members to relate to those outside the family will be diminished.

Further, Christianity proclaims justice and hope for all who are disadvantaged, impoverished, and unjustly victimized by the oppressors of this world. Victims need to be helped to experience themselves as persons loved by God through the faith community. Abused children have lost their self-esteem. Is not the church called to restore hope and confidence to such children?

The church is ultimately involved because of its faithfulness to Jesus who came proclaiming "release to the captives;" as such, God summons the church to bring release to children held captive by the oppression of unloving families and a broken world.”

*There are many ways the church can respond to varied adverse conditions of children, not the least of which is when children are victims of child abuse. The suggestions on the other side of this paper are just as applicable now as they were when written in 1986, and they are just as applicable to child protection issues in our churches as they are to those issues in our families. Please prayerfully consider these recommendations for positive action in your congregation.*

--Family Life Ministry of the Church of the Brethren



## **Congregations can:**

1. Provide meaningful ways to integrate children into the total program of the church. Pastors can integrate the children's story with the total worship experience, include words to the children in the offertory statement, and provide bulletin supplements for children that elaborate on the worship theme.
2. Sponsor congregational/community workshops on parenting and relational skills.
3. Develop and coordinate parent support groups for single parents, foster parents, congregational couples, divorced parents, etc. for affirming and encouraging one another and providing other help.
4. Develop a congregational parent co-op that provides, at no cost, exchange sitter service for all co-op participants.
5. Provide foster care or other shelter/respice care for children in need. Consider using the church as a sanctuary or safe haven for children/parents who are endangered by violent relationships, or provide transportation for victims to an existing shelter.
6. Sponsor a "hot line" that provides information and a listening ear, or become acquainted with hot line resources already available in the community and offer volunteer services. Volunteer to coordinate resources in the community.
7. Provide non-violent teaching/training/learning experiences for children and adults through Sunday school, vacation Bible school, camps, youth clubs, youth/adult fellowships, etc.
8. Befriend lonely children and parents who need to talk to someone. Contact local service agencies for names of persons in need in the community; be aware of similar needs within the church family or relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the church family.
9. Pray for those who experience sexual, physical, emotional, or spiritual abuse. Pray also for those who perpetrate such violence.
10. Train and coordinate volunteers to provide meaningful childcare for the congregation, the community, and the district.
11. Work toward the inclusion of parenting courses as a part of the academic curriculum in public and private schools.
12. Provide or sponsor a wholesome day-care program in the church building.

## **Pastors, deacons, and other church leaders can:**

1. Take advantage of training opportunities on how to relate to, support, and (if appropriate) refer victims and perpetrators of child abuse and neglect.
2. Preach on the importance of enhancing human life and dignity within the family.
3. Understand their own personal communication patterns and consider how their behavior, attitude, and sermon illustrations distance persons from approaching church leaders in regard to family violence. Examine their modeling of discipline and interaction with children.
4. Plan congregational worship experiences that capture the conditions of childhood and extend a call for congregational response.
5. Initiate educational opportunities that nurture positive attitudes toward human sexuality and health relationships including junior and senior highs and adults.
6. Provide opportunities for discussion of parenting and relational skills as a part of premarital counseling, senior high and post high Sunday school classes and other pre-parent groups.