

41 response (letters, e-mails, online comments, Special Response hearing materials) was paralleled by
42 a deep sense of responsibility and commitment by each committee member to accurately portray
43 the voices that were shared.

44 The rubric used to sort and categorize the material fell into four foci: *structural elements*,
45 *common themes and statements*, *contextual elements*, and *wisdom statements*.

- 46 • Structural Elements assist in the processing of the raw data—basic numerical summaries,
47 logistical and procedural elements of the hearing process, identifying and noting areas of
48 affirmation and concern regarding the overall process.
- 49 • Common Themes and Statements represent the various viewpoints, leanings, and yearnings
50 as the body discerns its responsibility to the call of faithfulness to God.
- 51 • Contextual Elements include, in part, the church's theological heritage and historical
52 treatment of concerns, our calling as a people of God, and the specific nature of Annual
53 Conference and Standing Committee through which the Forms Reception Committee is
54 charged.
- 55 • Wisdom Statements highlight wisdom reflected in the deep and thoughtful deliberation by
56 respondents, evidenced in the study and the range of possible directions offered through
57 participants.

58 The numbers identified below accurately record and reflect the quantity of e-mails, letters,
59 hearings, and hearing participants. However, to understand the conversation and the dynamics of
60 discussing a highly emotional and controversial subject, a qualitative approach is needed whereby
61 the material is reviewed and trends are interpreted. With 65 percent of the hearing groups being
62 not of one mind, it is neither possible nor appropriate to treat the material as one would a vote.
63 Leanings and trends revealed a broad range and diversity of opinions in the denomination.

64 **Structural Elements**

65 The process outlined by the *Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues*
66 received great attention, and the Standing Committee-sponsored hearings were well attended. A
67 total of 121 hearings were hosted across all 23 districts with 6,638 participants, the equivalent of 5
68 percent of the denomination's membership or 8 percent of the denomination's active worship
69 attendance. With a total of 388 small groups, the average size of a hearing group was 17, with the
70 smallest hearing having 2 participants and the largest group having 91. Atlantic Northeast,
71 Southern Pennsylvania, and Shenandoah districts had the largest number of participants, with
72 Idaho, Missouri & Arkansas, and Southern Plains districts having the fewest. Oregon & Washington,
73 Southeastern, and Missouri & Arkansas districts had the highest percentage of membership
74 participation, with Atlantic Southeast, Northern Plains, and Middle Pennsylvania districts having
75 the smallest percentage of membership participation. Atlantic Northeast District hosted the largest
76 number of hearings and also represented the largest number of small groups and overall
77 participants.

78 Regional patterns emerged from the district hearings although consensus on a district level was
79 rare. Those districts with the strongest patterns of consensus regarding the Statement and the

80 Query were West Marva, Southeastern, Oregon & Washington, and Pacific Southwest District.
81 These four districts exhibited strong consensus. Southeastern and Oregon & Washington were at
82 near unanimity within their districts, with Southeastern accepting the Statement and returning the
83 Query, and Oregon & Washington wanting to reject the Statement and accept the Query. Both
84 Atlantic Northeast and Western Plains had a majority of hearings that were not of one mind and yet
85 discovered general consensus as a district, with Atlantic Northeast accepting the Statement and
86 returning the Query, and Western Plains returning the Statement and accepting the Query.
87 Michigan, Illinois & Wisconsin, and South/Central Indiana districts were not of one mind and did
88 not exhibit common direction. They instead revealed great diversity with South/Central Indiana
89 exhibiting the greatest range of opinions.

90 Although the recording of age and gender was not consistent, of the 121 forms noting specific
91 ages, the youngest member was 7 and the oldest was 95 with the median range between 30 and 77
92 noting specific ages in the 40- to early 60-year-old group. Gender distribution was nearly even in
93 the 280 groups reporting gender, with a total of 2,260 females and 2,206 males represented.

94 The Annual Conference Office provided an on-line opportunity for individuals to e-mail their
95 reflections directly to the Forms Reception Committee. The on-line form asked individuals to
96 indicate their district, whether they had attended a hearing, and what they would like to say to
97 Standing Committee. Responses were often short and to the point, focusing more on the question
98 of revisiting the 1983 Annual Conference paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* than
99 on the two items of business. On-line responses included statements from churches, letters of
100 concern, brief statements of individual concern, and several comments that did not address the
101 issues. A total of 208 e-mails were received from 23 districts. Seventy-eight of the respondents
102 had previously attended a hearing, where 130 had not. The largest number of comments came
103 from the Northern Indiana (25) and the Mid-Atlantic districts (15). Three districts had one on-line
104 response while three others had none.

105 The Forms Reception Committee and Annual Conference Office received 54 letters. These
106 letters included personal opinions, church resolutions, pastoral statements, books/pamphlets, and
107 policies previously adopted by particular faith communities. Ten of the letters were signed form
108 letters, 11 churches responded with letters claiming to represent a total of 609 members, and 9
109 churches responded with letters but did not specify numbers of their membership in accord with
110 the particular view.

111 In addition to the *Facilitator's Reflection Forms*, the Forms Reception Committee received an
112 unspecified number of recorder's notes from the individual hearings.

113 *Reflections on Process*

114 There was and continues to be a deep need for persons to be heard and to be understood. There
115 seldom exist models which provide for facilitated discussion without the introduction of a degree of
116 inherent bias. The controversial issues process is no exception.

117 A number of facilitators were dismayed to note that participants in some hearings did not avail
118 themselves of learning opportunities prior to the hearings. Materials available for review included

119 the *Special Response Study Guide*, the Statement, the Query, the 1983 Annual Conference paper
120 *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*, as well as guiding documents on biblical
121 interpretation (1979 Annual Conference paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority*) and forbearance
122 (2008 Annual Conference resolution *Urging Forbearance*).

123 There was some confusion of issues in the hearings. Discussion often focused on one element
124 but implicated others. Opinions in support of the Statement were often construed as also
125 supporting the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* and vice-versa. For others,
126 the process was a referendum on the 1983 paper, raising the question of revision. A number of
127 hearing groups recorded a vote while others listed the names and churches of participants. For
128 some hearing groups, the query process was clearly a mystery and needed to be defined, either by
129 self-study prior to the hearing or by clarification by the hearing facilitator.

130 Special Response hearing comments from groups that were largely of one mind tended to be
131 more sharply stated and unyielding, some comments bordering on anger. In mixed response
132 groups, remarks were generally more respectful and affirmed the presence of differing opinions.
133 Some persons were more comfortable in a larger group where they felt there was safety in
134 numbers; others preferred small groups where a strong majority was less likely to inhibit
135 discussion.

136 Deviating from the script for the hearings occasionally introduced bias into the hearing process.
137 One example involved hearing questions with leading questions to affect a particular response. In
138 general, the larger the hearing group, the less opportunity there was for individual comment. A
139 diversity of viewpoints produced the liveliest responses by hearing groups as a whole. Concerns
140 were noted for petition-style responses in which a statement was supported by signature pages
141 rather than interactive discussion of the elements suggested in the hearing process. The Forms
142 Reception Committee received letters from individuals, churches and organizations. In most cases,
143 it was not possible to determine whether the authors of those letters had also participated in a
144 hearing group.

145 While Standing Committee did not police attendance at hearings, concerns were noted by
146 several facilitators that delegations had been sent to attend hearings in order to “flood” the hearing
147 with a particular point of view. Some persons remarked that they had traveled distances in order
148 to attend a hearing which they felt would allow their voice to be heard.

149 Despite instances of confusion, bias, or even deviation from the scripted process and questions,
150 the process was viewed as well designed and valuable in meeting its intended goal of conversation
151 and sharing. The information gained from the process paints a discernable picture of the
152 denomination as it continues to seek the Spirit's leading.

153 **Common Themes and Statements**

154 Responses from the hearing process describe a denomination committed to the love and unity
155 exemplified in Jesus Christ yet struggling with how to be authentic to the call of scripture and a
156 theological heritage which has traditionally favored forbearance over doctrinal uniformity. The

157 personal sharing of stories and experiences were important, generating a depth of discussion which
158 was welcomed by many.

159 Many respondents expressed frustration and overall weariness regarding issues of
160 homosexuality, issues which have been difficult for the church to resolve. Despite the weariness,
161 there remains deep concern for one another as brothers and sisters. Numerous hearings served as
162 reminders that a scriptural divide exists in how the Word is interpreted. Oft-heard expressions in
163 the hearings included, “love the sinner, hate the sin,” and “God’s Word is unchanging.” Many
164 countered with their own understandings of scripture within both Hebrew Bible and New
165 Testament traditions, declaring that God’s Word is characterized by continuing revelation.

166 Sadness and fear of splitting the membership were commonly expressed. Our small
167 denominational size was noted, while trends in declining membership were blamed variously on
168 opposing opinions. The pain of this as a recurring issue was also noted by each of the sides
169 represented in the discussions. Threats of leaving the denomination have been shared by
170 individuals and churches at each end of the theological perspective.

171 An important question was regularly raised: “What role does our Brethren heritage of
172 reconciliation play in this discussion?” Concerns were voiced as to the religious legacy we will
173 leave for our children. Many wondered if the Brethren could set an example for other
174 denominations struggling with similar issues. In general, it was noted that participants in the
175 hearings arrived and left with nearly the same set of understandings. There was little changing of
176 others’ minds; however, many commented that the discussions were filled with vitality and that
177 persons were pleased to discover they could respectfully disagree with one another.

178 Opinions expressing a desire for a moratorium were raised for different reasons. Some hoped
179 that the issue could be made to go away for an indefinite period of time. Others felt that time would
180 provide opportunity for healing and for the voice of younger generations to be included. Still others
181 felt the moment was now for the denomination to reconcile its concerns representing a hoped-for
182 autonomy in our decision-making from the pressures exerted by popular culture or in response to
183 the changing cultural understanding of homosexuality.

184 Concerns were expressed implicating questions of participation, membership, and leadership
185 roles by homosexuals in the context of congregational life. Alternate concerns were voiced
186 lamenting the migration and loss of talent, commitment, and leadership to non-Brethren groups
187 and mission venues.

188 An overall appreciation of the process was expressed by many. Less appreciation was
189 expressed by groups maintaining a more homogenous position. The greatest appreciation for the
190 process arose when accompanied by several factors: preparation in reading suggested resource
191 materials, participation in Bible study prior to the hearings, participation in hearing groups which
192 were diverse in their opinions and interpretations, and the presence of attitudes conducive to
193 sharing in a small group setting.

194 *Facilitator's Reflection Form Questions*

195 A *Facilitator's Reflection Form* was provided to the facilitator at each Standing Committee-
196 sponsored hearing. The form asks basic information regarding the facilitator, location, date,
197 approximate number of people attending, and a brief description of those in attendance. The
198 primary focus of the form is to record summary information pertaining to the Statement and the
199 Query. The following is a summary of answers received to each of the questions on the form.

200 *Summary of responses to the questions, "What did you hear in regard to the Standing Committee*
201 *Statement of Confession and Commitment? Was the group of one mind? If not, describe the different*
202 *perspectives expressed."*

203 Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of the hearing groups were not of one mind in their view of the
204 Statement. Approximately one-third (35 percent) of the groups were of one mind, some in their
205 support of the Statement, others in their dissatisfaction.

206 A strong majority of hearing participants were supportive of the Statement, but for a variety of
207 reasons. Appreciation was generally expressed for naming and acknowledging the brokenness
208 across the denomination and the church's ownership of the concern. Many felt that the Statement
209 was necessary for encouraging discussion but differed over its value and role. Primary support for
210 the Statement came from an understanding by hearing participants of its undergirding of the 1983
211 Annual Conference paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*.

212 A minority expressed non-support of the Statement also based on a variety of reasons. A
213 perceived progressive or conservative slant was variously provided as a reason for non-support.
214 Some believe the Statement to be ambiguous and not strong enough in its perceived support of the
215 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* while others believe it to be too hazy in its
216 focus and treatment of the issues. It was viewed by numbers of hearing participants as too
217 conservative at times and too progressive at others, including sharp differences over the intent of
218 the John 8 scriptural inclusion.

219 There was confusion at times as to whether the Statement or the 1983 Annual Conference
220 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* was being discussed. The breadth of suggested
221 responses to the Statement reflects the wide-ranging discussions elicited by its content. This range
222 included affirming of the Statement by Annual Conference, setting the Statement aside without
223 action on the idea that it has already achieved its primary purpose by engendering timely
224 discussion, or rejecting the Statement.

225 *Summary of responses to the question, "What did you hear in regard to Query: Language on Same-Sex*
226 *Covenantal Relationships? Was the group of one mind? If no, describe the different perspectives*
227 *expressed."*

228 Approximately 61 percent of hearing groups were not of one mind regarding the Query. Those
229 groups who were of one mind (39 percent) were mostly in favor of returning the Query. However,
230 there were also groups unanimous in their desire to support the Query in hopes of revisiting the
231 paper, rewriting the paper, discarding it altogether, or forcing a yes/no vote on the issue.

232 A strong majority of hearing participants were not supportive of the Query, again for a variety
233 of reasons. The most frequently stated reason for non-support of the Query was based on a literal
234 reading of scripture (God's Word as unchanging). Some, weary of the debate, simply desired the
235 issue to be put to rest. Others, in their understanding of scripture, expressed sincere salvific
236 concern for their sisters and brothers.

237 A credible minority pointed to a number of reasons for supporting the Query's intent. Reasons
238 included an interpretation of scripture that is revelatory in nature (God's Word as dynamic), the
239 need for revision of not only phrasing but of content of the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a*
240 *Christian Perspective* after more than two decades of updated medical and scientific
241 understandings, and recognition that the denomination may never be of one mind on these issues.
242 With the exception of a very few, hearing participants declared their deep concern and love for one
243 another in spite of their differences.

244 The range of possible responses raised regarding the Query was also a factor of the widely
245 divergent discussions found within the hearings. A broadly shared concern from all sides was that
246 a yes/no vote carried with it a high degree of risk regarding schism; that no matter the outcome,
247 individuals and churches could be lost from the denomination. Numerous suggestions were
248 offered: calls for forbearance, a statement or paper which would allow a "two-column" approach
249 similar to the 1979 paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority*, a moratorium on discussion, discarding
250 the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* and beginning anew with an up-to-
251 date statement, and "enforcement" of the 1983 paper.

252 *Summary of responses to the questions, "What observations do you have about the nature of this*
253 *discussion that would be valuable for Standing Committee to know? How would you assess the overall*
254 *understanding of the group?"*

255 Many expressions of prayerful support and concern were offered for Standing Committee
256 members and Annual Conference officers, as well as expressions of gratitude for their wrestling
257 with such difficult issues on behalf of the larger church.

258 The responses to these questions were numerous and passionate. Many professed a deep love
259 for the church and concern for its welfare as the issues continue to unfold. The remarks
260 underscored deep differences in the ways we approach and interpret scripture. There was wide
261 acknowledgement that the denomination may never arrive at a common understanding on the
262 issues surrounding human sexuality. Some recognized the differences as a valuable gift in that they
263 draw the church into deeper conversation and greater integrity. Many called on Standing
264 Committee and the membership of the church to envision ways in which the body could agree to
265 disagree, believing it to be our best hope of remaining one body. A significant number of hearing
266 respondents raised creative possibilities of congregational autonomy as a possible polity direction.

267 There were many expressions of appreciation for the controversial issues process. Many felt it
268 was the most vital and dynamic discussion the church has embarked on in some time. A minority
269 concluded it was a waste of time and energy. Others were grateful for the opportunity to engage in
270 study and conversation with each other, an encouragement of the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality*

271 *from a Christian Perspective*: "The Church maintains an attitude of openness and willingness to
272 evaluate specific issues related to sexuality . . . Seeking the guidance of Scripture, the Holy Spirit,
273 and responsible contemporary research, the church continues to study and search for the mind of
274 Christ in dealing with the complexities of responsible sexuality."ⁱⁱ

275 **Contextual Elements**

276 *Biblical Authority and Interpretation*

277 It is clear that the Bible is central to who we are as the Church of the Brethren. Participants
278 repeatedly and universally affirmed that the church's doors should be open to all people and no
279 person should be discriminated against when it comes to worshipping God. However, the church is
280 divided as to what the Bible says about same-sex unions and homosexual persons in leadership.

281 Responding to questions regarding the Statement and the Query, participants with varying and
282 often different viewpoints consistently lifted up scripture in support of their positions. For some
283 the Bible speaks in a clear and consistent manner prohibiting same-sex unions and denouncing the
284 sexual behavior of homosexual persons. For others, the overarching biblical themes speak of God's
285 unchanging love which transcends the specific historical context of selected scripture texts,
286 allowing for new understandings of ancient texts. Such arguments affirm the long-held interpretive
287 difference both known and formally acknowledged by the 1979 Annual Conference paper *Biblical*
288 *Inspiration and Authority*.

289 It may be safe to assume that the Bible entered into a majority if not all of the hearing
290 conversations. However, only 20 percent of the forms specifically referenced the Bible in support
291 of the Statement and against same-sex unions. When referenced, the trustworthiness of the Bible
292 was found in its inerrancy. That is to say the Bible is without error, whether historical, doctrinal, or
293 factual. God's Word, often used as a simile for the Bible, is the final authority when discerning
294 correct belief and action. It is within this grouping that there was a call to strengthen the language
295 of the Statement and the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* to name
296 homosexuality a sin.

297 A smaller number of responses shared a similar passion for the Bible, yet emphasized God's
298 ongoing inspiration in interpreting scripture. Speaking not of inerrancy, but rather emphasizing
299 the historical context of the initial writers and their communities, some pointed to the themes of
300 God's love and justice correcting past interpretations and bringing forth a new prophetic witness.
301 In addition, where some might have emphasized all parts of the Bible equally, among this sub-
302 group, the New Testament and the message of Jesus were more often cited as guiding texts. It is
303 within this grouping that there was a call to return the Statement, revise the 1983 paper *Human*
304 *Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* or at minimum remove the amended portion of the paper, and
305 accept the Query.ⁱⁱⁱ

306 The 1979 paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority* asks the question, "How can we hold one
307 another in love and fellowship when there exists a diversity of attitudes among us about the way in
308 which scripture was given and its interpretation?" The paper goes on to answer the question by
309 saying, "The way is found in the nature of God's creation, through the example and teachings of

310 Jesus, through the examples of our early Brethren, through acknowledging our human limitations in
311 understanding, and through being open to the leading of the Spirit who draws all members of
312 Christ's church together."^{iv} In many ways, the special process affirmed both the diversity of
313 understanding related to the authority of scripture and the recognized call to draw all members of
314 Christ's church together.

315 *Annual Conference Statements*

316 With over half of the hearing groups being not of one mind, and those groups who found unanimity
317 expressing weariness of the ongoing conversation, questions were raised as to ending the debate
318 through moratoriums and polity compromise. On the extremes, there were only a few who sought
319 active enforcement of current Annual Conference position statements through censure or other
320 actions. There were some who found the disagreements to be irreconcilable and therefore sought
321 schism as a solution.

322 Throughout the conversation, participants asked, "What does it mean for the church to
323 disagree?" Issues such as women in ministry, flags in sanctuaries, and military service were offered
324 as examples of individual churches differing from Annual Conference position papers yet remaining
325 active parts of the denomination. Such examples prompted further questions such as, "How
326 binding are Annual Conference statements?" and "To what degree does a congregation or district
327 need to conform in order to be in fellowship with Annual Conference?"

328 The 1968 Annual Conference paper *Church Polity* answers the question of congregation's and
329 district's relationship to Annual Conference position papers by saying:

330 The actions of Conference are directives for the whole life of the church and
331 implementation is assumed to take place within a reasonable span of time. This
332 implementation does not depend on acts of enforcement by decree. Rather,
333 education, consultation, and patience are characteristics of Brethren polity. Groups
334 and individuals have channels of review when decisions of Annual Conference are
335 questioned. It is important that there be mutual trust and shared responsibility
336 between local, district, and Brotherhood structures of church order.^v

337 The call for mutual trust and shared responsibility is echoed in the 2004 Annual Conference paper
338 *Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions* urging continued attempts at
339 reconciliation over discipline.^{vi} In addition, the 2004 paper urges disagreeing parties to continue in
340 their conversation through visits, forums, and consultations so as to gain a greater understanding of
341 the disagreement and how each party might learn more about the other's perspective, thereby
342 moving closer to reconciliation: "If this goal is unattainable and there is a lack of reconciliation, an
343 acknowledgement should be made that the congregation continues supporting the larger church in
344 other aspects of its life while disagreeing with Annual Conference in the particular matter. It is
345 expected that reconciliation attempts will continue," a sentiment held by the majority of
346 participants.^{vii} The 2008 resolution *Urging Forbearance* continues to affirm the relational role of
347 Annual Conference position papers:

348 We accept Annual Conference positions as an invitation to agree rather than
349 mandates to obey. For instance, we affirm that all war is sin and that killing other
350 human beings is unacceptable. We respect those who do not agree and continue in
351 fellowship with them. We preach and teach peace without separating ourselves
352 from those who choose military service or otherwise question the official position of
353 the denomination.^{viii}

354 Due to the weariness of some concerning the current debate, a small group, primarily in
355 support of the Statement and seeking to affirm the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian*
356 *Perspective*, calls for a moratorium on further conversation whether it be through appeals, queries,
357 exhibits, or any other venue that might continue the discussion of homosexuality and same-sex
358 covenantal unions. Moratoriums ranging from one year to one hundred years were suggested.

359 The 1979 paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority* was cited as a possible example of how
360 Annual Conference might speak to areas of agreement and disagreement in relationship to
361 homosexuality. For some, simply stating that the church is not of one mind suffices as an answer to
362 the position of the church today. For others, simply stating that the church is not of one mind is a
363 license to unrestricted freedom. Seen as a solution, the 1979 paper affirms that the church is not of
364 one mind in interpreting the Bible yet states specifically the varied positions and offers direction as
365 to how the church might "hold together in love and fellowship."^{ix}

366 **Wisdom Statements**

367 The range of possible recommendations arising from the hearing process reflects the thoughtful
368 wisdom, deliberation, and prayerful intent of those who love God and love the Church of the
369 Brethren. The recommendations reflect deep faith commitments of the membership and are borne
370 of prayer and a desire to respond to God's calling in authentic and faithful ways. From more than
371 1200 pages of hearing responses, letters, notes, and comments, the following possibilities were
372 gleaned.

373 Many suggested that ***A Statement of Confession and Commitment*** should be affirmed by the
374 Annual Conference body, primarily for its perceived restatement of support for the 1983 paper
375 *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective* and the particular phrasing related to same-sex
376 covenantal relationships. Others feel that the Statement is overly broad, something that cannot be
377 agreed upon and that will only complicate a call for consensus regarding its content. Still others
378 view the Statement as having accomplished its purpose and intent of generating much-needed
379 discussion in order to come to terms with the issues, yet with little compelling need to act in an
380 official way towards the document. In that respect, the Statement might be tabled, withdrawn, or
381 set aside by Standing Committee, allowing for more vital discussions to occur in our limited time
382 together at Annual Conference.

383 ***Query: Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships*** was viewed as somewhat more
384 straightforward. It was suggested that the Query could be entertained and forwarded to a study
385 committee or returned to the originating congregation. Some have called for the censure of the
386 originating group but most, in their understanding of Brethren polity, have indicated censure is not

387 consistent with either Brethren faith or practice. The threat and fear of splitting the membership
388 by enacting a vote are very real and cause deep sadness in the hearts of many. Many cautioned
389 against such a vote.

390 A moratorium was called for by a number of persons and groups. However, though it was noted
391 by others that if calling for a moratorium is based on a desire to hold firm to the language of the
392 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*, it would result in an inconsistency
393 because the 1983 paper encourages continuing discussion and dialogue. There were frequent
394 suggestions of alternatives that honestly acknowledge the gulf of difference that lies between our
395 far understandings as a denomination, and that forbearance and the possibility of a two-column
396 statement of our positions, similar to the 1979 paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority*, would best
397 serve the reality of where and who we are. There was a strong call for investigating whether polity
398 based on congregational or district autonomy should be sought, as well as for addressing concerns
399 of leadership within the church. Some perceive leadership by homosexuals in the church as a grave
400 affront to God's desire. Others value the leadership of homosexual persons and affirm their gifts for
401 ministry as a reflection of God's presence and grace.

402 A strong and consistent moderate voice challenges the church to commit to finding a way
403 through the difficulties of the discussion while a minority of individuals and churches intend to
404 withdraw from the denomination if called upon to compromise their position.

405 Regarding the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*, many would like to
406 see a reaffirmation of its language today. Additional suggestions were to revisit the document and
407 remove the amendment language from 1983, update the paper to reflect recent science, completely
408 rewrite the paper as it is nearly 28 years-old, or arrive at a polity solution allowing congregational
409 and district autonomy. Others suggested continued acknowledgment of the 1983 paper but with a
410 separate statement or addendum noting that we agree to disagree. The possibility of no decision
411 also represents an additional avenue, but one representing an uncertain result.

412 Some churches intentionally chose not to participate in the hearing process, in part because
413 their positions seemed clear for them within their ministry focus. What is helpful to know is that
414 positions were as strongly held on one end of the spectrum as the other. One of the most commonly
415 shared statements out of the hearing process was that we are called to love and care for one
416 another as members of God's creation. It was the hope of many that that observation would serve
417 as a guiding principle as we deliberate these concerns.

418 **Closing**

419 *I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to*
420 *which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing*
421 *with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the*
422 *bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one*
423 *hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is*
424 *above all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1-6*

425 Throughout this review process, a deep yearning persists that the Church of the Brethren will
426 remain one body. Differences can be mapped geographically, theologically, by the interpretation of
427 our heritage, personally, corporately, numerically, and by percentage. And yet the call from
428 Ephesians echoes throughout the denomination. From work camps to disaster relief, from foot
429 basins to baptismal pools, from communion bread to cold cups of water, we are called to the one
430 hope of our calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. It is clear that
431 there exist majority and minority views when speaking of the Statement and the Query. It remains
432 less clear how the 65 percent of hearing groups that were not of one mind and our commitment to
433 our life together transcend the differences.

434 Within the Special Response process, the Statement and the Query have served their purpose in
435 allowing Standing Committee to take the "temperature" of the denomination as it relates to
436 homosexuality and same-sex unions. In the end, participants affirmed the known differences in
437 biblical interpretation and expressed a desire and willingness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in
438 the bond of peace.

439 Additional Reading:

440 1979 Annual Conference paper *Biblical Inspiration and Authority*

441 1983 Annual Conference paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*

442 2002 Annual Conference paper *Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the*
443 *Church of the Brethren*

444 2004 Annual Conference paper *Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions*

445 2008 Annual Conference resolution *Urging Forbearance*

446 2011 (May) Messenger *How Did the 1983 Committee Reach Consensus?*

447

448 Standing Committee Forms Reception Committee:

449 Jeff Carter, chair

450 Ken Frantz

451 Shirley Wampler

ⁱ 2009 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 232

ⁱⁱ 1980-1984 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 571

ⁱⁱⁱ The amended portion of the 1983 paper *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*, "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" (1980-1984 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 580)

^{iv} 1975-1979 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 563

^v 1965-1969 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 1273

^{vi} 2000-2004 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 1270-1280

^{vii} 2000-2004 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 1279

^{viii} 2008 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 1238

^{ix} 1975-1979 Annual Conference Minutes, p. 79