

**Context Statement and Proposed Service of Confession and Repentance
to be led by Standing Committee during the 2023 Annual Conference
(SC Task Team Recommendation 4)**

The 2020 Standing Committee (SC) called a five-member task team with diverse theological perspectives to engage On Earth Peace (OEP) with questions from SC. These centered on the decision of OEP to join the Supportive Communities Network (SCN). Following the initial report of the task team, Standing Committee requested that the team continue the conversation with On Earth Peace in 2021. The team was asked to engage in dialogue with the OEP representatives, rather than simply ask questions and receive answers.

The 2022 Standing Committee received four recommendations that originated from the dialogue with On Earth Peace. Each of these were adopted by and required follow up by Standing Committee. The adoption of these recommendations was neither “actions regarding OEP” nor “suggestions from OEP” as some have implied. The recommendations and resulting work pertain to two broad categories: (1) the responsibilities of Standing Committee arising from the polity statement regarding Annual Conference agencies adopted in 2022, and (2) efforts to address larger systemic issues impacting our life together.

The four recommendations Standing Committee adopted in 2022 are as follows:

Recommendation #1 reads as follows:

Standing Committee will provide full clarity of expectations for agencies in the proposed new covenants with agencies. Standing Committee will also create a process with clear and specific provisions that explain steps to deal with concerns when they arise.

Recommendation #2 reads as follows:

Standing Committee should act within three years to bring clarification for how Annual Conference decisions and policy statements should be received and implemented, so that all individuals and entities within the church are more likely to have commonly understood and agreed upon expectations. Additionally, clear guidelines should be provided for how judgments with regard to compliance should be impartially examined, appealed, or reviewed.

Recommendation #3 reads as follows:

Standing Committee asks Annual Conference to review the organizational structure of the Church of the Brethren, which includes the denomination, agencies, districts, and local congregations, to address the deep dysfunction that exists in the communication processes, in organizational structure, in our ability to resolve/transform conflict and division, and in the overall effectiveness of the mission of the church.

Recommendation #4 reads as follows:

Theological differences around human sexuality have too often been manifested in bullying, violence, and a general sense of dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters. We must redouble our efforts to live out these differences, as individuals and through our systems of governance, in ways that preserve the humanity, dignity, and deeply held spiritual convictions of all. Harsh, dismissive, unloving, and unforgiving behaviors toward one another cannot have a home among us. We recommend that a first step toward healing be taken through Standing Committee leading a significant intentional time of confession and repentance as part of Annual Conference 2023 around this specific point of failure in our relationships with one another. As is so well stated in James 5:16 "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

Beginning in 1977, the denomination has engaged in a comprehensive study and discussion of human sexuality. This produced the 1983 position statement of the denomination entitled “Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective.” During the past four decades, this discussion has focused in great measure on the LGBTQIA+ community. This discussion has shaped the business of Annual Conference both directly and subtly in ways

that have deepened pain and created division. Standing Committee adopted the proposed service of confession and repentance (recommendation #4) in response to these experiences. This is not an apology. This is an opportunity to examine our individual and corporate roles in the dysfunction and disunity of our denomination. Each of us and all of us bear some responsibility for that dysfunction and disunity. This simple service provides the spiritual space to ponder and pray about this responsibility.

PROPOSED SERVICE OF CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

What follows is the proposed service of confession and repentance to be led by Standing Committee during the Friday morning business session at Annual Conference.

One:

The following statement was passed by Standing Committee at last year's Annual Conference:

Theological differences around human sexuality have too often manifested in bullying, violence, and a general sense of dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQIA brothers and sisters. We must redouble our efforts to live out these differences, as individuals and through our systems of governance, in ways that preserve the humanity, dignity, and deeply held spiritual convictions of all. Harsh, dismissive, unloving, and unforgiving behaviors toward one another cannot have a home among us. We recommend that a first step toward healing be taken through Standing Committee leading a significant intentional time of confession and repentance as part of Annual Conference 2023 around this specific point of failure in our relationships with one another. As is so well stated in James 5:16, "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

Two: Today we take this first step.

Two: We confess our theological differences around human sexuality have too often manifested in bullying, violence, and a general sense of dismissal toward one another and specifically toward our LGBTQIA brothers and sisters.

Three: We confess that harsh, dismissive, unloving, and unforgiving behaviors toward one another cannot have a home among us.

Three: Before our God we make our confession.

Four: Let us pray. Come Holy Spirit, You alone can help us. You hear us, hold us, heal us. As Your people, as Your church, move us to compassion. Increase our empathy. Hear now in silence our confession and forgive us, we pray:

Silence (4 min)

Four: O God, as a body moving forward, together, we need Your help, Your wisdom, Your guidance, so we might never again corporately or individually participate in harsh, dismissive, unloving, and unforgiving behaviors toward one another and we might work to create a world of true equity and care for all. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Three: We know our God hears us and will help us move forward together, and that fruit will be born out of this time of confession, for *the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.*