

Timeline of Human Sexuality Conflicts

within the Church of the Brethren

1979

Annual Conference Statement: Biblical Inspiration and Authority.

“We are to give first importance to the message which was of first importance to the early church (I Corinthians 15:1-5). We are to guard against twisting God's word with our private misinterpretations,” (2 Peter 1:20).

1983

AC Statement: Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective.

“The Church of the Brethren upholds the biblical declaration that heterosexuality is the intention of God for creation. Nature, in the very functional compatibility of male and female genitalia, confirms this biblical revelation that males and females are meant for each other. This intimate genital contact between two persons of opposite sexes is not just a physical union; it also embodies the interlocking of persons. This intimate companionship is heterosexuality at its fullest. It is the context for the family.”

1994

Womaen's Caucus invited Martin Rock to speak at their Annual Conference luncheon. It created such a furor that Standing Committee gave new screening instructions to the Program & Arrangement Committee that all speakers at any Conference event must sign a copy of the new policy.

1995

Bunkertown Church of the Brethren diverts the required annual payment of \$8,000 from Elgin's general distribution account to a mission or disaster fund.

1998

On Earth Peace meets with Womaen's Caucus and Brethren / Mennonite Council for Lesbian and Gay Concerns to examine commonality in their mission statements and project goals. Each group is extremely progressive.

2001

Matthew Smucker of the Skyridge Church of the Brethren, Kalamazoo, Michigan, was approved for licensing by in 1999 graduated from Bethany Theological Seminary in 2001. All this time he was “openly gay” in sexual preference.

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2002

The Skyridge congregation ordained Matthew Smucker on June 9, 2002. Later that same month, Annual Conference convened in Louisville, Kentucky, on June 29. The delegate body voted by a two-thirds majority the recommendation of Standing Committee that homosexual licensing and ordinations violated the spirit of the 1983 Human Sexuality paper: *"...it is inappropriate to license or ordain to the Christian ministry any persons who are known to be engaging in homosexual practices."*

2003

Michigan district conference approved a petition affirming Annual Conference decision of 2002 that would discontinue licensing and ordinations of any known homosexuals in the district. Smucker's ordination was then terminated. He is now ordained in the United Church of Christ.

2009

Query to Annual Conference meeting in San Diego, California: Language on Same Sex Covenantal Relationships asks the delegate body, *"to consider whether it is the will of the church that this language on same sex covenantal relationships (1983 AC Statement) will continue to guide our journey together."*

2011

Annual Conference meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, following the recommendation of Standing Committee: *"In light of the Special Response process, as outlined by the 2009 paper 'A Structural Framework For Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues,' the Standing Committee recommends to the 2011 Annual Conference that Language on Same-Sex Covenantal Relationships' be returned. (Amendment) It is further recommended that the 2011 Annual Conference reaffirm the entire 1983 'Statement on Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective' and that we continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process."*

During their September meeting, the On Earth Peace board of directors expressed their displeasure with the results of Annual Conference 2011 and issued a paper titled Statement of Inclusion: *"We are troubled by attitudes and actions in the church which exclude persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or any other aspect of human identity. We believe God calls the church to welcome all persons into full participation in the life of the faith community."*

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2012

Annual Conference Program & Arrangements Committee decides to grant exhibit space to all applications. This was the first time that the Brethren / Mennonite Council for Lesbians and Gays obtained permission to have an exhibit booth. This was technically not a violation of the 2011 Annual Conference decision, since that delegate body had voted to keep human sexual issues outside of the “query process,” thus, an exhibit booth was not a part of the regular business agenda.

2013

Standing Committee meets with On Earth Peace executive director Bill Scheurer to address their Statement of Inclusion. Both sides remained firm in their positions.

Standing Committee meets later in the year with On Earth Peace board to consider ways to resolve the impasse. Both sides continue to remain firm.

2015

On Earth Peace flyer that accompanied the On Earth Peace report in the Annual Conference delegate packet referenced the scripture, *‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, She has anointed me to...’* referring to God as She. This same flyer also included a picture of a rainbow-scarved female speaker promoting the concept of Inclusion.”

2016

Three queries in the realm of human sexuality were presented to the delegate body of Annual Conference: Same Sex Weddings, On Earth Peace Reportability / Accountability to Annual Conference, and Viability of On Earth Peace as an Agency of the Church of the Brethren.

“Standing Committee recommends 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 decision 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. 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.”

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Delegates voted to refer Same Sex Weddings to the Leadership Team to also include consultation with the Council of District Executives.

Standing Committee combined both On Earth Peace queries into one item of business. *“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.”*

Delegates accepted the recommendation of Standing Committee that a report will be given to the 2017 Annual Conference in Grand, Rapids, Michigan.

Researched and written by Ronald Gordon