

Relating to the Larger Church on LGBTQ Inclusion

We recognize that our larger denominational body, the Church of the Brethren, continues to struggle to extend full welcome and inclusion to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons. It is clear that the 1983 Annual Conference statement *Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective*, reaffirmed in 2011, does not reflect the convictions of the entirety of our denomination. The same is true with regards to the 2002 response to the query *Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry*. While we agree with much that is said in these statements concerning the importance of a Christ-centered approach to sexuality and the need to seek justice for LGBTQ persons, we disagree with some of their conclusions.

As a congregation we desire to name, affirm, support, and bless the presence of God's love and power within LGBTQ individuals and their relationships. We lament our denomination and district's continued refusal to recognize the validity of same-sex covenantal relationships or allow congregations to call LGBTQ persons to be licensed and ordained.

We affirm that our sexuality is a gift from God that can be nurtured and treasured, or mistreated and abused. As such, it is important for the church to help one another discern how our sexuality might be expressed as a reflection of Divine love. We also affirm that abuse, force, and violation of trust have no place in sexual relationships. Despite our disagreement with certain parts of the above Annual Conference statements, we applaud the ways they seek to dispel misinformation, name instances of incomplete biblical interpretation, and promote continued conversation with regards to LGBTQ sexuality. In the spirit of these statements, as a welcoming and affirming congregation we seek to:

- be open and welcoming to all who seek community in the name of Jesus Christ;¹
- develop helpful and compassionate ministries with LGBTQ persons;²
- challenge openly the widespread fear, hatred, and harassment of LGBTQ persons;³
- advocate the rights of LGBTQ persons to jobs, housing, and legal justice;⁴
- be in conversation with persons of varied sexual orientations as sisters and brothers in Christ;⁵ and
- wrestle with our tension, truly listening to one another, disagreeing in love, avoiding unkindness toward those with whom we differ, and continuing to seek the mind of Christ together.⁶

Our decision to openly welcome and affirm LGBTQ persons comes after much individual and corporate discernment, and follows Annual Conference encouragement for “individuals, congregations and districts to continue deeper conversations concerning human sexuality outside of the query process.”⁷

Sexuality, which is meant to be an expression of love, joy, and unity, has all too often become a reason for brokenness, sadness, hatred, and violence. We seek to find healing and wholeness in the midst of our divided culture and denomination. We know that not all are of the same mind, even within our congregation. Yet our desire is to remain in fellowship despite our differences, while nevertheless standing with those who are rejected and marginalized. We believe this is the way of Jesus. When we find any individual or group within the congregation, district, or denomination to be in conflict with any other, we will show love rather than demand conformity or push for separation. Together we will work to draw closer to one another as we gather around Christ, our center.

(Adopted by unanimous consent, Richmond Church of the Brethren Congregational Meeting, 11/20/11)

1 2002 Annual Conference Response on Query: Licensing/Ordination of Homosexual Persons to the Ministry in the Church of the Brethren

2 Ibid

3 1983 Annual Conference Statement: Human Sexuality From a Christian Perspective

4 Ibid

5 2011 Standing Committee Report on Query: Language on Same Sex Covenantal Relationships

6 Ibid

7 Ibid