

This booklet has been provided in response to the need of those within and outside our fellowship to know the Brethren position on critical social issues. The Brethren continue to hold that “the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible” is sufficient to answer all questions regarding our interactions in society. However, it has also become apparent that on occasion our mutually felt and biblically derived positions need to be articulated to our membership and to society at large. The positions listed are the current statements adopted by the denomination at its annual General Conference, and as such represent the understanding of the Brethren as a body at the time of their adoption. Our hope is that this booklet will be used as an aid in understanding The Brethren Church, and an encouragement for its membership to act redemptively in the world.

The Social Responsibilities Commission

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GAMBLING —1985

The Brethren Church affirms its opposition to gambling and lotteries, including those run by government. These are socially, morally and economically destructive. They are rooted in covetousness and violate the biblical work ethic.

We believe that gambling in any form is potentially addictive. It is a social evil that feeds upon greed and sells a set of fantasy values that exploits people. It harms especially the poor who can least afford to forfeit their financial resources on the promise of instant wealth. The tragic end result is often deepened poverty and increased welfare rolls, to say nothing of the emotional damage and disillusionment experienced by the vast numbers of planned losers.

Gambling undermines the economic base of a nation in that it reduces the purchasing power of the people. Money gambled by wage earners cannot be spent to purchase goods and services of constructive and productive businesses.

Compulsive gambling causes the individual's character to be weakened and to disintegrate. It leads to indolence and self-delusion, breaks up families and can lead to crime, loss of jobs and even suicide.

Since we deplore the exploitation of the weakness of humanity, The Brethren Church calls upon all who are in positions of influence and decision-making to seek other means by which to raise revenue. We further call upon churches and schools to conduct programs that will inform people of the evils and dangers of gambling.

HOMOSEXUALITY —1985

The Scriptures declare that God created us male and female. Furthermore, the biblical record shows that sexual union was established exclusively within the context of a male-female relationship (Gen. 2:24), and formalized in the institution of marriage. The partner for man was woman. Together they were to be one flesh. In the New Testament, the oneness of male and female in marriage pictures the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:22-33). Everywhere in Scripture the sexual relationship between man and woman within the bonds of marriage is viewed as something natural and beautiful.

Homosexual activity, like adulterous relationships, is clearly condemned in the scriptures. In Leviticus 18:22 God declares the practice of homosexuality an abomination in his sight. In Romans 1:26-27 the practice of homosexuality is described as a degrading and unnatural passion. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 identifies the practice of homosexuality as a sin that, if persisted in, brings grave consequences in this life and excludes one from the kingdom of God.

The Apostle Paul, strong in his condemnation of the practice of homosexuality, also testifies that those once engaged in homosexuality were among those who were forgiven and changed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). This declaration offers hope both for forgiveness and for healing. Individual Christians, ministers and congregations need to maintain the belief that all human beings have sinned, and that all Christians have received God's mercy while helpless, ungodly and hostile to God. In the name of Christ we proclaim forgiveness, cleansing, restoration and power for godly living for all who repent and believe the gospel.

We believe that homosexuality is not an inherited condition in the same category as race, gender or national origin, all of which are free from moral implication. We believe that homosexuality is a deviation from the creator's plan for human sexuality. While homosexuals as individuals are entitled to civil rights, including equal protection of the law, The Brethren Church opposes legislation which would extend special consideration to such individuals based upon their "sexual orientation." Such legislation inevitably is perceived as legitimizing the practice of homosexuality and elevates that practice to the level of an accepted moral standard. While maintaining our opposition to proposed so-called "Gay Rights" legislation, where such legislation has been enacted into law, The Brethren Church strongly urges that churches and religious organizations be exempted from compliance by amendment to the law. The position

and practice of such organizations regarding homosexuality are determined by their religious convictions. This we hold to be a grave matter of religious freedom.

Individual Christians, ministers and congregations should compassionately proclaim the Good News of forgiveness and encourage those involved in homosexual practices to cease those practices, accept forgiveness and pray for deliverance as nothing is impossible with God. Further, we should accept them into fellowship upon confession of faith and repentance as we would any other forgiven sinner (1 Cor. 6:11).

We further call upon pastors and theologians, along with medical and sociological specialists within the Christian community, to expand research on the factors which give rise to homosexuality and to develop therapy, pastoral care and congregational support leading to complete restoration.

PORNOGRAPHY AND OBSCENITY —1985

In recent years there has been a growing portrayal of sexual immorality and deviation in the cinema, television, radio and the print media. The lifestyle modeled for our children on mass media outlets portraying these excesses is dehumanizing and morally destructive. Such ideas and ideals promoted by mass media are in direct contradiction to the biblical lifestyle.

Furthermore, the \$8 billion pornography industry has grown to epidemic proportions and is invading all the segments of our society. Pastors, counselors, social agencies and law officers are seeing families broken and lives adversely affected as well as persons of both sexes victimized by this plague of pornography and obscenity. This industry, controlled largely by organized crime, is responsible for corrupting the lives of children as well as adults, and most alarming of all is the proliferation of child pornography.

Aware of this insidious evil in our society and seeking to be obedient to our prophetic task as God's people, The Brethren Church therefore declares itself as follows:

1. We are committed to Jesus Christ who calls us as the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" to be involved in the solution of the problem of pornography.
2. We are committed to speak out against pornography and obscenity at every opportunity.
3. We encourage our congregations to observe a Pornography Awareness Sunday or Week.
4. We urge our congregations to become involved in appropriate plans of action in their communities.
5. We commit ourselves to participate as a denomination in the National Coalition Against Pornography.
6. We call upon the president of the United States to declare publicly his support for the enforcement of obscenity laws and to order the Justice Department to enforce the existing obscenity laws.
7. We urge Christians everywhere to seek ways to minister more effectively to both the victims and perpetrators of obscenity and pornography.

BRETHREN RESOLVE FOR PEACE —1986

Brethren are a peace-loving people. Historically, this value was expressed in the practice of nonresistance which established Brethren in the tradition of the peace churches such as Mennonites, Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren. Twentieth century Brethren continue to uphold the ideal of peace, but the church embraces persons of opposing convictions concerning the role and means of “peacemaking.”

On the one hand, some Brethren understand peacemaking as a practice of nonresistance or nonviolence. Brethren annually reaffirm that historic position as a nonresistant peace church and, as such, provide counsel and support for those persons who, as a matter of personal conscience, hold a conviction of nonresistance. On the other hand, some Brethren understand peacemaking as the responsibility of the state to defend against and deter evil. These Brethren affirm the role of the state to maintain peace and deter aggression through a strong national defense by sanctioning chaplains in all branches of military service and providing counsel and support for those who, as a matter of personal conscience, hold to the conviction of peace through a strong military defense or “resistance.” Therefore, as Brethren Peacemakers, let us resolve:

- I. To oppose tyranny, injustice, exploitation, and dehumanization as interpreted from a biblical perspective whenever and wherever they exist.
 1. To vote against candidates, regardless of political affiliations, when they encourage or support such practices at home or abroad.
 2. To express our opposition to these practices in writing, surveys, telephone, and personal contact with political candidates and Public officials.
 3. To encourage those whose conscience moves them to action to oppose these practices politically by raising questions and drawing attention to such evils.
 4. To use our resources for truth and justice.
 5. To encourage local congregations to establish a Peace Committee to aid in the implementation of the above.
- II. To encourage our government to seek to reduce the threat of all war, including nuclear war, and to pursue peace through all possible diplomatic means.
 1. To continue the efforts of détente through international dialogue, negotiations, and diplomacy aimed at the lessening of international tensions.
 2. To continue in summit meetings, diplomatic talks, negotiations, and other such means of weapon and warfare control and reduction.
 3. To pursue all possibilities of bilateral, verifiable reduction of offensive and/or nuclear weapons.
 4. To maintain control of the availability and sale of nuclear technology, arms, and offensive weaponry with the ultimate goal of eliminating the sale of arms trade.
 5. To maintain the military for the purposes of defense and deterrence of aggression only. The U.S. should avoid being the aggressor in military action.
- III. To encourage our government to pursue peace and the improvement of East/West relationships via the following:

1. Continual diplomatic communication.
2. Trade and commerce in non-strategic items.
3. Cross-cultural exchanges in education, travel, and diplomatic visits.
4. Collaboration and cooperation in non-strategic areas unrelated to national defense and security.

IV. To make peacemaking concerns a regular part of prayer. Let us pray for the following:

1. Bilateral (mutual) verifiable disarmament.
2. The lessening of tension in East/West relations.
3. Those who encourage and support tyranny, injustice, exploitation, and dehumanization that they might be changed and follow God's leading for their lives.
4. Freedom and human rights of those who must live under political tyranny.
5. Those who work for the cause of freedom and justice in the West and East.

V. To provide avenues for Brethren to work in peacemaking roles in society.

1. To seek to understand and apply peacemaking principles in interpersonal relationships, as well as international relations.
2. To actively support those interested in cross-cultural voluntary service through existing organizations.
3. To encourage Ashland University and/or Ashland Theological Seminary to expand educational exchange programs to Third World, Eastern European, and Asian cultures.
4. To encourage the development of tours for Brethren to visit Third World, Eastern European, and Asian nations for cross-cultural experiences.
5. To encourage and support Brethren who pursue peacemaking professions in the private and governmental sections, such as diplomatic corps, foreign exchange programs, Peace Corps, military chaplaincy, etc.
6. To encourage Ashland University to develop peacemaking programs as a part of the John M. Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs.
7. To continue in the official support of Brethren young people of both peace convictions by the following:
 - a. Encouragement and support for those who affirm a nonresistant position "within the law."
 - b. Encouragement and support for those who enlist or are conscripted for military service.

For both nonresistant Brethren and those who believe in peace through military strength, this resolve may be too weak at some points and too strong at others. But differences are resolved through dialogue, and peace is achieved through mutually acceptable compromise. If Brethren who love peace cannot coexist with their differences, how can we expect such of nations? Let us concentrate on areas in which we can agree, continue dialogue in areas of disagreement, and resolve to increase our understanding of peace related issues and each other.

Our role as peacemakers may be in dispute, but the goal of peace is undeniable. May Paul's teaching be our practice ...

If someone has done you wrong, do not repay with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good. Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.
Romans 12: 17, 18 (TEV)

ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS) —1991

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is rapidly becoming the number one health problem in the world. For those who have contracted AIDS, there is currently no known medical cure, and thus the disease is fatal. The evidence is not clear regarding the long-term results for those who are carriers of the HIV virus. The Surgeon General of the United States has called AIDS "the most serious matter any health official of any nation has ever faced."

Although there is the urgent need for education regarding AIDS, education without reference to values ignores the moral dimensions of the problem. Therefore, government or private sector programs that deny the moral element of the problem are inadequate remedies. While there are innocent sufferers of the disease, the fact remains that two primary groups of individuals with AIDS are practicing homosexuals and drug addicts who share needles. The connection between immoral behavior and the spread of the HIV virus is self-evident.

Furthermore, AIDS is first and foremost a public health concern, not a civil rights issue. Hence, any proposed legislation that would confer special "civil rights" on persons afflicted with AIDS, but threatens the health of others, is totally unacceptable. We believe appropriate legislation regarding AIDS would require testing of high risk groups, reporting of those with the disease to public health officials on the same basis as other sexually transmitted diseases, and closing of bathhouses and other facilities that permit promiscuous sexual activity.

But legislation and the best efforts of public health officials have their limits. Our Christian faith offers hope for the victims of AIDS. This faith offers a realistic way of life that will curb the spread of this tragic disease in that our faith calls for chastity before marriage, fidelity in marriage, and rejection of the homosexual lifestyle. For this reason The Brethren Church proclaims the hope that God has provided in Christ Jesus and promotes the practice of biblical sexual morality. We encourage pastors to request couples coming to them for marriage consider having AIDS tests and to share the results with each other before marriage. We further urge that, with Christian compassion, we offer the hope of Christ's redemption and grace to victims of AIDS.

Our churches should take the initiative and leadership in ministering to AIDS patients and to those infected with the HIV virus. We cannot permit fear or apathy to keep us from bringing the life-changing resources of our Christian faith to those who suffer from the dreaded AIDS disease.

ABORTION—1991

The Brethren Church believes that the moral issue of abortion is more than a question of the freedom of a woman to control the reproductive functions of her own body. It is rather a question of those circumstances under which a human being may be permitted to take the life of another. We believe that all human life has value, is a creative act of God, and begins at conception. We oppose the use of abortion for personal or sociological purposes. We recognize therapeutic abortions may be necessary where the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother, as in tubal pregnancies.

Affirming the necessity of response to this issue, The Brethren Church supports and encourages the following:

1. Prayer for the unborn and those affected by the issue of abortion;
2. Biblical teaching promoting abstinence from sexual relations outside of marriage and the sanctity of all human life;
3. Spiritual, emotional, and material support at the personal and congregational levels to those in crisis pregnancies and children resulting from these pregnancies, including their adoption;
4. Activities that will offer the redemption, forgiveness, and restoration available through Jesus Christ to those involved in an abortion;
5. Legislative action which upholds the biblical truths regarding the sanctity of human life.