

## Church of the Brethren

### Annual Conference Statement

1977 Justice and Non-Violence

1987 Quest for Order

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1991 Creation: Called to Care

1996 Simple Life

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Global Warming 1991

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Clean Air 2000

Global Warming 2001

Climate Change and Christian Witness 2001

## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR JUSTICE AND NONVIOLENCE (1977)

*He has showed you. . . what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?*

(Micah 6:8)

### *The Concern*

Violence takes many forms: war, crime, oppression, denial of justice, and violation of personhood. The voice of the Church of the Brethren usually has been clear and unequivocal regarding non-participation in war, the most obvious expression of violence in our global community. Often the church has been less clear regarding more subtle expressions of violence, even benefiting from the injustice and violence that others suffer.

Is it not time for us in the church to examine ourselves and our faith and to work forthrightly for liberation, justice, and peace in ways that respect the life and potential of every person and the whole human family?

Is it not time for the church to put its house in order, realizing within itself a closer approximation of justice and nonviolence?

Is it not time for the church (which should be the primary locus of justice and nonviolence) to take a positive stance in support of justice and in opposition to the subtle forms of violence that deny survival for many and quality of life for the majority?

Is it not time for the church to declare itself in support of working non-violently for liberation and justice for persons bound by patterns of colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, localism, militarism, and other structures of oppression?

### *Biblical View*

The People of Israel understood Jahweh to be a God of both justice (*mishpat*) and peace (*shalom*). The original setting of the term *mishpat* is that of a judge at the gate of an ancient Hebrew town making decisions about grievances.

When a judge could make a decision that brought genuine reconciliation between the parties involved, that decision had the quality of justice (mishpat). The concept therefore represents the goal of the judicial process, but not in the sense of mere retribution or redistribution. Rather mishpat refers to concrete and particular acts of reconciliation. Nor is it the abstract ideas of harmony and balance. It is rather a quality of active and expressive behavior that restores the appropriate rightness or relation between dissident persons or groups.

Stated otherwise mishpat is the fitting and normal behavior of every person within the covenantal community. It relates the established tradition and instruction (torah) to the concrete relationships between persons in day by day situations. To act with justice (mishpat) is to act in such a way that one's place in the community is rightly established and guided, that one's relationships with others are engaged responsibly, that the tradition and instruction are embodied in act, and that alienation and injustice are actively and concretely overcome. This view of justice is to be carefully distinguished from concepts of necessary punishment, balance of power, and legal requirement. Though each of the latter may be taken up in mishpat, they do not in themselves reach the center of its reality.

A closely related concept is that of peace (shalom). In the biblical view shalom was the relationships of solidarity between persons who were rightly established in the covenantal community. Shalom referred both to the quality of the relationships between persons as well as to the free, unfettered, and appropriate life of the soul of each person. The person whose life was guided by mishpat and whose relationships were guided by the traditional instruction was also a person whose soul developed and grew with both an inner and outer blessedness. Shalom therefore refers to the solidarity and vitality of a people whose life is guided by justice as well as the inward blessedness of each person who is so related to the covenantal community. True mishpat (justice) and shalom (peace) can therefore never be separated from one another.

Justice and peace are both profoundly theological concepts. Just as justice cannot properly be reduced to the balance of power, so also peace cannot be reduced to the absence of conflict. Peace is rather the mark of an expressive life that is rightly related to all who are bound together by the covenant. In truth both peace and justice are the gift of God. One acts in reconciling ways toward other persons and groups because God is a God of justice whose ways are wholly just. To act otherwise would be to do violence to the way that God relates to his people. Violence of person against person is therefore fundamental violence against the relationship with God. Justice is the gift of God. We strive to find the right ways of actively and concretely reconciling our differences, but all our acts find their limit in the fact that God alone gives justice.

So also God gives peace. We are called to act in ways that deepen and enlarge the covenant, and in this behavior God has promised to grace our lives and our communities with peace. When justice is violated, then we lose the grace of God's peace with one another and with ourselves. Peace is thus closely related to individual and community expressions of justice, but related in such a way that God has promised peace to those who seek to live within the covenant. Both peace and justice are finally the gift of a just and loving God, and not in any sense our meritorious claim.

In the Exodus, the God of justice acted to liberate Israel from the yoke of Egypt and to establish them in peace. The Exodus is therefore not to be seen primarily as the open rebellion of a people against their captor, but rather as the liberating power that comes from living under a covenant of justice and peace. The torah is a constant reminder of the power of the covenantal community that hopes in God and lives in justice.

The Exodus of Israel from bondage was a miracle of liberation that gives hope to captive peoples yet today. It demonstrates God's desire for people to live in a worldwide community of justice and peace. The Exodus alerts the church of every age to God's power at work to affect social upheaval to bring about justice where there is suffering and oppression, thus awakening hope in the hearts of people everywhere. The liberation of people comes from their covenantal commitment to both justice and peace. In this light the major task of the people of faith is to live the liberated life that comes from actively seeking justice and peace.

The prophets bore witness to the Mosaic covenant in various ways:

*You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality: and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of righteousness.- Justice and only justice you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Deuteronomy 16:19-20)*

*I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies,  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them,  
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an everflowing stream.  
(Amos 5:21-24)*

*Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,  
and the writers who keep writing oppression,  
to turn aside the needy from justice  
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,  
that widows may be their spoil,  
and that they may make the fatherless their prey!  
(Isaiah 10:1, 2)*

Jesus stood exactly in the Hebrew tradition of Hebrew justice and peace. God's will for a reconciling justice marked by the covenantal blessedness of peace is expressed in the New Testament as love, especially agape love. Just as for Israel justice and peace between persons are the gifts of a covenantal relationship with God, so also for Jesus the love of God can never be separated from the love of neighbor. Jesus described his mission on earth in words that refer to Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord  
(Luke 4:18.29)*

Jesus radically transformed and extended the meaning of mishpat and shalom to include all people, even strangers, foreigners, enemies, despised neighbors (Samaritans), and nonbelievers. In Jesus Christ there are no qualifying limits to God's justice and peace. All the walls are down. The grace and love of God are being extended to everyone. The tradition itself must give way to God's justice (Mark 3:4, Acts 10).

In justice toward the enemy, the nonviolent character of God's love becomes fully evident. Throughout the Old Testament we find indications that adherence to covenantal justice rather than military might is the true source of Israel's hope. In the life and teachings of Jesus the love of God not only stands on the side of the poor and dispossessed, but is also concerned about the well-being of the enemy and the oppressor. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" was the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:44). We are to forgive as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32); and we are to be willing to suffer and lay down our lives, if necessary, for the sake of God's reconciling justice (I John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 1:5). We are to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:14-21). The way of armed conflict is not the way of God's kingdom (John 18:36).

The symbolism of the Love Feast carries potential for lifting up the fullness of God's love and justice for all persons, not just the gathered church. In the feet washing and the fellowship at the table we have concrete expressions of reconciliation between persons. The whole celebration makes real to us the reconciling activity of God in Jesus Christ as embodied in those around us. The reconciling acts bring new levels of God's peace among the participants, as well as a hope for peace among all people. Is this not a model of the justice and peace that is destined to reign among those in all times and places who come to the Lord's table?

### *Some Principles*

Our understanding of the biblical view of justice and peace leads us to affirm these principles:

- The church in its community life, organization, and worship must show compassion and equal respect for all persons.
- The church in its concern for all people, the poor, the powerless, the rich, the powerful, is not called to defend the riches of the rich or to preserve the power of the powerful.
- The church has specific responsibility to defend and respond to the rights and needs of the poor, the disadvantaged, and those with insufficient power to assure their rights.
- No person is created for poverty, but all are born for a full place at the table of the human family.
- The church is to witness to the responsibility of the ruling power for the administration of justice by crying out against persons or governments that abuse justice and misuse their power.
- Government is to rule with justice for every person.
- Individuals as well as the church must guard against the constant tendency to idealize and to worship (without regard to justice) the social, economic, and political institutions within which any people find themselves.
- All human systems including the church are fallible and imperfect.
- These systems must be judged by their fruits; are their programs just?
- When social structures have ceased to serve their humanitarian purposes, radical non-violent changes are in order.
- The church, in one aspect of its mission, may be called to participate non-violently in the change process.
- Hunger, poverty, war, and broken relationships are evidences of sin working in human structures. These point up the need for repentance and restitution for the restoration of justice in the earth.
- God calls the church to work at restoring justice by a responsible use of its power. We must use means that are compassionate because violence is sin, an abuse of the solidarity of humankind.

### *A Complex of Problems*

Violence still flourishes after the thousands of years of human history since the time of the prophets of Israel and the life and ministry of Jesus. Military conflict, atrocities, excessive or corrupt exercise of power, withholding of justice, and infringement upon personal dignity are some of the many forms of violence growing out of the ways peoples, nations, and institutions have organized and operated. This section of our paper directs the church's attention to some of the problems of systemic or structural violence—the violence often hidden in the usual and

customary institutions and practices.\*

Structurally violent institutions magnify inequities, denigrate personal dignity, repress freedom, resist change, abuse power, thwart community, and do other injustices to persons and groups. The harm resulting to people may be unintentional but none the less real. For example, poverty-perpetuating class structure may actually destroy life: one born into poverty or oppression usually has a shorter life expectancy than one born in privileged conditions. For example, the average life expectancy of persons born in the United States is thirty years longer than for equally precious persons in many poorer countries of the world.

### *Justice Violated*

In a world beset with degradation and misery, most members of the Church of the Brethren sit with others at the pinnacle of the global structure of wealth and power. Many middle-class persons in the United States possess and consume far more wealth than their numbers would allow if the resources of the world were shared compassionately among the people of the world. Many Christians, although committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ and solidarity with neighbors, are implicated in structural violence.

One can be unaware of the unfortunate consequence of his or her participation in an institution. An oppressor need not always be malicious for oppression to occur, nor can an oppressor's acts of kindness make an oppressive institution morally acceptable. (A slaveholder's kindness toward a slave, did not make slavery an acceptable institution.)

The abuse of power adds to the complexity of the problem of restoring solidarity. In reality, all power belongs to God (Psalm 62:11. John. 19:10-11). Creation (Jeremiah 10:12), history (Exodus 15:6), salvation (Revelation 19:1)—all attest to the transcendent power of God.

Persons in positions of power and authority often participate in structural violence. Such persons sometimes misuse power in making decisions in government, business, education, labor unions, churches, and families. These decisions enable them to accumulate status, power, or wealth at the expense of other people who are deprived of the economic, psychological, or political necessities for lives of dignity and fulfillment.

It is important that we do not confuse power with violence. Political power dependent on the consent and compliance of the governed, may be diminished or even destroyed when support is withdrawn or withheld. A redistribution of power follows. Other important changes are also effected in such nonviolent struggles: for instance, with the realization of power over one's own life comes a new sense of self-respect and self-confidence.

Those who achieve power by violence are prone to continue exercising coercive power after the struggle is over. Such power can be weakened by nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Jesus' life clearly shows that violence is not necessary to the use of power.

Institutions that resist the efforts of people to modify unfair systems of governmental organization, land ownership, and other social arrangements perpetuate injustice. Military repression is used consistently by those who seek political or economic gain; support of such repressive regimes is Pharaoh-like resistance to God's liberating presence in history. Similarly misguided are the training of repressive police and the granting of economic assistance that strengthens certain groups without regard for the interests of the majority of the population.

The persistent endeavors of the competing powers to peddle arms throughout the world strengthen military regimes, escalate international tensions, and encourage the squandering of precious resources by societies suffering from material scarcity. The worldwide supply of arms fosters "localized" conflicts and wars. Violence may become the major consumer of productivity and scientific advance.

Some institutions, for example the intelligence agencies of governments, at times manipulate, coerce, and destroy. The CIA has frequently engaged in clandestine intervention that creates mistrust, alienates people, and subverts the democratic principles in which the United States professes to believe.

By manipulating events in weaker, poorer nations, governments are committing violence; and by resisting or controlling change, they are encouraging reformers to resort to violent means to overturn institutionally imposed injustice. Such manipulation by the big powers perpetuates misery and suffering for millions of people.

Geography and sometimes history determine whether one society is richer than another. The richer, more powerful nations, intentionally or unintentionally, are deriving much of their wealth from the poorer or less powerful. Inequities of wealth tend to produce inequities of power. Also, inequities of power tend to produce inequities of wealth.

### ***Productivity Misappropriated***

No existing economic, political, or social institution or system perfectly reflects the ideal. Political and economic structures produce many positive benefits, but in their current practices they often prevent the realization of global community and the unity of the human family. In both capitalist and socialist systems, persons who aim to maximize their wealth and power rather than serve human needs deny the sacredness of life.

Nationalistic economic policies, supported by government, business, labor, and public opinion, sacrifice global responsibility and retard economic development. Such policies prevent broad-based economic opportunities for small producers and adequate levels of life for many consumers. The maze of the world's systems of tariffs, quotas, and national "self-sufficiency" policies contribute to this imbalance. "Buy American" enjoys periodic popularity in the United States. This attitude overlooks matters of genuine global economic concern.

Because we live in an interdependent world, capital flows across political boundaries are necessary. It is in the interest of all that investment opportunities remain attractive for recipient and donor in those countries without sufficient indigenous capital. Although balanced investment programs should benefit all concerned, some investors obtain unrealistic returns and take away as many resources and as much profit as possible. Skills and technology taken to other lands may be offset by exploitation of resources in those countries.

### ***Dignity Denied***

In more than one hundred countries in the world, people are systematically treated unjustly because of their ethnic backgrounds, political views, or religious beliefs.\*\* They are incarcerated without trial, tortured, assassinated, or otherwise denied human rights. The United States position on human rights, which many presume to be favorable, is brought into question not only because of our unwillingness to join other states in an open call for approval of United Nations treaties on human rights, but also because of our intervention to protect military governments overseas and our poor example in guaranteeing the rights of some of our own citizens and resident aliens.

Both domestically and globally, the weak and poor have limited influence over the decisions that affect their lives. Economic oppression as well as political oppression denies basic human rights; the former denies the fight to life and the latter the right to free speech and political and religious activities.

Racism, sexism, and elitism divide the human family; so do some expressions of nationalism and tribalism. They encourage the belief that one's own group is better than another and deserves more wealth, power, prestige, or security than another. No social grouping can implement justice for all human beings if its people take advantages at the expense of other groups.

The struggle for the allegiance of human minds impedes interaction with peoples of other cultures, particularly of other economic and political persuasions. Fear and distrust also are among the factors that keep apart the adherents of the various systems and prevent the contacts that would promote understanding. What challenge do love and the aspiration for a responsible and humane world order place on the church to enable persons from diverse and even opposing political and economic systems to be in touch with one another for the sake of peace and understanding?

For a peace church, the problems of dignity denied are complicated in another way. While not condoning violence,

how does the peacemaker express love for those who rely on violent means to bring about a better social order? How love those who violently oppose any change, violent or nonviolent?

### ***The Universe Offended***

The world seems headed toward ecological crisis and perhaps disaster. In many instances, the pace and mode of industrialization and technological development appear to exceed the ability to combine the factors of production in ways that preserve and use with equity the resources provided by the Creator. In other instances, there seems to be a trend toward using up resources for a minority of God's children, destroying the beauty of the planet and life-sustaining necessities such as clean air and water.

The critical problem facing the human family is how to implement eco-justice and to focus the consumption of the resources in God's universe upon the service of human needs.

### ***A Word of Hope***

The liberating activity of God finds support around the world where persons and nations are looking for new non-violent ways to translate the values of liberation, justice, and peace into operational goals. While violence, tyranny, and dehumanization in many forms are on the increase, there is a growing interest in nonviolent alternatives. All persons of good will can be thankful for such support as they encourage changes in social, political, and economic institutions in order to promote justice and eliminate oppression. The righteous judgement of God empowers our human justice, letting God's will for justice be expressed through us.

### ***Imperatives***

We join with the afflicted, the brokenhearted, the captives, the bound (Isaiah 61:1). Thus we live out our response to the love of God in Jesus Christ, participating with him in his ministry of reconciliation and redemption.

Our understanding of the mind of Christ demands of us vigorous non-violent involvement and identification with the poor and the oppressed, all the while acknowledging our limitation and confessing our complicity in the evils addressed. We also recognize that these problems (evils) are massive, complex, and ambiguous and that we lack perfect knowledge. We believe, however, that Christian discipleship demands decision and action to help achieve greater justice and peace in our time.

We must face the risks and vigorously implement the love of God in our political, economic, and social relations. The consequences of our decisions and actions may be as costly as when Jesus was accused of political subversion and was executed. We need faith, moral courage, and love as revealed in Jesus Christ and lived out in the faith community.

Our own faith community cannot escape its responsibility to act for justice, liberation, and peace. It is imperative for us as a church to pursue further biblical and theological reflection and study about the meaning of God's justice for concrete action in our homes, churches, communities, and nation. Brethren ought to assume leadership in their communities to bring concerned persons together from other churches and secular agencies for study, action, and reflection around these concerns. District boards and executives should lift up the vision and develop projects for both district and local programs. Placement of leadership should be influenced by criteria related to the commitment of candidates to justice, liberation, and peace. In order to help generate wider support for needed change in systems we should use all available communications media to expose problems, raise awareness, and suggest transforming action.

### ***Peace with Justice***

We place a high priority on changing political structures in order to reverse the present spiral of violence, militarism, and the armaments race. The Church of the Brethren must be decisive in shaping its own programs and

calling all Christians and other persons of good will to encourage the United States to:

- cease immediately its sales of arms to other countries
- pledge not to use nuclear weapons
- dismantle its nuclear arsenal
- provide leadership to ban environmental warfare
- strengthen global institutions that facilitate nonviolent means of conflict resolution and the process of disarmament
- curtail foreign military aid and training
- refuse to sell nuclear fuels and technology to any state not agreeing to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency
- end its secret intelligence gathering and its political intervention in foreign countries
- discontinue any policy which strengthens unpopular, repressive, and unjust regimes by financial aid, military and intelligence training, and political favoritism
- provide tax alternatives, such as the World Peace Tax Fund, for those conscientiously opposed to the current level of military spending
- transfer immediately the funds in the military budget to life-giving programs
- discontinue the Junior ROTC program

### ***Economic Justice***

Economic institutions should promote the capacity, willingness, and likelihood of peoples to embrace economic equity at the expense of material self-aggrandizement; to substitute for selfish competition, cooperation to meet the needs of one another; to implement justice toward other classes, nationalities, and “enemies” by sharing wealth and power in practical ways; and to build community, nurtured by local roots and encompassing all humanity

We call upon all Christians and other persons of good will to join with the Church of the Brethren to reverse the widening of the gap between rich and poor. In order to conserve energy, food, and other resources needed by the poor, we must reexamine our patterns of consumption. We urge our people to contribute from their material resources, beyond a tithe, for global redistribution of wealth. We encourage one another to dissociate, as far as possible, from, or change the policies of, economic institutions that buttress elitist systems abroad or seek to take unreasonable profits out of less developed countries.

The Church of the Brethren seeks to shape its own programs and to influence other institutions in order to encourage the United States to:

- acknowledge that food is a human right and to make this right a guiding principle in deciding economic policies
- lead in creating a world food reserve system under international control and to contribute significant resources, as the world’s largest producer of food for export
- relieve the economic insecurity which creates pressures for population growth and to encourage family planning aimed at stabilizing population through increased education



- contribute a fixed portion of savings from arms reductions to programs for emergency relief food reserves, and the development of knowledge needed to increase agricultural production worldwide, through the United Nations
- channel its foreign economic aid through multilateral agencies in which the poor nations enjoy equitable representation
- contribute at least one percent of its GNP annually to world development programs
- participate in the movement for a new international economic order for promoting economic well-being for all.

### ***Human Rights and Liberation***

We deplore imprisonment for nonviolent opposition to a government and all forms of repression, torture, censorship, and discrimination based on sex, religion, race, age, economic and cultural strata, or national origin. We find this position consistent with our understanding of the scriptures.

The Church of the Brethren should develop its own programs and influence the policies of other institutions in order to encourage our nation to:

- accelerate programs designed to eliminate discrimination based on sex, age, or race
- support firmly monitoring the violations of human rights by impartial transnational groups such as Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists
- pursue a general worldwide amnesty for people forced to live in exile, and for individuals imprisoned for their beliefs or for nonviolent acts of conscience against a government, including a person's conscientious refusal to obey conscription laws
- ratify the Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights\*\*\*
- support nonviolent sanctions of the United Nations against regimes which justify discrimination based on race, and to encourage boycotting the products of any corporations that have, through subsidiaries, sought to evade the impact of the sanctions already imposed in southern Africa
- deny aid to oppressive regimes
- receive exiles willingly.

### ***Eco-Justice***

We are obligated to accept our responsibility as stewards of God's creation and exercise good stewardship of natural resources to satisfy the basic human needs of persons now living and of those to come.

We call on members of the Church of the Brethren, other Christians, and persons of good will to examine the ways we consume resources and dispose of wastes, making changes as needed in the light of responsible stewardship.

We urge citizens, our church, and government to adopt policies based on the principle that any insufficiency of resources should be borne equally by all persons in all societies.

We urge our government to declare a moratorium on the building of any new nuclear power plants until adequate safeguards have been implemented regarding plant safety, nuclear waste disposal, and security of nuclear materials with weapons potential.

We encourage the government to pool knowledge and funds with other societies to increase research into solar, tidal, geothermal, and wind sources of energy.

We favor policies aimed at using for purposes of international development all proceeds from resources of the oceans and seabeds beyond territorial limits.

Recognizing that environmental protection is a global problem, the costs should be largely borne by those countries with the most ability to pay for such protection.

### *Closing Statement*

The world confronts us with the temptation to use violence in war, to acquiesce and participate in structural violence, and to support violent revolution against structural violence. Although we seek to identify with the oppressed, to these three types of violence we make a uniform response: the Scriptures call us to reject all forms of violence and to undertake nonviolent acts to exercise our commitment to human liberation and justice. We must be vigilant against that which would seduce us to use the very means against which we must struggle. Such a nonviolent response is rooted in the call to radical discipleship; it calls us to take risks and to transform our own lives and human institutions for the sake of God's justice but it does not destroy life or close off the possibility of genuine reconciliation (nurtured in mishpat and shalom) with an oppressor after the oppression is ended.

We cannot retreat from the world. We are to move from where we are to where God's power and purpose have begun to define new possibilities and new necessities. We must become aware of the rampant injustice and subtle hidden violence in today's world, examine our own involvement, and identify non-violently with the oppressed and suffering.

We must develop a theology of living here and now in the spirit of the kingdom. We look toward a future that will be more peaceful, just, and respectful of God's creation. We who are of the body of Christ, an incarnation of God's reconciling and redeeming love in the world; are called to be a channel of God's loving justice. Wherever brokenness among people exists, we are called to participate in God's work of healing; wherever people suffer from oppression, we are to work for God's act of liberation; and wherever people are deprived of basic human needs and opportunities we are called to God's work of humanization. We are called to live the life of God's agape in the world because Christ is our Lord.

*Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise... glory in... wisdom, let not the mighty... glory in... might, let not the rich... glory in... riches; but let those who glory glory in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.'*  
(from Jeremiah 9:23, 24)

Clyde R. Shallenberger,  
Chairman  
S. Loren Bowman, General  
Secretary

**Action of 1977 Annual Conference:** The recommendation of Standing Committee, that we adopt the paper, was presented by Edith Griffith. *The paper was adopted with a number of amendments which are incorporated in the above wording of the paper.*

### **Footnotes**

\* "Structural Violence" as used in this paper refers to violations of personhood such as malnutrition, oppression of apartheid, or denial of equal opportunity because of one's class, race, age or sex.

\*\* During 1976, Amnesty International, a London-based nongovernmental organization with 97,000 members in 78 countries, reported violations of human rights in 112 countries. The violations included putting citizens in jail for their beliefs, denying fair trials to those being held, and torturing or illegally executing prisoners. See *The New York Times*, October 3, 1976, IV, page two.

\*\*\* The United Nations General Assembly adopted three important treaties on human rights on December 16, 1966. The first of these, entitled Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, guarantees freedom of religious expression, peaceful assembly, and movement. It prohibits arbitrary arrest, asserts a right to life and to a fair trial, and provides legal protections for minorities. The Optional Protocol of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights gives individuals and groups the right to appeal to the UN Commission on Human Rights when their rights are violated. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights establishes the right to work, education, medical care, and related social and economic benefits. The United States has not yet signed and ratified any of these treaties, despite the passage of more than a decade since they were opened for ratification. The texts of the three instruments are contained in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200. *General Assembly Official Records*, Volume 21. Supplement 16 (A/6319) pages 49-53. The texts are also reprinted in *American Journal of International Law*, Volume 61 (1967), pages 861-890.

### **GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO GENETIC ENGINEERING (1987)**

**WHEREAS:** The miracle of new life is a gift from God.

**WHEREAS:** The innate characteristics, such as sex and genetic makeup, of new life are also considered intimate to God's plan;

**WHEREAS:** Scientific research, in regard to genetic engineering and recombination, including gene insertions, deletions, and mutations, is progressing steadily in areas of amphibian and mammalian gene manipulation;

**WHEREAS:** Restrictions toward some aspects of genetic engineering are being eased, or lifted altogether;

It is felt that a thorough, comprehensive study is in order to allow the Annual Conference to learn of the mounting evidence in scientific progress toward ultimate future manipulation of human genes, and also to encourage the General Board and Annual Conference to provide guidance and direction to the local churches.

Therefore, we, the people of the Bear Creek Church of the Brethren, in council on May 30, 1982, voted to petition the 1983 Annual Conference meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 28 to July 3, 1983, through the West Marva District Conference meeting in Westernport, Maryland, on September 17-18, 1982 to appoint a committee to investigate the current direction of scientific research in regard to genetic engineering and recombination, as it relates to experimentation on human life.

Ernest Spoerlein,  
Moderator  
Mrs. Judy Rush, Clerk

**Action of the West Marva District Conference** meeting at the Westernport Church of the Brethren, September 17-18, 1982: Passed to Annual Conference.

Lester Boleyn, Moderator  
Linda Everett, Writing Clerk

**Action of 1983 Annual Conference:** The Annual Conference approved the Standing Committee

recommendation to “a) adopt the concern of the query from the West Marva District and b) take the following actions:

1. to endorse the concept of persons using their ability and reason to experiment for the enrichment of life and existence.
2. to instruct the General Board to:
  - v. seek out wherever possible Church of the Brethren participation in the development of guidelines for ethical research;
  - a. encourage and assist continued evaluation and discussion by the Brethren Health and Welfare Association and other interested groups within the church;
  - b. report to the membership within two years in the form of a study paper or by other means in the areas of concern, controversy and change. We also request the General Board to monitor these areas and to keep the membership appraised.”

**Action of the General Board:** The General Board assigned to the World Ministries Commission responsibility for implementing the Annual Conference action. Leland Wilson, director of the Washington Office, was given staff responsibility.

The following actions were taken:

- Through *Messenger* and *Agenda*, Church of the Brethren members were encouraged to study the issue of genetic engineering and to share ideas and guidelines for genetic engineering that would be a part of this study. Referrals were also made to the Brethren colleges and to Bethany Theological Seminary.
- A referral was made to the Brethren Health and Welfare Association, and the issue has been a part of its agenda.
- Paul W. Hoffman, president of McPherson College and 1983 Annual Conference moderator, was asked to prepare the query answer, assisted by an Advisory Committee. The committee provided initial perspectives and resource materials. They then reviewed and made suggestions on the preparatory draft of this paper. Members of the Advisory Committee were:

Murvel Annan, Professor of Biology and Genetics, retired, Bridgewater, VA;  
John W. Cooper, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA,  
David Deeter, graduate student, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont CA;  
Thomas A. Fogle, Assistant Professor of Biology, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN;  
Harvey Good, Professor of Biology, University of LaVerne, LaVerne, CA,  
Robert Heckman, Professor of Biology, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA;  
Leon Hironimus, Pastor, First Church of the Brethren, Ligonier, PA;  
G. Martin Keeney, Synthetic Chemist, Monsanto Corporation, St. Louis, MO;  
Debra A. Kirchhof-Glazier, Assistant Professor of Biology, Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA,  
David G. Metzler, Professor of Religion, Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA;  
Romelle S. Million, Medicine and Science Verbatim Reporter, Alexandria, VA;  
Dale L. Oxender, Director, Center for Molecular Genetics, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI;  
William Puffenberger, Professor of Religion and Philosophy, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA,  
Gerald W. Roller, Physician of Internal Medicine, Roanoke, VA,

A. Robert Shank, Director, Western Research Station, Illinois Foundation Seeds, Inc., Seward, NE;  
Graydon F. Snyder, Dean, Chicago Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL.;  
Marla Ullom, premedical student, McPherson College, McPherson, KS;  
Ben F. Wade, Vice-President and Dean, Florida Southern College, Lakeland, FL;  
LeRoy Walters, Director, Center for Bioethics, Georgetown University, Washington, DC;  
W. Steve Watson, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, VA,

## 1987 ANNUAL CONFERENCE STATEMENT ON GENETIC ENGINEERING

### Definitions

The term "genetic engineering," first coined in 1965, describes the various techniques used to isolate specific genes, form combinations of genes, or move genes from one species to another species without regard to genetic barriers. Genetic engineering is the common name for more scientific descriptive words such as "gene splicing," *in vitro* recombination, or DNA cloning. The most common type of genetic engineering is gene splicing, in which some DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid-the building blocks of life) is excised from one species and inserted into the DNA of another species, thus forming "recombinant DNA." "Germ cells" are the sex cells, sperm and egg, which fuse during fertilization. "Somatic cells" constitute all cells of the body other than germ cells. They

### (1987) QUEST FOR ORDER

We believe that God the Creator brings order out of chaos; that where the earth is "without form," there the Spirit of God is moving to bring light and life (Gen. 1:2, 3, 24). when God acts, the order that is created is of truth and right (Isa. 45:19). Even in the worship of God, "all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

We are convinced that the early Christians lived orderly lives within their own community; they were counseled toward order within the state (Rom. 13).

Order and harmonious relations are values cherished throughout the history of the Brethren. Radical obedience, fellowship, simplicity, non-resistance, are part of our story related to order. Even so, we recognize that blind adherence to order can result in demonic use that is unjust coercive and oppressive.

True order is an expression of love. Love creates order within the family, among neighbors, and extends to the world. We believe that God intends order among and within nations of the world.

We affirm obedience to human law, including obedience to the law by government itself, when laws are justly drawn. We are a people whose inclination and commitment are to live with order in our society. Yet, we recognize that civil disobedience to law can be a form of ultimate obedience to God, a prophetic judgment a witness against unjust law, and can bring clarity to discipleship, giving priority to obedience to the Divine rather than to the human (Acts 5:29). For society, such disobedience is disorder that ultimately creates order.

The order which we cherish is now threatened by three major interrelated developments.

1. *Much of the energy that has driven this nation for more than 50 years has been a negative, obsessive anti-communism.* It has been a goblin in the media, a tarnish to the reputations of people, an inhibitor of honest public debate, a manipulator of votes and elections of public officials, a justification for the passions and crimes of war. So long as we derive our motivating forces and direction from such an obsession, such a negative, we act from forces that are ultimately self-destructive and disordering.

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER THAT IS ENERGIZED BY THE POSITIVES OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.**

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER THAT PROTECTS SELF-DETERMINATION IN FORMS OF GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY FOR THE NATIONS AND PEOPLES OF THE WORLD.**

2. The use of secret wars, covert actions, and violent intelligence operations has developed since World War II as national policy. Destabilization of governments, murder, assassination, and dealing with those involved in illicit drugs and other forms of organized crime have become government activities. Covert war is even more destructive to international order than overt war; it lacks public accountability, and its legacy is usually despotism. The history of covert actions that is known, in such places as Iran, Guatemala, Afghanistan, Albania, Cuba, Burma, Chile, Nicaragua and Angola, show these actions to be repugnant and self-defeating, morally and practically.

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER THAT IS INFORMED BY LEGAL AND ACCURATE SOURCES OF INFORMATION.**

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER THAT DOES NOT ENGAGE IN TERRORISM IN ANY FORM, INCLUDING TERRORISM DIRECTED BY GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES, SUCH AS THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.**

3. There is increasing evidence of contradiction between public law and public statement and actual government action. Military support of Nicaraguan Contras may be prohibited by law but secretly, ways are found to fund the war and arm the Contras. It may be loudly declared that we do not deal with terrorists, but even as the statement is made, attempted deals are in process. Arms control is declared as public policy, but arms superiority is pursued. High officials of government are known to work against the legislative mandate of their offices.

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER THAT EMBRACES FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICIES CONSISTENT WITH PUBLIC LAW AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS.**

**WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST SEEK AN ORDER IN WHICH THERE IS INTEGRITY AND REASON FOR PUBLIC TRUST IN OFFICIAL ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS.**

To move toward the order that we seek:

- We call upon our government to seek a new relationship to Central America with an end to Contra aid and an end to military intervention in Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. We support the Contadora and other regional peace settlement efforts.
- We call upon our government to seek a new interaction in Southern Africa with an end to apartheid in South Africa, an end to support of UNITA efforts to overthrow the government of Angola, and an end to the South African occupation of Namibia. We support government and business efforts to eliminate our participation in the apartheid system.
- We urge the support of our government for an international conference to assist in the pursuit of a Middle East peace between Israel, the Palestinians, and Arab neighbors. We support the legitimate interests of the Israelis and the Palestinians, with both having the opportunity to identify their own representatives.
- We call upon our government to use its good offices to work toward an end to the war between Iran and Iraq. It is time for an honest effort to end the carnage between these combatants.
- We plead for concrete steps to arms reductions with the Soviet Union, compliance with existing treaties such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and adherence to the limitations of the unratified Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II. We support programs of confidence building, such as cultural and informational exchanges.

- We call for the withdrawal of United States military bases in the Republic of the Philippines. We wish to give support to the efforts in the Philippine government to achieve new levels of justice and economic development in their nation.
- We petition our government for a change of priorities in our national budgeting, away from spending for war and toward spending for human services. We call for an end to nuclear weapons testing, an end to all expenditures related to the Strategic Defense Initiative, and an end to all chemical weapons research and production.
- We call upon our government to pay a fair monetary restitution to the Japanese-American families who were unjustly detained in relocation centers during World War II.
- We are concerned about the protection of refugees, affirming the immigration reforms achieved, but believing the implementation of the legislation needs to be monitored by concerned citizens and the Congress to achieve its intended result. Again, we call for the end to the deportation of Salvadoran refugees through the Statement on Communism and enactment of legislation such as the DeConcini-Moakley bill. We, members of the Church of the Brethren, assembled in Annual Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, June 30-July 5, 1987, declare it our purpose for our church and our nation to pursue order in ways listed above. We will especially endeavor to:
  - liberate ourselves from an obsessive anti-communism;
  - eliminate covert warfare in the foreign policy of our nation; and
  - demand integrity in the statements and actions of our government.

We believe the Creator calls us to greater order in our international relations. We pray, too, that in the future we shall experience a greater measure of order in our national life. Even to labor for greater order is an achievement for order.

We direct the officers of Annual Conference to communicate to the Administration and the Congress concerning this quest for order.

**Action of the General Board:** At its meeting on June 29, 1987, the General Board approved and recommended to Annual Conference the paper "A Quest for Order."

**Action of the 1987 Annual Conference:** Robert W. Dell, Standing Committee delegate from the District of Northern Ohio, presented the recommendation from the Standing Committee that Annual Conference adopt the resolution, A QUEST FOR ORDER. *The resolution was adopted by the delegate body with one amendment which has been incorporated in the preceding wording of the text.*

**Statement, 1991 Annual Conference "Creation: Called to Care"**

#### ***ABSTRACT***

Why should Christians care about the environment? Simply because we learn in Genesis that God has promised to fulfill all of creation, not just humanity, and has made humans the stewards of it. More importantly, God sent Christ into the very midst of creation to be "God with us" and to fulfill the promise to save humankind and nature. God's redemption makes the creation whole, the place where God's will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's promises are not mere pledges. They are covenants. And covenants are agreements between people and between people and God. The covenants with Noah and Abraham and the New Covenant mean that people of faith are responsible for their part in renewing and sustaining the creation.

This statement helps us to see the degradation of the earth as sin, our sin. We, the people who have accepted the redeeming love of God, have broken the covenant to care for creation. The challenge in the paper is to confess our sin, to take seriously our role as stewards of the earth, and to work for the renewal of creation.

The needs of the world are apparent. The call is clear. The most motivating aspect of this statement is the claim that stewardship of the creation is a matter of faith.

## **I. HUMAN DEGRADATION OF CREATION**

Planet earth is in danger. The ecological crisis that threatens the survival of life on earth is evident now not only to professional biologists, botanists, environmental scientists, but to all. Awareness grows that humanity is facing a global crisis.

The crisis is evident in the quality of air we breathe, in the food we eat, in the rivers where we can no longer fish or swim, in the waste dumps leaking their toxins into our water supplies, in news reports about oil spills and acid rain and holes in our protective ozone layer. The tragic disasters of Bhopal, Chernobyl, the Rhine, Love Canal, Three Mile Island, and Times beach are part and parcel of the contamination that is progressing at a steady, daily rate.

We read staggering statistics: Agricultural practices in North America today destroy topsoil at the rate of six billion tons per year. In the United States alone, we dump 80 billion pounds of toxic wastes into our waters annually. Twenty-two acres of tropical rain forest are demolished each minute, an area the size of a football field every second of every day. A million species of plants and animals will be extinct by the turn of the century. Dr. Musafa Tolba, director general of the United Nations Environment Program, says that the destruction of genetic material and environment has reached such a pitch that “we face, by the turn of the century, an environmental catastrophe as complete, as irreversible as any nuclear holocaust.” These figures, combined with what we experience daily, are both mind boggling and numbing.

Moreover, humanity possesses the power to destroy creation. Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* correctly identifies this as an ecological peril: “The nuclear peril is usually seen in isolation from the threats to other forms of life and their ecosystems, but in fact it should be seen as the very center of the ecological crisis.” It is also a spiritual peril. Disarmament and the fate of the planet are interlinked.

Humanity now possesses the power to create and manufacture new forms of life. Humanity’s ability to alter the basic design of living things and bring into being totally new forms of life marks a watershed in our relationship to God’s creation. Society’s understanding of nature and reality are being transformed by the ability to create and market life itself. In our contemporary technological ability to destroy and create life, humanity strives, in belief and in practice, to replace God as Creator and Sustainer of all.

Beyond humanity’s power of life and death over creation, the global environment continues to deteriorate in large part because the lifestyle of an affluent minority puts tremendous drains on its resources. The prevailing model of economic development assumes that the resources of the earth are valuable only insofar as they may be exploited, that humanity is free to conquer the earth, and that the resultant riches prosper the conquerors. Scarcity of global resources and threats to the earth’s life-supporting capacity stem from this distortion in humanity’s relationship to creation.

## **II. OUR THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Tragically, the churches have been slow to bring forward life affirming understandings of the earth and its ecology. There is no comprehensive treatment of what spiritual resources might be brought



to bear in response to the environmental problems caused by industry, urbanization, nuclear power, and the application of technology on a huge scale. Spiritual resources of any nation are basic for a healthy life in the present and a future with integrity. Does the Christian faith have resources to shape and to redeem humanity's relationship with creation? What theological questions need to be looked at? What biblical texts lie untapped and unexplored?

**A. The Genesis Creation Story:** The most obvious biblical texts are the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The doctrine of creation as recorded in Genesis includes three affirmations about the universe and the human race: 1. The universe did not initially bring itself into being but God brought it into being and God continues to sustain it. 2. Humankind through sin and disobedience has violated and devastated the world in which God has created human, animal, and inanimate life on earth. 3. Human beings were created for mutually sustaining relationships with one another, with the creation, and with God.

In Genesis, the account of God's relationship with creation, and humanity's role, begins with the creation and continues on through the ninth chapter, with the story of Noah and the flood. The Genesis stories are a rich source of what we might call spiritual ecology. Humankind is made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). Genesis 1:26-28 speaks of humanity having dominion over creation. Genesis 2 stresses tilling the earth and replenishing it. The story of the fall in Genesis 3 describes the disastrous effects of human sin. Following Adam's sin, the ground was cursed (Gen. 3:17), and after Cain's murder of Abel, Cain in "cursed from the ground," which no longer is fruitful. Cain is consigned to wander ruthlessly in the land of Nod. But the story does not stop there. In Genesis 5:29, when Noah is born, God promises relief from the hard labor resulting from God's curse upon the ground. And this promise is fulfilled after the flood. The Lord declares, "Never again will I curse the ground because of humankind...While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8:21-22).

The central point of Noah's story and the ark, however, is the covenant established by God with "living things of every kind" Here, for the first time, the word covenant is explicitly used and addressed to humankind. However, God's covenant is established not just with people; it is a covenant with all creation. Five times in Genesis 8 and 9; the scope of God's covenant is repeated a covenant between God and every living creature, with "all living things on earth of every kind." God's faithful love extends to and includes all that has been made. The rainbow is the sign of this promise.

The Genesis story of creation is completed as it began: with the assurance of God's faithful and saving relationship to the world. The rainbow reminds us that creation is not merely the stage for the drama between God and humankind, that the promises given by God are directed not only to humanity, but to the creation that upholds all life as well.

**B. The "Wisdom Literature" and Creation:** The wisdom literature is particularly rich in the theology of creation. In general, wisdom literature focuses on creation, including human experience, in an open search for God's truth. It then seeks to order life according to the truth that is discovered. In this way, the guiding, nurturing presence of God is revealed.

Proverbs 3:19-20 states:

*The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding  
God established the  
heavens; by God's knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the  
clouds drop down  
the dew.*

Such passages see God's wisdom as both the source of creation and as reflected in power and beauty throughout creation.

The most powerful portrayal of God's relationship to creation within the wisdom literature, and perhaps in all the Bible, is found at the end of the book of Job, in chapters 38 through 42. God's answer to Job comes as a series of questions poetically stressing God's presence in all creation. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding... Have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place... Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this... From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven" (Job 38:4,12,18,29). Job responds, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4). Contrary to attitudes of humanity's dominance over the earth this vision disarms human arrogance and self-sufficiency, and calls for a stance of humble awe and wonder towards the divinely ordered ecology of the created world.

**C. The Brethren Understanding of Creation** has been less doctrinal than confessional, affirming our total dependence upon God the Creator. The Scriptures speak quite plainly: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). God's power is not limited. God creates solely by the might of God's Word original, dynamic, gracious, all-powerful. The same word of God active in creation is active also in redemption (John 1:1-3). The very God who created all things is also the maker of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1a). So the fitting response of all creatures, Brethren believe, is obedient gratitude for the gift of life, yes, of new life in Christ through the Spirit (Brethren Encyclopedia, Vol.I, p.351).

Early Anabaptist theology did not separate God's purpose for humanity from God's purpose for the rest of creation. Brethren accepted the Genesis creation story that the human creature was placed in the garden after all the necessary elements of human survival had been produced the ecosphere of air, water, warmth, nurture, sustenance, etc. Thus God's purpose to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity must include creation. Because of the absolute dependence of humankind on environment and vice versa (humankind is part of the environment), a plan of shalom for humanity excluding nature would be unthinkable. The fall included an alienation of humanity and nature from God, and could only be reconciled with the redemption of both. When creation is redeemed, it will happen simultaneously with the total redemption of humanity and nature (Rom. 8).

The biblical text that most strongly molds our understanding of creation is the prologue to the Gospel of John. This text declares that God's act of creation and the incarnation in Christ are inseparable. The Word (logos) is the means of the world's creation. And the Word, present with God, goes forth from God in the incarnation and returns to God. "No single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life" (John 1:3-4).

This passage, and others as well, emphasizes the intimacy of relationship between the Creator, creation, and God's redemptive love for all creation in the incarnation of Jesus. The purpose, destiny, and fulfillment of humanity and creation are to be found in its relationship to the Creator, who came upon this earth not as a domineering master, but as a servant and friend.

**D. Land:** In the people of Israel's experience with the land, we find a model of the promise and peril in humanity's relationship to creation.

The Hebrew Scriptures are a record of the relationship between Israel, creation, and Yahweh. Relationship to creation focuses around the land. Hebrew Scripture scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann goes so far as to say, "The Bible itself is primarily concerned with the issue of being displaced and yearning for a place...land is a central, if not the central theme of biblical faith" (The

Land).

God as creator is considered in the biblical tradition to be the sole owner of the earth. At the heart of creation faith is the understanding that “the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23). “The earth is the lord’s” (Psa. 24:1). Yet while no individual Israelite was to imagine that they possessed any land in their own right, God gave the land to Israel as a whole (Deuteronomy 1:8). Certain families within Israel used the land allotted to them (Joshua 13 ff.) but only on condition that all members of the tribe or family might share in the income derived from the land. Any monopolizing of land was, therefore, a serious failure in worship

Continually, the prophets warned that the land has seductive power. The temptation is to cling to it, possess it, manage it, rule over it, and own it to treat it as though it were one’s own domain rather than to cherish it and as stewards hold it in trust as Yahweh’s gift. The gift of land to the people of Israel was conditional upon living within that land as if it were Yahweh’s and they were Yahweh’s people. But because they forgot this, choosing instead to possess the land as if it were their own, they lost it. That is the judgement announced by Jeremiah.

Israel’s relationship to the land can symbolize humanity’s relationship to creation. Saving that creation and our place within it can come only by treating it as God’s gift rather than our possession. We need to confess that Western Christianity has been extremely weak in proclaiming a gospel of a humble and nurturing love for creation. Part of the reason may be that we have strayed far from this conviction of divine ownership of the land, of equal sharing of all families in the use of it.

Biblical creation ethics is essentially sabbath ethics, for the sabbath is the law of creation. According to Exodus 23:10-11, in the seventh year Israel is to leave the land untouched, “that the poor of your people may eat.” In Leviticus 25:1-7, the law of the sabbatical year is repeated, so that “the land may celebrate its great sabbath to the lord,” The sabbath rest for the land every seven years contains God’s blessing for the land. Moreover, the sabbath rest is a piece of deep ecological wisdom and sharply contrasts with the destructive practices of much of modern industrialized agriculture.

Biblical passages frequently suggest that humanity’s rebellion against God results in the land itself suffering, mourning, and becoming unfaithful. Our modern culture has all but lost this vision of the land. Jeremiah 2:7 refers to the unfaithfulness and sins of humanity expressed in the destruction of the environment. It says, “I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in you defiled my land...” That’s exactly what we have done.

Contrasted with the wondrous pictures of creation’s intended harmony and wholeness given in the Scriptures, environmental ruin is a direct offense against God the Creator. Indeed biblical insight names human sin as the cause of our deteriorating environment. Selfish lives alienated from God’s purposes and love quite literally cause the land to mourn and the whole creation to be in travail. “How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?” asks Jeremiah (12:4). The biblical answer carries promise for the renewal of the created order, continually springing fresh from the resources of God’s grace. Just as God responds to human sin and rebellion with the invitation to new life, the response to the degradation of the earth is the concrete hope for restoring “shalom” and, in the words of the Psalm, the renewing of the face of the earth (104:30)

Though Brethren theological understandings have not referred explicitly to the preservation of the earth, Brethren practice has tended in that direction. A community of believers who would live in harmony must seek a redemptive relationship with their environment. By nurturing the earth, the Brethren achieved prosperity that set a trend for Brethren for generations. Doing the Creator’s will in a faithful community requires a recognition that the created world in which humans move

and have their being is not irrelevant but is the very context in which faithfulness to God is expressed.

**E. The Renewal of Creation:** Given that God has established a covenant with all creation; that God, humanity, and creation are bound together in an interdependent relationship; and that creation is an expression of God and its destiny lies in relationship to God, it follows that God's work of redemption through Christ extends to the creation.

Sin breaks the intended fellowship and harmonious relationship between God, humanity, and creation. The reign of sin and death alienates God from humanity and creation and propels the earth toward self-destruction. But in Christ the power of sin and death is confronted and overcome, and creation is reconciled to God. In and through the incarnation of the divine word, humanity and the whole creation are enabled to taste "new life." For through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, God has inaugurated the renewal of this broken world. In his own person, Jesus Christ exemplifies the glorious destiny of a transfigured creation.

The parables and teachings of Jesus are filled with examples drawn from the realm of nature. Vineyards, soil, fruit, seeds, and grain are the frequent examples used by Jesus to explain God's truth. And the Sermon on the Mount includes a direct, but often overlooked, teaching regarding our relationship to creation. "Blessed are the meek," Jesus said, "for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

God's love for the world, for the whole cosmos, is the resounding biblical theme and the reason for God's embrace of the world in Jesus Christ. Paul's writing in Romans underscores these truths. Paul's letter explains to us the relationship between God's work of redemption in our own lives and in all creation. The final victory has been won by Christ. We belong to God. And the whole world belongs to God. We have become new, claimed by the power of God's spirit. Likewise, creation has entered into this renewal. The power of sin in its midst, which has wrought destruction, is not the final word. Rather, the goodness of creation and God's stewardship of the creation are its final destiny.

**F. The Worth of Creation in and of Itself:** To say that creation, the natural order, has worth in and of itself means that nature's value exists independently of humankind. It has a right to exist unconnected to human interest.

Before the European Renaissance and the European conquest of America, Africa and Asia, land, water, forest, and air were regarded as God's property, left to human beings for common use. It was the Renaissance that deprived nature of its rights and declared it to be "property without an owner," property that belonged to the one who took possession of it by occupation. Today, only the air is available for common use. If we would live with integrity in the community of creation then before all else the rights of the earth as a system and the rights of all species of animals and plants must be recognized by human beings. We need to codify the "rights of the earth and of all life" parallel to the 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Creation is good in and of itself as God's intention and work. This applies to all the beings, animate and inanimate, made by God. The world of sea and forest, desert and field with myriad creatures became, after all, the very ground of the incarnation of the Word. The created order is dependent on God in its own way and finds its meaning and purpose in God. Human action that tends to disrupt or destroy a part of the created order is, therefore, interfering with God's plan. This understanding does not amount to a worship of nature but a recognition of the transcendent power and sovereignty of God. The protection of the created order is, therefore, required of all human beings, for they alone have the power to impose their will on other created orders.

**G. Justice:** The vision of redeemed creation is that of a harmonious, abundant, and secure life together. Biblically speaking, justice is that which makes for wholeness in nature, in persons, and in society. This concept of justice does not originate with the great prophets of the sixth and eighth centuries B.C.; it stems from an ancient understanding of creation as harmonious world order. When the Hebrew confession says again and again that Yahweh is “just,” it means that God fashions order from chaos, holds back the chaos, and balances things anew when chaos intrudes. Justice is the achievement of harmony.

Hebrew understanding of justice is all-inclusive. It does not refer only to human relationships and human events. It applies to all nature human and non-human. Its many-sidedness may refer one time to human events and another time to events we assign to nature (e.g., the flood). Such an understanding of justice is more all-embracing than the one in the Anglo-American moral tradition that defines justice narrowly to include liberty and equality and is human-centered. Moreover, the many dimensions of the Hebrew view forbid using a single word to bear the full notion of justice. Therefore, words like righteousness, loving-kindness, faithfulness, completeness, integrity, order, instruction, peace, wholeness, equity, and “justice” are used to represent what is meant by justice. Nonetheless, for persons of faith justice is the right and harmonious ordering of life in all its dimensions under the sovereignty of God.

### III. LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP TO CREATION

The biblical vision of God’s intention for humankind living in harmonious relationship with creation (e.g., Gen. 1-3; Psa. 104; Rom. 8) is available to the church, though we have often neglected such relationship with creation.

The creation story in Genesis says that humanity is created to live in harmony with creation. The Bible knows nothing of a right relationship with God the Creator that does not include a right relationship with the creation: with land and mountains, oceans and skies, sun and moon, plants and animals, wind and rain. Our vocation is to walk with God in gently tending God’s wonderful, strong, fragile, and enduring creation. The meaning of our existence is found in this vocation.

We are called to be stewards and partners in God’s continuing creation. Christian ecology or Christian stewardship is rooted in the Scriptures and flows from caring for all creation. Christian stewardship is doing the Creator’s will in caring for the earth and striving to preserve and restore the integrity, stability, and beauty of the created order a response in God’s Image and service to Creation’s eager expectation of redemption. Christian stewardship is living with respect for the earth so that creation is preserved, brokenness is repaired, and harmony is restored. Christian stewardship seeks the Creator’s reign a reign redeemed of human arrogance, ignorance, and greed.

Creation gives God glory and honor. The gift of environment came forth from God’s creative word and is a testimony to God’s wonder and love. Christians have no less a calling than to participate in the preservation and renewal of this precious gift. With the words of Revelation, we can then proclaim in word and deed,

*Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created. (Rev. 4:11)*

### IV. ROOTS OF THE CURRENT CRISIS

At the heart of the crisis lies the world view of Western culture. With the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution, Western culture came to assume that humanity had both the right and duty to

dominate nature. The view of life became secularized; we came to understand the world apart from any relational reference to God. The purpose of objective, scientific knowledge was to exercise power over creation, which became “nature” raw material existing only for exploitation.

Science and technology placed an immense range of power in human hands. Modern means of production are the basis for today’s economy and provide possibilities that have never existed before. Abuse of technology is largely responsible for the increasing exploitation and destruction of the environment. Technology has brought many blessings but has also developed into a threat to the human future (for example, Three Mile Island). It has created complex systems in which even small human errors can be disastrous.

The roots of the crisis, however, are to be sought in the very hearts of humankind. We harbor the illusion that we human beings are capable of shaping the world. Such pride leads to an overestimation of our human role with respect to the whole of life, to the support of constant economic growth without reference to ethical values, to the conviction that the created world has been put into our hands for exploitation rather than for care and cultivation, to a blind faith that new discoveries will solve problems as they arise, and to the subsequent neglect of the risks brought about by our own making.

We need the resources of science and technology as we face the future. But if we are to serve the cause of justice, peace, and the preservation of the environment, we must radically re-evaluate the expectations that science and technology have generated. As Christians we cannot uncritically advocate any view of human progress which does not promote human wholeness. Therefore, we must not share unqualified confidence in human achievement. We must also resist the growing tendency toward feelings of powerlessness, resignation, and despair. Christian hope is a movement of resistance against fatalism. It is through conversion to Christ, who came that we might live abundantly, that the full meaning of human life is revealed.

## **V. CONFESSION OF SIN**

Faced with a threatened future of humanity, we confess the truth of the gospel. Listening to the word of God, we believe that the future will become open to us as we turn to Jesus Christ and accept our responsibility to live in Christ and in God’s image. Believing that the crisis in which we find ourselves ultimately has its roots in the fact that we have abandoned God’s ways, we proclaim that God opens the future to those who turn to God.

We confess that we do not possess God’s final truth. We have failed in many ways, we have often not lived up to God’s calling, and have failed to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ. Our witness has often been unclear for we have disregarded the prophetic voices who warned us against impending dangers and have been blind to the gospel’s claim upon us in respect to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We need a new beginning.

We confess our failure both as a church and as individual members of Christ. We have failed to witness to the dignity and sanctity of all life and to God’s care for all its creation.

We have failed to develop a lifestyle that expresses our self-understanding as participants, stewards, and servants of God’s creation. We have failed to consistently challenge political and economic systems that misuse power and wealth, that exploit resources for their self-interest, and that perpetuate poverty. We pray for God’s forgiveness and commit ourselves to seek ways:

- out of the divisions between humanity and the rest of creation,
- out of the abuses of the dominance of human beings over nature,
- out of a lifestyle and ways of production that violate nature,
- out of an individualism that violates the integrity of creation for the sake of

pursuing private interests,  
- into a community of human beings with all creatures where the rights and  
integrity of all is nurtured.

## **VI. A CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF FAITH**

We believe that:

1. God, Creator of heaven and earth and all earth's creatures, looks lovingly upon all the works of creation and pronounces them good.
2. God, our Deliverer, acts to protect, restore and redeem the earth and all its creatures from sinful human pride and greed that seeks unwarranted mastery over the natural and social orders.
3. God in Jesus Christ reunites all things and calls humans back from sinful human sloth and carelessness to the role of the steward, the responsible servant, who as God's representative cares for creation, for all life, both animate and inanimate.
4. God our Creator-Deliverer acts in the ecological-social crisis of our time, demonstrating today the same divine love shown on the cross of Christ. As a covenant people, we are called to increase our stewardship, in relation both to nature and to the political economy, to a level in keeping with the peril and promise with which God confronts us in this crisis.
5. All creation belongs to God (Psa. 24). God, not humanity, is the source, the center the depth and height of all creation. The whole creation is ordered to the glory of God (Rev. 1:8). Human beings, both individually and collectively, have no right to systematically abuse or dispose of nature for their own ends.
6. Even amid human violation and devastation, God is at work renewing creation. One important way is through humans who join God in reconciling and restoring the earth to its new creation.
7. Human dominion in God's image is not mastery, control, and possession, but a stewardship of love for and service of this world in God's name. Such stewardship respects the integrity of natural Systems and lives within the limits that nature places on economic growth and material consumption.

## **VII. THE CHURCH'S CHALLENGE**

As we face the threats to survival, we realize that we are entering a new period of history. Humanity has itself created the capacity to destroy all life. The end of creation and of human life is now a possibility. How can the churches proclaim the gospel in this situation? How are we to speak of God's grace and forgiveness? Can we point to possible new departures? What is Christian hope in the face of the temptation simply to survive?

The church is that part of creation that has received and covenanted itself to embody God's redemption in Christ. As Paul writes in Romans, the whole created universe yearns with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. As the body of Christ we are to live out a new and restored relationship to the creation which itself has been won back to God by Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. The church therefore is to live as a visible sign of a restored relationship among humanity, the creation, and God.

Our situation raises new issues that need urgent and open discussion, for example:

- How do we understand mission? In what sense does the response to the threats to survival belong to the frontiers of mission today?

- What does it mean to live in faith and hope as we face the threat to survival?
- How do we understand the coming of God's reign? How do we understand the relation between hope for this world and hope for God's reign? How do we interpret the present period of history? What significance do we attribute to the apocalyptic parts of the New Testament? Does Christian faith, from its biblical and doctrinal resources, bring any wisdom to bear on the many sided environmental crisis of our time?
- Does Christian faith have something to contribute to the mending of our world?
- How, can we, as scientists and persons of faith together, address ourselves to the task of integrating our knowledge of the world with our faith in God?
- In what way can the church be a sign of hope in this time of crisis?

As we enter the post Cold War era and struggle to address this new environmental agenda, the church needs to be aware of conflicts which are perhaps deeper and harder to resolve than the Cold War itself. Europe, United States, and the USSR who promoted industrial development in the Third World are now seeking to curb further growth in order to protect their own self-interests. All too often the First World has not given adequate consideration to the impact their policies have on the quality of life of Third World people.

There is little likelihood of resolving this new conflict, where the "haves" remain the haves and the "have-nots" become the "never-shall-haves," unless the northern industrialized countries, particularly the consumer societies of the West, change their lifestyle. The average family in the United States affects the environment 40 times more than a family in India and a hundred times more than a Kenyan family. On a per capita basis, the United States uses 45 times more energy than India.

At the end of World War II there were about 2.4 billion people in the world. Now there are 5.3 billion. If the current rates of growth continue, nearly a billion more people will be sharing the planet by the year 2000. There are already many places where human concentrations have overwhelmed the present ability of the environment to support them at a quality of life that is humane and acceptable. The breakdown is evident in many developing countries but by environmental standards, wealthier countries are at least as guilty of overburdening the environment because they consume more resources per capita and rely on more disruptive technologies. Certainly attention to population growth is necessary to maintain life on planet Earth.

At this more profound level of conflict the enemy is not external; it is us. In the crime of ecological destruction we are both criminal and victim. More precisely, since industrialism's ravenous appetite daily diminishes the health and life of the ecosystem, the conflict is between us and our children: our lifestyle versus their future.

The environment does not depend upon us. It is clearly the other way around. The question is whether we humans have the will to respect and maintain the environment so that our kind may continue to inhabit the earth. The question is still open. It could be that we humans do not have a future.

Today, our Western culture is being undermined by an emphasis on exploitation, comfort, and convenience. It seems difficult for persons to consider that their small actions affect the environment and the ultimate success or demise of humanity. Our attitude seems to be, if it's comfortable, if it's convenient, if it's profitable, do it. Can a culture repent and take steps to halt its deterioration? There are some signs of hope but there are also signs that the lesson is not yet learned; that comfort and convenience are more important than care of the environment. The



environment will no doubt survive. The question is “will our kind remain?”

As Christians, we can reform our theology and contribute to society a new appreciation for the sacredness of all creation. Individually and collectively, we can change the way we live so that instead of destroying the earth, we help it to thrive, today and for future generations to come. As a church, are we ready to commit ourselves to this challenge?

### **VIII. A CALL TO ACTION FOR KEEPING AND HEALING THE CREATION**

The Creator-Redeemer seeks the renewal of the creation and calls the people of God to participate in saving acts of renewal. We are called to cooperate with God in the transformation of a world that has not fulfilled its divinely given potential or beauty, peace, health, harmony, justice, and joy (Isa. 11:6-9, Mic. 4:3-4, Eph. 2:10, Rev. 21:1-5). Our task is nothing less than to join God in preserving, renewing and fulfilling the creation. It is to relate to nature in ways that sustain life on the planet, provide for the essential material and physical needs of all humankind, and increase justice and well-being for all life in a peaceful world.

Therefore, the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

#### **Invites ALL MEMBERS of The Church of The Brethren to:**

1. Affirm the goodness and beauty of God’s creation.
2. Acknowledge our special responsibility for stewardship of the Creator’s good earth.
3. Learn of the environmental damages facing the planet.
4. Recognize that our practices and styles of life have had an effect on the environment.
5. Pursue a lifestyle that is wise and responsible in light of our understanding of the problems.
6. Exert our influence in shaping public policy and insisting that industries, businesses, farmers, and consumers relate to the environment in ways that are sensible, healthy, and protective of its integrity.
7. Become involved in organizations and actions to protect and restore the environment and the people in our communities.

#### **Invites ALL CONGREGATIONS to:**

1. Express solidarity with both nature and humankind in worship services, educational programs, community outreach, and social action.
2. Study and reflect on the Annual Conference and the General Hoard statements and resolutions (see Appendix) and, where possible, convene study groups on current environmental/ecological issues.

#### **Invites ALL CONGREGATIONS AND DISTRICTS to:**

1. Become ecologically sensitive in the conduct of their programs and to bring all under the control of a caring stewardship.
2. Pursue courses of action that promote environmental protection and social justice.
3. Investigate the adequacy of environmental policy and protection at the state and local levels of government

4. Encourage environmental awareness programs in Brethren camps that do not have such programs.

**The GENERAL BOARD commits itself to:**

1. Promoting an attitude affirming that all nature has intrinsic value and that all life is to be honored and revered.
2. Incorporating in the Goals for the '90s the enlistment of all parts of the Church of the Brethren in study and action to the end that the issues of justice, peace, integrity of creation, and the interrelationships between them, are addressed in a comprehensive manner.

**And instructs its staff to do the following:**

1. The treasurer: to encourage policies and to develop guidelines for church agencies and churches that will consider the by-products of the corporations in which they invest and that will help monitor their existing investments as to corporate responsibility.
2. The Washington Office: to include in its agenda for church attention and legislative action, national environmental policy on air, water, land, and use of natural resources
3. Related staff: to find ways to raise awareness of congregations and members of the denomination to the seriousness of environmental issues and to develop statements and resolutions on specific topics relating to ecology and environment.
4. Brethren Volunteer Service: to list environmental programs as a separate category in the project booklet.

Further, the General Board calls upon local and state governments to enhance and expand constructive action for the caring of environment that would lead to a higher quality of life for all citizens. It also calls upon the Federal government to:

1. Consider the quality of life to be the high priority in the formulation of energy policies in the United States, looking for safer methods with present technologies and encouraging new technologies, alternative sources of energy, and the use of renewable resources.
2. Extend and expand the Superfund and expedite clean-up of contaminated sites, especially those sites threatening our water supplies.
3. Continue to act on acid rain abatement.
4. Give significant attention to the problem of the global warming trend (greenhouse effect) and the protection of the ozone layer both nationally and in international for a.
5. Consider the long range environmental effect of present policies, so that our earth is preserved for future generations,
6. Provide generous support to the United Nations Environmental Program.

**Appendix**

1. 1971 Annual Conference paper on Ecology
2. 1973 General Board resolution on Strip Mining
3. 1973 General Board resolution on Energy Crisis

4. 1974 Annual Conference statement on the Church and Farm Issues
5. 1975 General Board resolution on Concern on the Use of Energy and Resources
6. 1976 General Board resolution on Law of the Sea
7. 1977 Annual Conference paper on Justice and Non-violence
8. 1980 Annual Conference paper on Christian Lifestyle
9. 1985 Annual Conference paper on Christian Stewardship: Responsible Freedom
10. 1987 Annual Conference paper on Guidance in Relation to Genetic Engineering

S. Joan Hershey, Chair  
Donald E. Miller, General Secretary

**Action of the 1991 Annual Conference:** The resolution from the General Board on CREATION: CALLED TO CARE was presented by S. Joan Hershey, chair, and Shantilal Bhagat, staff. The report was adopted with two (2) amendments by the delegate body, both of which have been incorporated in the wording of the preceding text.

Statement, 1996 Annual Conference: **Simple Life**

Because there is a need to revive and remember the Brethren heritage of nonconformity, plainness, and simple lifestyles as an alternative to the hurried excesses of modern life, and to educate ourselves, our children, and our new congregation in this basic tradition of our faith and stewardship....

Because cultural pressures against simple living are different for every generation, and the contemporary age of competition, media proliferation, and rapid technological change presents unique challenges to Christian simplicity....

Because Brethren can benefit from learning ways to practice corporate simplicity in the congregation, the district, and the denomination....

Because the discrepancy between the standard of living of many in the United States and that of many nations is so great....

Because to know what is simple is often complex, Brethren need counseling and guidance from the church to avoid the pitfalls of simplistic answers and legalism. We need education on matters such as overconsumption and sharing our wealth, as well as protecting our natural resources....

We, First Church of the Brethren, Springfield, Illinois, convened in congregational business meeting April 18, 1993, petition the Annual Conference through the District of Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference, to name a committee to study ways to reemphasize the Brethren tradition of the simple life and to discern its full meaning for our time.

**Approved and passed to the Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference** by First Church of the Brethren Council Meeting, Springfield, Illinois, April 18, 1993.

James Morgan, Board Chair  
Tavia Ervin, Recording Secretary

**Action of the Illinois and Wisconsin District Board:** The District Board meeting September 25, 1993 at

Virden, Illinois, recommended that this query be adopted and passed on to the District Conference.

Richard Koch, Clair  
Kenneth O. Holderread, Secretary

**Action of the Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference:** Passed on to the Annual Conference by the Illinois and Wisconsin District Conference: The District Conference on November 5-7, 1993 held at York Center Church, Lombard, Illinois.

Judd Peter, Moderator  
Christopher Bowman, Writing Clerk

**Action of the 1994 Annual Conference:** Emerson Fike, a Standing Committee member from the Shenandoah District, presented the recommendation from Standing Committee that the query be adopted with the goal to enable the Brethren in our time to discuss and encounter the Brethren testimony concerning the Simple Life.

Standing Committee suggests that a committee be formed and that Bethany Theological Seminary be asked to appoint a person with a seminary faculty appointment appropriate to this program to chair the committee. Standing Committee also asks that Annual Conference elect two additional members.

Standing Committee outlines its process expectations for the committee:

1. As the committee plans its work, they will call on the needed resources not represented on the committee, e.g. the General Board staff.
2. Any necessary support services and expenses will be discussed with and authorized by the officers of the Annual Conference, through the Annual Conference manager.
3. By Annual Conference 1995, the committee will provide an Initial report proposing program objectives, process and budget.
4. By the 1996 Annual Conference, the committee will report on the progress of the program at which time Standing Committee will recommend future direction for the program. (Among the options: The program could be continued under the direction of this committee, handed over to a program agency of the church, discontinued, etc.)

*The delegate body adopted the recommendation of Standing Committee.* It then elected Fletcher "Bud" Farrar, Jr., and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm to serve on the committee with the Bethany Theological Seminary faculty appointment.

### **1996 Report**

Jesus Christ gathers us as a community blessed with faith, with love for God and each other, and with hope in the coming reign of Christ which reorders our lives now. Simplicity is the Way of Jesus, God's gift to us. The New Testament and the Holy Spirit's guidance have led the Brethren to practice this plain way. We affirm our heritage that began with people like Anna and Alexander Mack, who gave their lives and wealth for God's service until they died in material poverty and spiritual riches. Simplicity is living not conformed to the world, but transformed by Christ. Neither rules nor programs, neither simplistic answers nor legalism can fully define the simple life. Jesus's way of simplicity is at the heart of the gospel. It is central to our faith and practice, not optional. To make it less than central is sinful. Simple living is sometimes difficult. But to those who embark on this humble journey God provides joy and peace.

The context in which we presently respond to the simple life is one in which most of the world lives on far less than we in North America consume. Since the last conference statement on Christian lifestyle, the gap between rich and poor in the world, in the United States, and among Brethren has widened. Many more people live in

poverty. The number of children in poverty has grown. Lifestyles dominated by consumerism despoil the earth and deplete resources that could be shared with the poor. Such lifestyles separate us from the grace and humility of our lord Jesus Christ, who emptied himself for our sakes to give us another way of living.

### **The Way of Jesus is one of devotion to God.**

Our love for God and neighbors is a treasure above all other wealth and possessions.

Single-hearted devotion to God draws us to cultivate spiritual disciplines that render us receptive to the Spirit: Bible reading and study, prayer and meditation, worship in the gathered community, service to others. Through these we can listen for and act on God's leading, rather than bowing to serve the world which fragments us.

Devotion to God makes us aware that the earth and the fullness thereof belong to God. They are not ours to possess. Grateful thanksgiving to God abounds as we care for the earth and share its resources with those in need.

### **The Way of Jesus is one of integrating inward faith and outward expressions of daily living.**

Integration honors time as God's gift and remembers the Way of Jesus: patient, forbearing, unhurried.

Integration joins our words with the living Word of God so that our yes becomes yes and our no becomes no.

Integration of faith and living shows reverence for our bodies given to serve God, free from toxins, indulgences, and overwork. Our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit, not idols to gratify.

Integration guides us to compassion for those living in poverty.

Integrating faith and living keeps us from closing our hearts and hands against sisters and brothers in need when we have plenty. We will repent as thoroughly as Zacchaeus, who gave half his wealth to the poor and restored fourfold to those he had cheated. We will share as generously as Lydia and Barnabas. As Michael Frantz, colonial elder of the Conestoga congregation wrote, "As long as there is abundance and want, there is no pure genuine communion, for communion equalizes everything with the measure of love and the balance of love."

Integrated lives will witness to peace rather than the false priorities of our culture which value military might.

### **The Way of Jesus is one of community.**

We cannot live the simple life alone. We need the faith community to counsel and disciple us in the habits of simplicity. We need to uphold each other in this Way.

We need a faith community that models Jesus' way by surrendering its own power, prestige, and possessions. Buildings and budgets, pensions and programs can obscure our vision and hinder our prayer. We, the church, can stand for Jesus only when we stand apart from the values of the world. Our sisters and brothers in poor countries can teach us much about joyous living in simplicity.

God redeems us to live in community with the created earth. We will care for God's earth in ways that are sustainable.

The community of faith will discuss and discern specific ways to simplify, without resorting to one final description of simplicity to enforce. We will not shrink from acting in renewed ways that may seem difficult. May God renew us as thoroughly as the widow who, with the two coins she offered at the temple, gave all her living to God.

We repent of poor stewardship, of trusting wealth and possessions for security, of abandoning Christ's way of living. We confess these sins and confess our faith in the gracious Way of Jesus.

With Christ at the center, the Bible at one hand, and the witness of the community at the other, we face temptation with faith and courage. When tempted to accumulate wealth, we will hear the voice of Jesus proclaiming, "Seek

ye first the Kingdom.” When tempted to hurry and be busy, we will hear our spirit forebears calling, Seek ye first the Kingdom.” When we covet power, prestige, and possessions, we will join our sisters and brothers in the church singing, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.”

Jeffrey A. Bach, Chair  
Fletcher Farrar, Jr.  
Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm

Committee’s expenses related to travel, lodging, and meals from December, 1994 to March, 1996.....\$1,003  
Estimated additional expenses.....\$250

**Action of the 1996 Annual Conference:** The report of the Annual Conference Study Committee on the Simple Life was presented by Jeffrey A. Bach, chair, with other members of the committee present. The delegate body adopted the Simple Life Statement without amendment.

## GENERAL BOARD RESOLUTIONS

Church of the Brethren General Board

Resolution on Global Warming and Atmospheric Degradation (1991)

**WHEREAS** our vastly increased use of fossil fuels is substantially increasing the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases, thereby enhancing the strong possibility of catastrophic warming of the earth’s surface, and

**WHEREAS** the negative consequences of the greenhouse effect are likely to intensify human suffering especially in the developing countries, and

**WHEREAS** the Annual Conference statement “Creation: Called to Care” challenges us to take seriously our role as stewards of the earth, and to work for the renewal of creation, and

**WHEREAS** the General Board is committed to study and action on issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Church of the Brethren General Board, meeting in Elgin, Illinois on October 19-22, 1991 commits itself and urges Brethren congregations, institutions and members to:

*Reaffirm our belief*

· That we are called by God to live in harmony with all of creation, and that our covenantal relationship to care for the creation requires us to be aware of present and impending threats to our environment and to take action to preserve the integrity of creation.

*Join together*

- In the search for ways to live together in harmony with God’s creation;
- In addressing the causes and dealing with the consequences of atmospheric destruction locally and globally; and
- In praying for the strength to reduce consumption and reject the myths of unlimited resources and economic growth.

*Work together through global, local, and personal efforts to safeguard the world’s reliance on fossil fuels, and by*

- Increasing awareness of the negative ecological consequences of continuing reliance on fossil fuels, and by expanding ongoing educational efforts that lead to action;
- Encouraging the building and renovating of our homes and church facilities and camp buildings to be energy efficient and initiating new programs of energy conservation and awareness, including alternatives to fossil fuels;
- Striving to eliminate the use of products that contain ozone-depleting Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs);
- Using public transportation, carpooling, and telephone conferencing in order to reduce fossil fuel consumption;
- Becoming ecologically aware consumers by using diets and products that consume less energy in production, transportation, packaging, and use;
- Devoting maximum effort to the separation and recycling of household goods, while also reducing waste and toxic materials;
- Encouraging office energy audits and recycling programs (particularly paper and paper products).

*Pledge ourselves to address the causes and reverse the consequences of global warming by*

- advocating the passage of legislation, at all appropriate levels, that reduce carbon dioxide output and set reduction targets for other greenhouse gases;
- supporting research and development of energy alternatives to fossil fuels. And supporting the passage of mandatory higher fuel efficiency for new vehicles and the phasing out of older, less efficient vehicles;
- supporting the expansion and promotion of rail transportation and other systems of mass transit, including subsidies for public transportation;
- combating forest destruction domestically and internationally through programs of preservation and reforestation and through responsible consumption of wood and wood products;
- engaging with corporations in dialogue and shareholder resolutions on such issues as reduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, phasing out of CFCs increased energy efficiency and fuel conservation, environmental cost accounting and other issues affecting global warming;
- calling for the adoption to limit the production of greenhouse gases worldwide;
- working to implement fair trade and economic relationships so that forms of development that minimize global warming are available to all nations.

**FURTHER** the General Board commits itself to;

- support and participate in national and international networks of religious bodies and other non-governmental organizations addressing the greenhouse effect; and
- continue through its program staff, within the context of a theology based on caring for the earth, and educational effort to acquaint the members of the Church of the Brethren with the nature, causes, and consequences of the greenhouse effect, including suggestions for individual and collective action to help address the problem. This will include the promotion of the use of the General Board's study resource, *Creation in Crisis: Responding to God's Covenant*, in all congregations. We will elicit the cooperation of District Executive as agents within each district to work directly with pastors to reach the membership of the church.

This resolution was adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board at its meetings in Elgin, Illinois on October 21, 1991. For further information contact Shantilal P. Bhagat, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120, 1-800-323-8039.

March 9, 1992

Church of the brethren General Board Emergency Resolution on the Destruction of the Ozone layer

**WHEREAS** the Bible calls upon us as Christians to be good stewards of God's creation and to protect and sustain God's creation for future generations, and

**WHEREAS** the ozone layer is a blanket of ozone molecules located in the upper atmosphere that protects the earth's surface from the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation, and

**WHEREAS** the Environmental Protection Agency issued a report in April 1991 which stated that the ozone layer over the United States and other populated regions of the Northern Hemisphere is thinning at twice the previously reported rate, and

**WHEREAS** the NASA-led team of scientists in February 1992 reported record levels of ozone-destroying chemicals above the Northern Hemisphere raising the possibility of an Arctic ozone hole developing this winter over populated parts of the United States, Canada and Europe,

**Therefore**, the Church of the Brethren General Board meeting in Elgin, Illinois on March 7-10, 1992 resolves to:

1. support the amendments to the ozone-protection treaty that will phase out production of all ozone destroying chemicals by 1995;
2. support the 1992 United nations conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in its effort to write and Earth Charter that protects the Earth and future generations;
3. support a large expansion of the financial assistance fund for developing nations to enable them to quickly end their production of ozone-destroying chemicals;
4. communicate with the President and US senators and representatives to request their strong leadership in constructing and passing funded legislation to accomplish these objectives;
5. use mailings, presentations at Church workshops and conferences, and other available resources to inform church members and encourage them to call and write the President and their US senators and representatives to express their support for the rapid phase out of ozone destroying chemicals.

Further, the General Board commits itself and urges Brethren congregations, institutions and members to:

Strive to identify and eliminate the use of products that contain ozone-depleting chloroflourocarbos (CFCs)

Reduce the use of air conditioners while locating and utilizing service centers that recycle CFCs from air conditioners and refrigerators;

Study seriously the destruction of the ozone in a continuing search for an environmentally friendly life style.

This resolution was adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board at its meeting in Elgin, Illinois on March 9, 1992. For further information contact Shantilah P. Bhagat, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120, 1-800-323-8039.

Resolution, 1996 General Board

**Church of the Brethren General Board**



## **RESOLUTION ON A DIOXIN-FREE FUTURE**

**WHEREAS** the church, as the people of God, is called to be environmentally responsible in caring for creation as God's gift; and

**WHEREAS** the 1991 Annual Conference statement "Creation: Called to Care" calls us to confess our sin and challenges us to take seriously our role as stewards of the Earth, and to work for the renewal of creation; and

**WHEREAS** dioxin, one of the most toxic substances created by humans, is formed as an accidental by-product in numerous industrial processes involving chlorine; and

**WHEREAS** dioxin is persistent in the environment, food chain, and in our bodies; and

**WHEREAS** dioxin is cross-generational, passing from mother to child through the placenta and via mother's milk, with children typically bearing the highest exposure to dioxin; and

**WHEREAS** the creation of dioxin is an avoidable hazard creating numerous adverse health effects such as cancer, hormonal disruption, infertility, suppression of the immune system, endometriosis, and diabetes; and

**WHEREAS** some communities are subject to even greater exposures and health risks because of disproportionate siting of polluting facilities in minority communities; and

**WHEREAS** a healthy population, a clean environment, and efficient nonpolluting technologies are essential to a sound economy; and

**WHEREAS** the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 1994 report entitled *The Scientific Reassessment of Dioxin* affirmed health warnings made 20 years ago - that the "background" levels of dioxin, a deadly chlorine-based chemical, pose a serious threat to the health of the general U.S. population; and

**WHEREAS** with a single program of dioxin phase-out, much of the world's most severe toxic pollution could be stopped;

**THEREFORE** the Church of the Brethren General Board, meeting in Elgin, Illinois, October 19-22, 1996, regards the dioxin crisis as an ecological as well as a justice issue. Ecological destruction results from the deliberate unsafe production and disposal of toxic substances leading to the wanton contamination of water, air, and other natural resources. A violation of justice occurs when there is the conscious dumping of such substances into powerless, poor, and minority communities, and when all of us are denied the right to a healthy environment. To redress such issues, the General Board resolves to support

- legislation and actions that decrease, phase out, and eliminate the creation, release, and exposure to dioxin, beginning with immediate attention to the three largest sources of dioxin: incineration of chlorine-containing wastes, bleaching of pulp and paper with chlorine, and the production, use, and disposal of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic;
- the use of alternative processes, and to utilize products that are chlorine-free and avoid exposure to dioxin;
- the development of worker protection programs for people in industries that make toxic chemicals or result in generating toxic by-product and related chemicals, who with a phase-out of these chemicals may lose their jobs;
- a move toward a prevention-based approach to cancer research and funding, including more studies on the relationship between cancer and chlorine-based toxins in the environment.

**FURTHER**, acknowledging that the discharge of toxic chemicals into the air, water, and soil spreads pollution far and wide, endangering many who are unaware of the source of contamination, the General Board

- invites all members of the Church of the Brethren to give serious thought and prayerful consideration to whether we can justify the depletion of resources, the exposure of those who handle and manufacture the products for us, and the contamination of our air and water to have weed-free lawns, disposable bottles and cups, candy and fruit dyed in bright colors, and blemish-free vegetables and fruits;
- encourages congregations and districts to study Annual Conference statements\* on simple life, creation, stewardship, and lifestyle in the context of the issues presented in this resolution, with a view to discerning appropriate action;
- requests the Association of Brethren Caregivers and Lafiya congregations to examine the concerns presented in this resolution;
- instructs its staff to, when practical, begin utilizing, for general office use, totally chlorine free paper; and
- commits itself to continue an educational effort through its staff and in other ways to assist members and congregations of the Church of the Brethren in addressing the pervasive issue of dioxin pollution and the potential it holds for a major global health catastrophe.

\* Simple Life Statement (1996)

Creation: Called to Care (1991)

Christian Stewardship: Responsible Freedom (1985)

Christian Lifestyle (1980)

*This resolution was adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board at its meeting in Elgin, Illinois on October 22, 1996.*

### **Introduction: Clean Air Principles**

July 15, 2000

Members of the Church of the Brethren have long had a close relationship with God's earth. We have enjoyed its bounty, appreciated its beauty, and taken seriously our responsibility as stewards of its goodness. Importantly, we have also been committed to simplicity of lifestyle, which in today's consumption-oriented economy is itself a mark of caring for God's creation. And we have called for justice, seeking to share the earth fairly with all God's people.

These concerns position the church well to respond to the environmental crises of our time—crises which affect the very fabric of planetary life: water, soil, plants, animals, the air we breathe. Anticipating this time, the 1971 Annual Conference paper, *Ecology*, states: "We have hope that tomorrow's world will not confront our children with an atmosphere so polluted with automotive and industrial wastes that the support of healthy life will be difficult or impossible."

Tomorrow's world has come, and so has pollution on such a scale that our lives and the well-being of other living things are indeed imperiled.

Given the present condition of the earth's atmosphere, and with the upcoming reauthorization of the Clean Air Act, this is a timely moment to reissue a call for measures to insure clean air for all. The following Clean Air Principles offer us an opportunity to join with concerned citizens and organizations all across the country in making this call. In affirming these principles, the Church of the Brethren General Board is stating to coalition partners and to the national legislators that clean air for all is a God-given right, and that appropriate measures must be taken to preserve this right for all God's creation.

#### Clean Air Principles

**Principle 1.** Breathing clean air is a basic right and necessity for all life. We must clean up and prevent air pollution, which threatens the health of our families.

Over 100 million Americans live in areas that do not meet the current health standards for ozone smog, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, lead and particulate matter. In addition, cancer-causing air toxics exceed levels considered safe in millions of neighborhoods. Those most at risk of harm from air pollution are children, the elderly, people with heart and lung diseases (like asthma and emphysema), and poor and minority communities who are often in closest proximity to pollution sources. The health effects of lung diseases are particularly troubling because they are irreversible; their effects have lifetime impacts. Although there has been significant progress in reducing air pollution over the past three decades, our air still causes sickness and early death. All people deserve to breathe clean, safe air regardless of where they live.

**What we should do:**

- Ensure that health-based air quality standards are based on the best, most current science to protect everyone, especially vulnerable populations.
- Establish and enforce milestones to reduce air pollution, holding states and polluting industries accountable for real pollution reductions.
- Reduce toxic air pollutants that pose a significant risk to communities, especially those that cause cancer and reproductive harm.
- Guarantee that all pollution limits are being strictly enforced.

**Principle 2.** We have a responsibility to future generations to protect our natural environment from the harmful effects of air pollution and leave a legacy of clean air.

Air pollution is taking its toll on the environment. Many of our lakes and streams are so acidic that they cannot support aquatic life. Others have such high nitrogen levels that algae blooms are starving out other aquatic life. In 1998, 40 states issued fish consumption advisories because mercury levels in fish made them dangerous to eat. Air pollution causes haze in our parks and cities, reducing visibility by up to 80%. A hole in the stratospheric ozone layer allows in ultraviolet light which causes cancer and other serious health problems, as well as ecosystem impacts. And carbon pollution is altering our climate, and is predicted to lead to rising ocean levels, cause even more extreme weather patterns, and cause a rise in troublesome diseases. We must make a commitment to protect our natural environment for future generations.

**What we should do:**

- Reduce carbon pollution by finding alternatives to combustion and fossil fuels.
- Require the virtual elimination of mercury emissions from incinerators, power plants and manufacturers.
- Continue reducing nitrogen and sulfur gases to halt the damage caused by acid rain and reduce haze that is destroying the vistas in our national parks.
- Continue to phase out chemicals that deplete the stratospheric ozone layer.
- Provide international assistance and incentives to phase out the use of persistent bioaccumulative toxins, including organochlorine compounds and mercury.
- Guarantee that no air pollution reduction efforts occur at the expense of contaminating another part of the

environment, such as our water and land.

**Principle 3.** There is no inherent right to pollute.

We cannot hold our breath until we reach a place that is free of pollution. The decisions made by individuals, communities, businesses and government all contribute to the dangerous air we breathe daily. No one owns the nation's air shed, or has the right to do with it as they please. While we support cost-effective solutions to reduce air pollution, we cannot trade away our right to clean air. The atmosphere should not be treated as the society's disposal ground, and our children's lungs should not suffer the consequences of such actions. We must promote national policies that guarantee the air is safe to breathe for everyone.

**What we should do:**

- Apply the Precautionary Principle, shifting the burden of proof to polluters to show that their emissions are safe, rather than making citizens prove that emissions pose a health threat.
- Ensure that no emissions trading occur with cancer causing or persistent bioaccumulative toxins, or with any toxic pollutant.
- Demand that large polluters, specifically power plants, refineries and chemical manufacturers, irrespective of age or fuel use, meet standards based on the least polluting processes in each industrial sector.
- Establish industry-specific pollution standards that result in the reduced use of toxic materials in manufacturing to prevent pollution, reduce the risk of chemical accidents, and provide for a safe work environment.

**Principle 4.** We have a right to, know whether the air we breathe is clean and free of toxic pollution.

Over 70,000 chemicals are currently being used by industry. Industry is required to report their releases of about 600 of these chemicals to the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI), many of which cause cancer, reproductive and neurological damage. While we have more information about toxic air releases than we did 10 years ago, there are still numerous gaps. The reporting thresholds are too high, especially for the most toxic contaminants, and a number of industries are still exempt from reporting to the TRI. States also must measure and report the ambient pollution levels which show the cumulative effect of all sources in an area. This information should be widely reported in "real time" so that people can take precaution to protect themselves from high pollution levels. Everyone deserves to know what is being released into the air they breathe, and participate in the decisions about toxic pollution limits.

**What we should do:**

- Require all sources that emit one or more of the listed pollutants to report to the TRI.
- Require better monitoring and public reporting of all air pollutants and their health effects, as well as ambient air quality.
- Lower the reporting thresholds for the most pervasive and harmful toxins.
- Consider the cumulative impacts of multiple pollution sources in an area when setting acceptable pollution limits.

- Promote more public participation and authority for communities to review and reject air permits submitted by pollution sources.

**Principle 5.** We must seek interstate and international cooperation to ensure that we continue to make progress in cleaning our air.

Air pollution passes freely over governmental boundaries and may well travel in excess of hundreds of miles, contributing to dirty air far from where the pollution is generated. We can only succeed in cleaning our air if we all work together to solve this problem. We need to empower more collective action to protect our common air shed through multi-state and international cooperation to clean the air have begun. At the same time, local, state, and federal governments must take responsibility to continue to make progress in cleaning the air to protect all communities and our environment.

**What we should do:**

- Promote national strategies to reduce pollution from all controllable sources of pollution (cars, trucks, fuels and power plants) to reduce the overall pollution levels nationwide.
- Encourage multi-state pollution planning regions, while holding states ultimately accountable for meeting clean air goals.
- Strengthen international agreements with Canada and Mexico to improve cooperation across national borders.

**Principle 6.** We must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and toxic chemicals to ensure the long-term health of our communities, our ecosystems, and the global climate which sustains all life.

The average American uses six times the energy used by the average European. There are over 200 million motor vehicles registered in the U.S. that travel over 3 trillion miles each year. Coal, oil and gasoline are the mainstays of our economy and society, and the root of many of our most serious pollution problems. Every year, thousands of new chemicals are being introduced into the market with very limited testing completed. As we look to the future, we need to invest in renewable energy alternatives and energy efficiency, alternative transportation modes, and in alternatives to toxic chemical use in manufacturing. We must make smart investments to ensure that by reducing some pollution other forms of pollution are not increased (e.g., relying on diesel to reduce carbon pollution or increasing the use of nuclear power). All forms of energy have a cost to the environment and therefore we value conservation of energy first before promoting air pollution controls. Likewise, individuals also must help to reduce air pollution by demanding cleaner products and making better energy and transportation choices.

**What we should do:**

- Invest in alternative fuels and energy efficiency for electric generation and transportation.
- Develop economic incentives and use the tax code to encourage investments in clean technology, rewarding early and more significant emission reductions.
- Require electric utilities and other producers to publicly disclose their emissions so customers can make informed choices about where to purchase their power or products.
- Invest in urban revitalization as a means to improve urban infrastructures and reduce suburban sprawl.

- Promote high wage job growth in clean energy technologies.
- Practice and support pollution prevention. Consume less, use less toxic substances, and reduce combustion.
- Support producers that observe these practices.
- As individuals, do our part by not wasting energy and demanding cleaner energy and more transportation choices that promote nonpolluting vehicles, better mass transit and land use planning.

#### Resolution on Global Warming/Climate Change (2001)

**WHEREAS** the church, as the people of God, is called to be environmentally responsible in caring for God's creation as God's gift; and

**WHEREAS** the Annual Conference statement *Creation: Called to Care* challenges us to take seriously our role as stewards of the Earth and to work for renewal of creation; and

**WHEREAS** our vastly increased use of fossil fuels has the potential to bring about irreversible changes in the climate and immense suffering for the poor and for people living in the coastal areas around the world;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Church of the Brethren General Board, meeting in New Windsor, Maryland on March 10-13, 2001, affirm the following principles:

1. Human societies must learn to draw on energy sources in ways that do not damage ecosystems or compromise the capacity of the Earth to meet the needs of current or future generations;
2. The generation and use of energy must be determined primarily by the needs of all people for a good quality of life, placing priority on appropriate and accessible energy for the world's poor;
3. Compliance with international trade agreements should not be given precedence over compliance with international environmental agreements or prevent the US from adopting measures to reorient its energy policy;
4. Energy policy in the US be based on ethical principles of respect for and justice within the One Earth Community, focusing not on expanding supply through megaprojects but on managing the demand and development of renewable, alternative sources. Specifically, the US should:
  - move beyond its dependence on high carbon fossil fuels that produce emissions leading to climate change,
  - ratify the Kyoto Protocol under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,
  - concentrate on reducing carbon dioxide emissions within the US and not rely on mechanisms such as emission trading with other countries to meet our targets for emission reductions under international agreements,
  - reduce our reliance on nuclear power, a technology for which there are still unresolved problems such as the safe disposal or safe storage of high level waste of nuclear reactors,
  - manage demand through high priority on conservation and energy efficiency,
  - significantly increase research and development into such renewable energy sources as solar, wind, biomass, etc.,

- support development and utilization of appropriate technologies for small-scale, decentralized energy systems, and
- provide necessary support for individuals, families, and communities adversely affected by a transition away from fossil fuels, nuclear power, and large-scale hydro in order to allow for alternative economic development, retraining, relocation, etc.

As members of the Church of the Brethren, we are encouraged to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels; to build and renovate our homes, church facilities, and camp structures to be energy efficient; to initiate new programs of energy conservation and awareness; to use public transportation, carpooling, and teleconferencing to reduce fossil fuel consumption; to become ecologically aware by using diets and products that consume less energy in production, transportation, packaging, and use; to separate and recycle household goods and to reduce waste and toxic materials.

*God redeems us to live in community with the created Earth. We will care for God's Earth in ways that are sustainable* ([Statement on Simple Life, 1996 Annual Conference](#) minutes, p.#326).

**Be it further resolved** that the General Board ask staff to give priority to the issue of global warming/climate change; and provide models and educational resources for congregations, institutions, and members to study the issues; and take commensurate actions.