

This is more detailed background information concerning the Listening Session that is being hosted by the York Center church on Sept. 19. Audrey deCoursey of the Highland Avenue CoB wrote the following letter to her congregation that provides a good explanation of what the Standing Committee of Annual Conference is asking of us. Thanks to Audrey for sharing this letter with us.

9 September 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ;

The Church of the Brethren is at a crucial point in its history. Like many other denominations around the globe, we are wrestling with weighty matters of Biblical fidelity, dignity, hospitality, and justice for all members. The central "issue" bringing these matters to the fore is the question of how wide our church's welcome is to our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) sisters and brothers.

The Annual Conference Process

Our Church of the Brethren Annual Conference has called upon each of us, and all of us together, to explore this question through a two-year process initiated in 2009. This past July in Pittsburgh the 2010 Annual Conference attendees were oriented to ways to bring this discussion back to their home congregations and districts. This fall, you are invited to take part in some district hearings that will allow you to share your perspective, and have your words heard by your representative to the Annual Conference Standing Committee, Ed Garrison. Similar hearings are happening around the country. Next year, Ed and the rest of the Standing Committee will review the recorded minutes from all these hearings, as they contemplate their recommendation to the 2011 Annual Conference body, who will then decide the votes on two statements.

This is a very complicated process! Sometimes we are talking about an issue... and sometimes we are talking about talking about an issue! Our goal is to bring everyone on board on these discussions, but we recognize that will take lots of energy and patience. Please feel free to talk to me with any questions you have.

District Hearings

There are two upcoming hearings planned for our part of the district, and I encourage you to attend either or both of them:

- _ Sunday, September 19, 3:00 pm – York Center Church of the Brethren, Lombard , IL (with potluck at 5:00 pm)
- _ Sunday, October 17 – Mt. Morris Church of the Brethren, Mt. Morris , IL

The timeline for this process is moving quickly, and so I must convey apologies that you are receiving late notice about these hearings. If you cannot attend either of these hearings, please mark your calendar for Sunday, January 16, for when Highland Avenue will host another hearing here in Elgin. This is an important process and I hope that each of your voices can be heard.

Resources for the Hearings

To prepare for these conversations, I recommend a few resources for background reading.

Attached you will find several documents that will be discussed at the hearing.

– **Special Response Process Timeline** – this lays out some background to the special *process* Annual Conference is following 2009-11.

– **Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues** – this is the policy Annual Conference approved in 2009, of a *process* they can choose to use for certain issues. At that same Conference, the delegates decided to put this process into action to address two other business items on their plate, regarding hospitality to gay and lesbian Christians. You will see that on pages 6-8, the process we're using now is outlined.

– **A Statement of Confession and Commitment** – this is the first of the two business items under review in this Special Response Process. It was initially trying to address specific concerns of the committee that plans the Annual Conference logistics (Program and Arrangements Committee) but was then taken to the wider church body. Many of its elements may be specific to internal Conference operations, and some apply in other church settings.

– **Query on Language on Same Sex Covenantal Relationships** – this statement was brought by the Beacon Heights CoB in Indiana for consideration by the 2009 Annual Conference. The 2009 Conference passed this on to be the second paper being considered in this two-year special process.

– **Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective** – this is the 1983 Human Sexuality paper that the Query on Language on Covenantal Relationships is referring to. It is available online:

http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/83HumanSexuality.htm

Recommendations for Safe, Sacred, and Meaningful Conversations - this two-page sheet offers tips for shaping conversations that affirm the dignity of all persons involved, especially those whose lives and bodies are being discussed as if they are abstract concepts.

All the Special Response documents can be found at the following site:

http://www.cobannualconference.org/special_response_resource.html

BMC-related guides are found here:

<http://www.bmclgbt.org/>

For the Biblical authority paper, go here:

http://www.cobannualconference.org/ac_statements/

Hope that helps!

Pastor Audrey