

**Policy on Same-Gender Marriage**  
**Atlantic Northeast District Church of the Brethren**

We, the Atlantic Northeast District Church of the Brethren, are the Body of Christ, and it is through the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that we discern together how we are to live as followers of Christ as a community of faith and within the world as His witnesses.

We recognize that the Church of the Brethren is not of one mind on a number of issues, including that of homosexuality and same-gender marriage, and so as a community of faith our relationships are of utmost importance as we are created and called to love one another as Christ loves us, for it is by this Christ said that all people will know we are His disciples.

We also recognize that the Church of the Brethren's official position on covenantal relationships between homosexual persons is that they are "an additional lifestyle option but, in the church's search for a Christian understanding of human sexuality, this alternative is not acceptable".<sup>1</sup> Additionally, "The Church of the Brethren upholds the biblical declaration that heterosexuality is the intention of God for Creation,"<sup>2</sup> yet also reaffirms a commitment to "extend Christ-like comfort and grace to homosexual and bisexual persons"<sup>3</sup>

The 1983 Atlantic Northeast District Conference Action states, "The District Conference affirms the Biblical standards for ministers as outlined in the query and affirms the 1983 Annual Conference decision which states that the expression of sexual relationships belongs within heterosexual marriage. Therefore congregations are called upon to apply the standard that avowed practicing homosexual ordained ministers and/or pastors should not function as such within the Atlantic Northeast District in accord with procedures set by the Commission on Ministry of the Atlantic Northeast District."<sup>4</sup>

The 1992 Atlantic Northeast District Conference Action states, "...in light of the Scriptures and the 1983 and 1992 actions of the Annual Conference in regard to homosexuality, we of the Atlantic Northeast District desire to support Christ-centered ministry which seeks to help people stop practicing homosexuality, and we will not support anything which promotes accepting the practice of homosexuality as a lifestyle that is approved by God."<sup>5</sup>

In the service of Ordination of Ministers in For All Who Minister, the fourth set of questions to be asked by the district representative is: "Do you affirm your devotion to the church of Jesus Christ, and specifically to the Church of the Brethren, which calls you to ministry? And do you promise to live in harmony with its principles, ordinances, and doctrines, being at all times subject to its discipline and governance?"<sup>6</sup>

Annual Conference polity gives authority to districts as defined by the recommended district constitution, which can be found in chapter 3 of the Manual of Organization and Polity. Specifically, that proposed constitution states:

*District Conference is the final authority of the district on policy, program, and procedure.*<sup>7</sup>

In addition, chapter 5 of the Manual of Organization and Polity makes clear that the district has authority for the credentialing of ministers:

*All licensed, commissioned and ordained ministers are accountable to both the district and the denomination. Annual Conference charges districts with the responsibility of credentialing ministers in the Church of the Brethren, and the denominational Office of Ministry works to resource and support districts in this process.*<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, we the Atlantic Northeast District Church of the Brethren affirm that ordained or licensed ministers are prohibited from performing or officiating any same-gender marriage.

The following process outlines the possible outcomes if a minister chooses to perform or officiate a same-gender marriage, with the hope that we will continue to seek reconciliation through conversation as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Response Process for a Minister Who Performs a Same-Gender Marriage**

*The officiating of same sex weddings by credentialed clergy shall be handled in the same way as any other report of ministerial conduct: if a district executive minister receives a report based on direct knowledge that a minister has performed a same gender marriage, the information shall be reported to the district's credentialing body as a matter of ministerial conduct.*<sup>9</sup>

1. The District Executive (DE) receives a report based on direct knowledge that a minister has performed a same-gender marriage. "Direct knowledge" means: The minister who performs or officiates the marriage informs the DE (either before or after the ceremony) or someone who was in attendance informs the DE.
2. The details of the report are documented by the DE and reported to the District Ministry Commission (DMC).
3. The DE will contact the minister in question and request a conversation with the DMC on questions of appropriate ministerial conduct. [Matthew 18:15]
4. The DMC will request a conversation with the minister and the governing body of the congregation or representatives thereof.
  - A. If the congregation is in agreement and support of the minister's actions, then steps 5-7 of this process will be followed.

- B. If the congregation is not in agreement or support of the minister's actions, then the action is reported by the aggrieved party(ies) as a potential Ministerial Ethics Violation.
5. The DMC affirms the following action to be taken:
- A. Letter of Reprimand and one year probation for first offense.
    - Probation:
      - 1) May not serve in any ANE District leadership roles.
      - 2) Monthly meetings with a DMC assigned mentor to process together and move to an understanding of the Annual Conference action and willingness to support the action, or at least a willingness to refrain from performing any future same-gender marriages.
      - 3) At the end of one year, the minister will meet with the DMC for conversation to determine appropriate next steps based upon the minister's commitment to his/her future actions.
        - a. If a commitment is made to no longer perform or officiate any same-gender marriages, then the minister will be free to resume normal ministry duties.
        - b. If the minister cannot commit to cease performing same-gender marriages, then the minister will be free to resume normal ministry duties while accepting the consequences for any future actions.
  - B. Immediate Termination of Ministry Credential after second offense.
    - 1) Follow steps 1-3 as outlined on page 2 of the Policy on Same-Gender Marriage paper, before a recommendation for termination is made by the DMC to the District Board (DB).
6. DMC reports and recommends appropriate action to be voted upon by DB.
7. District Conference may take action to create or amend policies governing future ministerial credentialing practices or make other responses.

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1. 1983 Annual Conference Statement; Human Sexuality from a Christian Perspective.  
 2. Ibid.  
 3. Ibid.  
 4. Action of the 1983 Atlantic Northeast District Conference in reply to Query from the Spring Grove Congregation.  
 5. Action of 1992 Atlantic Northeast District Conference in Reply from Discipleship and Reconciliation to 1991 "Query from West Green Tree: Homosexuality".  
 6. *For All Who Minister: A Worship Manual for the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1993), 299.  
 7. 2012 Minutes, "Revisions to Polity on Districts," 267.

8. 2014 Minutes, “Revisions to Ministerial Leadership Polity,” 244.
9. 2017 Report of the Leadership Team and the Council of District Executives on the Authority of Annual Conference and Districts regarding the Accountability of Ministers, Congregations, and Districts Authority and Accountability, p.10, lines 433-437