



Church of the Brethren General Board

Resolution on a Dioxin-Free Future

October 22, 1996

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.