



September 30, 2002

Church of the Brethren

To the Members of the District,

I am aware that there have been some rumors circulating about something that happened at the Springfield Church of the Brethren recently, and I have received some inquiries about that situation. I want to give some facts and a progress report in hopes of encouraging open communication and preventing further rumors.

I have had conversations with both Alan Krall, Board Chair of the Springfield congregation, and Kres Lipscomb, the Pastor. This is what I have learned. Two women who are members of the Springfield congregation went to Vermont this past August to be married in a civil ceremony. On returning to Springfield they asked their pastor if they could have a candle-lighting service and a reception at the church for their family and friends who were not able to be in Vermont. Kres passed that request on to the Church Board. While the Board did not officially approve the request, they did not prohibit it. The date of Saturday, August 31, was set for the candle-lighting service and reception, and the congregation was informed of the event during the congregational announcements and sharing time. There were no objections raised at that time, or immediately after the event. On September 20, a local newspaper ran a story on four same-sex couples. It included a photograph of the candle-lighting service in the Springfield congregation. Understandably, that has provoked some reaction from some members of the congregation.

It has also caught the attention of other persons in the district and beyond. That, too, is understandable in light of the current tension within the denomination around the issue of homosexuality. I have received questions about what the district is going to do about the situation at Springfield, and I want to address that as clearly as I can.

First, at this point this is a congregational issue and needs to be handled by the congregation. As in any controversy over any issue, the first concern for a congregation is maintaining unity as Brothers and Sisters in Christ engaged in a shared ministry. What the district can do is hold a congregation accountable to that task, and support and assist them in doing it well. I have been in consultation with congregational leadership and they are committed to an ongoing process that will ensure that every member is heard and valued, and that the leading of the Spirit is discerned. As a beginning step a congregational meeting was held on Friday, September 27, to allow open communication and identifying of issues. Carl Myers attended that meeting, first in a facilitative role, and secondly as my representative since I needed to attend the District Executive Committee meeting