

What Can Hold the Church Together?

By James M. Beckwith

1. All denominations struggle with division and disagreements. What has been the key to unity in the Church of the Brethren?
2. Beckwith notes that “Durnbaugh’s conclusions still apply, I believe: divisiveness appears when belief and cultic practice harden; opposition arises when power is seized or thrust upon a small number of leaders; and real communication breaks down when people are intent on advancing their own causes rather than on obtaining mutual understanding.” In what ways has cultic practice hardened? Who has power in the church? What causes are being advanced that divide? Can we change these conditions? How?
3. Jim Beckwith attributes the idea of “forbearance” to Alexander Mack, Jr. What promise does forbearance hold for Brethren today, especially on issues of human sexuality? What problems does forbearance present for us?
4. Respond to Beckwith’s questions in the article:
 - ❖ Has the Special Response process with its district hearings helped the church to listen to one another carefully and respectfully?
 - ❖ What do we do when our collective understanding of scripture is full of contradictions and differences?
 - ❖ How do we protect from interpreting scripture so that it doesn’t merely “bolster our preferred views?”
5. Beckwith calls everyone in the church to be careful about calling others to repent without repenting ourselves. Everyone, he says, is in need of repentance. Does repentance apply to sexual orientation? Why or why not?
6. Where would you place the issues of human sexuality on a scale of one to ten, one being not very important and ten being extremely important? How would you bring unity or greater harmony to the church as it struggles with issues of human sexuality? What will help us come to some sort of reconciliation?