

Inclusive¹ Pastors' Hopes for Mennonite Church USA

As Mennonite pastors, we are deeply committed to the way of Christ. Through Bible study, prayer, and community discernment, we understand the faithful Christian path to include ministering to and with LGBTQ² people, and we long for a Mennonite USA denomination that allows us to freely do so. If you would like to better understand the biblical/theological basis of our beliefs, we invite you to explore the resources listed at inclusivepastors.wordpress.com.

Below we have listed several actions that we hope denominational leadership will take. Ultimately, though, what we hope for is not a series of document and policy changes, but a structural transformation that honors the diversity of God's creation, lives out the justice-seeking love of Christ, and follows the radical leading of the Holy Spirit.

We recognize that some Mennonites view non-heterosexual intimate relationships as sinful. We do not want to force a particular theological position on every congregation, but to minister within a denomination that encourages us to be church in vibrantly inclusive and liberative ways. While we value Christian unity, we hold faithfulness to Christ's teachings of hospitality and love as higher values.

We would like to thank the Executive Board members for the difficult mental, emotional, and spiritual work you are doing on behalf of our denomination. Our prayers are with you as you seek to guide MC USA in the hard and holy way of Jesus.

1) We hope our denomination can recognize the worth of the entire body and celebrate such diversity by welcoming all those drawn to our Anabaptist witness into full participation in our midst. To this end, we hope that MC USA leadership will:

- a) Encourage congregations and conferences to live in loving relationships with each other.
- b) Publicly share the diversity of opinions on the Executive Board as a way of demonstrating how to remain in relationship in the midst of deep disagreements.
- c) Allow the staff of MC USA to publicly express their theological diversity in all sorts of representational settings including blog posts, articles, sermons and public discussions.
- d) Repent of and seek to make reparations for the systemic violence that MC USA has enacted and supported against LGBTQ Mennonites. Such reparations could include:

- *Welcoming LGBTQ Mennonites as an official constituency group at Constituency Leaders Council meetings.

- *Providing college and seminary scholarships for LGBTQ Mennonite students who are discerning a call to ministry.

- *Inviting Brethren Mennonite Council to facilitate a theological education initiative for MC USA around issues of human sexuality and justice.

1 The term "inclusive pastor" indicates Mennonite pastors (though not necessarily credentialed and not necessarily currently serving in MC USA) who believe the denomination should fully include and affirm LGBTQ people in the life of congregations, conferences, and the denomination. We recognize that others would support a type of "inclusion" that does not involve affirmation of LGBTQ sexual identities and relationships.

2 LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer. We use the term here to indicate the broad diversity of gender identity and sexual attraction.

e) Recognize that our current "foundational documents" are a reflection of what was felt and decided by a the majority of people within a certain group at a certain time; treating these documents as prescriptive rather than descriptive violates the spirit of the documents and alienates many people--particularly younger people who had no part in creating or affirming those documents.

2) We hope that MC USA will honor its stated commitment to congregational autonomy and conference authority by:

- a) Acknowledging all credentials granted by MC USA conferences, including credentials of LGBTQ pastors; this includes receiving the MLIs of LGBTQ pastors so that congregations who have discerned an openness to calling these pastors will be able to make necessary connections through formal MC USA channels.
- b) Removing the requirement for credential review of pastors who officiate same-sex weddings from the membership guidelines, thus respecting congregational discernment on such actions and leaving room for the credentialing body of each conference to decide for itself what pastoral actions warrant a review.
- c) Welcoming constituency groups like Pink Menno, Brethren Mennonite Council, and the Inclusive Pastors to be a public presence at convention, and accepting seminars that reflect the diversity of theology and experience within MC USA.

3) We hope MC USA leadership will provide a clear process for presenting resolutions to be considered by the delegate body in Kansas City in 2015. Such a policy should:

- a) Be available soon.
- b) Be easily accessible by anyone who is part of MC USA.
- c) Not privilege Executive Board created/approved resolutions over those submitted by other constituent groups.
- d) Allow for the presentation and discussion of appropriate resolutions without significant editing by the resolutions committee, even if it is feared such resolutions might prove controversial.

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