

**The Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC)** was begun in 1976 to engage the Mennonite and Church of the Brethren denominations in dialogue regarding the ill treatment and distorted perceptions of lesbian and gay individuals. Although institutional contacts were made, it became quickly apparent that there was a precursory need to provide community and support to lesbian and gay individuals who had been devastated by the harshness of these religious institutions, including churches and colleges. Retreats, newsletters and individual outreach were the fundamental needs of this era.

By the early 90's, BMC had matured into an organization which focused on more openly celebrating the unique gifts and perspectives of LGBTQ identified individuals. "Dancing Conferences" were initiated that focused energy upon dancing rather than wailing at the institutional walls. BMC opened itself to supportive non-LGBTQ individuals who were interested in the formation of a more expansive spiritual vision rooted in queer culture. The Supportive Congregations Network (SCN) was started to encourage congregations to be publicly affirming and welcoming of lgbt people. In addition, an outreach to LGBTQ students at the twelve US and Canada Mennonite and Brethren colleges was established.

A new millennium brought new challenges and a changing perspective. Beginning in 2004, the BMC board began to focus very intentionally upon social and religious trends related to lgbt and allied interests. Today, rather than a quiet plea for acceptance and tolerance, a more proactive energy is insisting upon equal justice and participation, with particularly attention being placed upon institutional systems and practices that continue to demean and harm LGBTQ people.

Today BMC's mission is to cultivate an inclusive church and society and to care for the Mennonite and Brethren lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied community. BMC provides resources and support to the Inclusive Pastors and Pink Menno as well as individuals across the denomination; empowers congregations to join SCN; provides an array of trainings; and advocates for an inclusive church and society.

BMC is supported and funded by Mennonite and Brethren LGBTQ individuals, parents, allies, and congregations as well as grants that fund our special projects and ecumenical work. The organization is currently led by Executive Director Carol Wise and a Board of Directors comprised of queer and allied Mennonites and Brethren from around the country. SCN continues to grow rapidly: 36% in the last two years, as more and more congregations realize the full range of gifts that LGBTQ people offer to the church.

Over nearly 40 years BMC has done the difficult work of coming out to ourselves and creating supportive and safe places that emphasized the theological grace and acceptance lacking in the institutional church. As our energy and movement has grown, we have shared our stories with others in celebration, claiming our spirituality and the redemption and joy that are ours. We have also connected with a global story, participating in work for justice and transformation of oppressive systems. The depth of BMC's theological and relational work provides a strong, broad-based foundation for a movement that will continue well into the future.

<http://www.bmclgbt.org/index.shtml>

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**The term "Inclusive Pastor"** indicates Mennonite pastors (though not necessarily credentialed and not necessarily currently serving in MCUSA) who believe the denomination should fully include and affirm LGBTQ people in the life of congregations, conferences, and the denomination.

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Inclusive Pastors is a growing, ever evolving network and community, not a formal organization. There is no official membership/network list and there is no single, designated spokesperson. Leadership often happens organically, as do special projects or campaigns. It is not a monolith. Each pastor/leader defines what it means to be an Inclusive Mennonite Pastor within and as a result of their particular social and

faith context.

Currently, six leaders meet regularly (online) as the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors Leadership Team: Theda Good, Karl Shelly, Megan Ramer, Chad Martin, Cynthia Lapp, and Joanna Harader. These pastors initiated the January 24, 2014 “Rule of love” letter sent to various MCUSA leaders. This letter was in response to the essay by Ron Adams published in the November 1, 2013 issue of *The Mennonite*. Currently, this letter contains the signatures of 165 Mennonite pastors and other (currently and formerly) credentialed leaders within the denomination. This group also maintains a web presence: <http://inclusivepastors.wordpress.com/>. In addition to the text of the letter, the web site includes the Inclusive Scriptures Project and links to various resources related to the church, the Bible, and sexuality.

The Inclusive Menno Pastors Facebook page currently has 111 members. The purpose of this Inclusive Pastors Facebook group is to be a safe space for pastors who advocate for greater justice for those who identify as LGBTQIA in Mennonite Church USA. It is an online community where we share relevant information, events, and encouragement. Joanna Harader started this group and she acts as moderator along with Adam Tice.

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**Pink Menno** began in 2009, the result of a conversation between siblings Jennifer Yoder and Luke Yoder about how the Mennonite church could be a more welcoming place for LGBTQ people. Rather than trying to duplicate or reinvent the work of BMC, Pink Menno has built on BMC’s organizational wisdom with the initial goal of creating a visible LGBTQ-supportive presence at national MCUSA conventions. Beginning in Columbus in 2009, Pink Menno invited LGBTQ Mennonites and those who stood in solidarity with them to wear pink in the convention center, and to gather in the convention hallways at regular intervals to sing hymns together. Not only did Pink Menno offer solace and solidarity for a number of LGBTQ Mennonites; it also generated an energetic movement towards straight Mennonites standing openly and unapologetically in support of full inclusion for LGBTQ people in the Mennonite church. After Columbus, Pink Menno continued to build its community online, with a particular concentration on young people.

Pink Menno repeated their pink-wearing, hymn-singing presence at Pittsburgh in 2011 and Phoenix in 2013, supported by BMC and by the Open Letter/Inclusive Pastors. While Pink Menno has never been granted an official convention presence, they have made a practice of renting hotel space near the convention center in order to host their own events and provide a welcoming environment for supportive convention-goers. At Phoenix, Pink Menno-sponsored events included seminars on sexual ethics, on LGBTQ-specific immigration issues, on gender identity, and on building a racially inclusive movement.

The decision to host the MCUSA convention in Phoenix motivated Pink Menno leaders to think critically about how different forms of oppression intersect within MCUSA. In a statement read on the Phoenix delegate floor, Pink Menno leader Katie Hochstetler stated, “As Pink Mennos, we refuse to allow our leaders to pit marginalized groups and people against one another in the name of unity or convenience. We reject the premise that our church is incapable of understanding the insidious connections of oppression and privilege as they are played out on the bodies of immigrants, women, children, people of color, lgbt people and the many who are excluded from full participation in our church and society.”

<http://www.pinkmenno.org/>

-Compiled September 26, 2014