

A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation

The current policies of Mennonite Church USA do violence to LGBTQIA¹ people by failing to affirm their full, God-given identities and by restricting their full participation in the life, ministries and rituals of the broader church. The rejection of LGBTQIA people by MC USA has silenced and denied ministry callings, torn apart families, forced parents to choose between their church and their child, and caused many LGBTQIA people to leave the church. In some cases, rejection by their faith community is a factor in LGBTQIA people self-harming or even dying by suicide.²

The 2001 Membership Guidelines, especially Section III,³ are the basis for many of these wounds, and also for harm done to the ministry and witness of our denomination and congregations. The Guidelines were not created for the benefit of LGBTQIA people. The Guidelines' purpose was to facilitate denominational integration, and, in the process, the church willingly offered up LGBTQIA people, their families, their congregations, and pastors as scapegoats for the sake of a false peace and unity.

The legacy of the 2001 Membership Guidelines is in direct contradiction to the vision and calling of MC USA; they have given us conflict and loss, not "healing and hope."⁴

Excluding LGBTQIA people from the church is a rejection of God's joyous delight in the diversity of creation and a denial of the Divine image and breath animating all humankind.⁵ It is unfaithful to the calling and ministry of Jesus who, as "the visible image of the invisible God" and the one through whom "God reconciled everything to God's self," offers radical hospitality to those traditionally despised and rejected by religious institutions and teaches that love is the fulfillment of the law.⁶ It is a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit who empowers LGBTQIA Christians to give and receive every gift in the body of Christ.

Excluding LGBTQIA people harms not only LGBTQIA people and allies, but it also harms the full body of Christ. Such exclusion is a rejection of the witness of individuals, congregations, and conferences who live out God's life-giving love in and through full affirmation of the lives of LGBTQIA people. It is a failure to realize the denominational vision of "healing and hope" and therefore restricts the life and mission of MC USA. It is a rejection of spiritual gifts that God longs to share through LGBTQIA people with the Mennonite church.

The exclusion of LGBTQIA people from the church also perpetuates the interconnected oppressions of hetero-sexism and racism. "Dualistic tactics"⁷ falsely separate the interests of LGBTQIA people, People of Color, and LGBTQIA People of Color, effectively pitting these marginalized groups against one another.

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual

² For example, see Ron Adams, *The Rule of Love*, The Mennonite, Nov. 2013; also Roberta Showalter Kreider, *The Cost of Truth: Faith Stories of Mennonite and Brethren Leaders and Those Who Might Have Been*. 2004 Strategic Press.

³ Section III of the "Membership Guidelines" reads, in part, "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life;" and, "We hold the Saskatoon (1986) and Purdue (1987) statements describing homosexual, extramarital and premarital sexual activity as sin to be the teaching position of Mennonite Church USA;" and, "Pastors holding credentials in a conference of Mennonite Church USA may not perform a same-sex covenant ceremony."

⁴ MC USA Vision: Healing and Hope at <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/vision-for-healing-and-hope/>

⁵ Genesis 1 & 2

⁶ Colossians 1.15-20, Romans 13.8-10, NLT

⁷ AG Report,

<https://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/REPORT-MGAdvisoryGroup-Final-01272020-1.pdf>

Our calling as disciples of Jesus compels us to “[c]onfront the misuses of power in our... institutions” by “seek[ing] to tell the truth and repent.”⁸

Therefore, be it resolved that, as members of Mennonite Church USA committed to truth-telling, repentance, and transformation in the Way of Jesus:

We confess that

- Our denomination’s policies, structures, practices, and theologies have excluded LGBTQIA persons from fully sanctioned participation in the denomination and have caused great harm to LGBTQIA Mennonites and their families.
- We have failed to offer the Good News of God’s “grace, joy and peace”⁹ to LGBTQIA Mennonites and their families.
- Our denomination and congregations are diminished in vitality and faithfulness by the loss of our siblings who have chosen to leave because of exclusionary practices and policies.
- We have not affirmed the full status and worth of LGBTQIA people as fully beloved by God.
- We have scapegoated People of Color as the reason for discrimination against LGBTQIA people, and blamed LGBTQIA people for the loss of some People of Color in the church.¹⁰
- That LGBTQIA Mennonite People of Color are virtually erased.
- We have not taken seriously “every human grouping [being] reconciled and united in the church.”¹¹
- As a result of the polity implications of the Membership Guidelines Section III, we have driven wedges of mistrust between MC USA pastors and their congregations, and between congregations and conferences.

We commit to:

- Rescind the Membership Guidelines, Section III.¹²
- Include representatives of the LGBTQIA community in the creation of any resource, document, or policy that specifically affects LGBTQIA people.
- Require that the Executive Board consult with LGBTQIA leaders¹³ to create an LGBTQIA constituency group with representation on the Constituency Leaders Council and/or other denomination-wide leadership groups.
- Provide resources for individuals, congregations, and conferences to engage with repentance and reconciliation in their own contexts. Such resources should explore historic harms, encourage truth-telling, and address areas of intersectionality.
- Follow the leadership of LGBTQIA Mennonites to provide support and resources for LGBTQIA leaders in the church. This should involve investment of denominational time and money.
- Implement policies for MC USA’s Executive Board, staff, and church-wide program agencies that prohibit the use of sexual identity, gender orientation, or marital status as criteria to restrict a

⁸ Renewed Commitments for MC USA, 2018

⁹ Mennonite Church USA *Vision: Healing and Hope*

¹⁰ [Quoted from Advisory Group report p. 11]

¹¹ Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 9

¹² This will effectively eliminate section III of the Guidelines. Sections I and II are part of the MC USA bylaws.

¹³ Many LGBTQIA Mennonite leaders are affiliated with advocacy groups including Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests, Pink Menno, and Inclusive Mennonite Pastors.

person's full participation in the ministries, activities, roles, and committees of our denomination.

- Expand the definition of marriage in future versions of *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.
- Revise *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* to affirm LGBTQIA people in ministry and to explicitly allow Mennonite pastors to officiate without repercussions same-sex weddings.