



**Mennonite
Church
USA**

June 13, 2012

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF MENNONITE CHURCH USA

We address you in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, the one who has made us his body! The hope of Jesus was that his followers would be one as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. This oneness of his body is how the world comes to know God's love for the world (John 17:23).

For the past generation we have experienced tension in our understanding of human sexuality, particularly related to our understanding of same-sex relationships. During meetings in April, the Executive Board discussed the issues under which the church is straining to remain one. The board discussion showed that:

- The board owns the understanding of our confession of faith that sexual union is to happen between one man and one woman who are committed to each other for life in holy marriage.
- The board has no plans to suggest that the church should change its current understanding and commitments. We cannot speak for all boards into the future, but this is the understanding of the current board.
- The national conference of Mennonite Church is composed of conferences and congregations. The national church does not have the authority to control the discussion or decisions at these levels. Congregations decide on their members and conferences decide on member congregations. Ministerial credentials are held at the conference level and thus minister's accountability is to the area conference rather than the national conference. We are aware that our polity creates some differences in the practice of church discipline from conference to conference.
- The board is committed to implement the action of the delegates who in the past asked for conversation and Bible study with members who are in disagreement with the position of our church on same-sex relationships. At the same time, we remain committed to keeping focused on the main thing ----following Jesus by focusing on our priorities spelled out in the Purposeful Plan. We want to grow as missional congregations who engage our communities with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Recently, same-sex covenant ceremonies have been performed by pastors in Illinois and Kansas. In both cases the conferences responded by following the polity of Mennonite Church USA and reviewed the ministerial credentials as required by our membership guidelines. The guidelines are clear that when a same-sex covenanting

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ceremony is performed that the credentials of the officiating pastor will be reviewed. In both cases it was determined that the credentials of the pastors would not be revoked. In one case this decision is being contested within the area conference.

The national conference helps area conferences work and witness together. Conferences relate to each other through the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC). The CLC is an important place for the conferences to address each other on these questions. This group functions as the "board of elders for Mennonite Church USA." At its next meeting the Executive Board will take time to consider how, working with the CLC, the national conference can best support the area conferences in their discernment.

We understand the frustration of persons who wish that the national conference would make decisions that our polity has given to area conferences of Mennonite Church USA to resolve. We also understand the need for time and space to allow orderly consideration and processing of the questions that are being raised.

We call the church to prayer that we may walk in paths of Christian faithfulness and in the words of Scripture "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3-6). There is one body, and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all and through all."

Shalom!

Executive Committee of Mennonite Church USA:

Dick Thomas, moderator

Elizabeth Soto, moderator-elect

Addie Banks

David Boshart

Patricia Shelly

Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director