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News Release to The Mennonite

As the Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference I experience overwhelming sadness at the news of Luke Hartman's arrest for solicitation. As I have learned more about Luke's unwise and inappropriate behaviors I lament the brokenness that his actions have caused to individuals and their families. Luke does not have ministerial credentials associated with Virginia Mennonite Conference.

We continue to affirm the necessity of appropriate intervention for children and adults who experience sexual exploitation in any form. We call upon leaders of a congregation, ministers and lay leaders, to engage diligently in creating safe spaces for children and adults to be nurtured in a healthy environment. We call upon ministers and lay leaders to report inappropriate adult behavior to the appropriate credible people who can respond to the information with integrity.

The Pastoral Staff and Board of Elders of Lindale Mennonite Church have been working diligently on a difficult pastoral scenario. Pastoral care issues involving real people often entail responding to information as it becomes available. At times there are limitations to pastoral responses based on family dynamics, personal concerns, and the lack of clarity about the breadth of an issue that is being presented. In spite of these difficult situations pastoral care must still be offered acknowledging that there are situations that are complex and very difficult. These dynamics are discerned by local leaders on behalf of a congregation and their members.

In spite of the fact that in the Commonwealth of Virginia ministers are not mandatory reports of child sexual abuse to local authorities in the same way that teachers and therapists are required to do so, Virginia Mennonite Conference is planning a series of consultations that can assist pastors in the challenges of difficult pastoral cases. In May 2016 a Pastoral Consultation is being planned on "Restorative Approaches to Broken Relationships in Congregational Life." In July 2016 prior to our Annual Conference Assembly, we will hold a Pastoral Summit to educate pastors about detecting child sexual abuse. It is our desire to prepare pastors to respond appropriately and professionally to incidents of child sexual abuse and other forms of inappropriate behavior.

Clyde G. Kratz
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Virginia Mennonite Conference