

## **Naming Our Differences, Committing to One Another: Continuing to “Create Space” within MCM**

In 2016, in concluding the “Being a Faithful Church” process that began in 2009, delegates from Mennonite Church Manitoba congregations joined with delegates from across Mennonite Church Canada in upholding the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* as a guide for our faith and life together while also resolving to “create space” for congregations among us to potentially discern differently about marriage than is commonly understood from Article 19 of our *Confession of Faith*. We also recommended that MC Canada and regional churches “develop ways to hear one another around the implementation of this recommendation.” In 2017, the MCM Board encouraged coming together after three years “to share how the Spirit has moved in our midst” on this matter.

In the fall of 2021, we as MCM did some of this sharing together in the form of a “listening circle” in which representatives from our congregations described what their congregational journey had been and where their congregation was at on LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation. Sharing of congregational perspectives has also happened through feedback given to Executive Minister Michael Pahl and other MCM staff, testing possible policy statements and resources with pastors and other congregational leaders in the fall of 2022.

It has become clear from the listening circle and other feedback that we do not all agree on this matter and we will not agree anytime soon. There is also little interest in revisiting this question on the floor of a delegate Gathering or in special delegate meeting. We need to continue to create space for congregational discernment and for differences among us on this.

A few repeated (though not universal) desires have emerged from this sharing and feedback:

1. To name the reality of our differences as Mennonite Church Manitoba congregations around same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation.
2. To affirm our commitment to continue covenanting together as congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba for fellowship, mutual support, and shared ministry.
3. To provide support for congregations where they are at on LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation, encouraging further discernment but without pressure to come to a uniform conclusion.
4. To ensure our shared Mennonite Church Manitoba spaces are safe for all, and particularly for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced harm in our society and our churches.

In light of these desires emerging from our sharing together, the Board approves the following as a guiding statement for Mennonite Church Manitoba.

Mennonite Church Manitoba is a community of congregations covenanted together for fellowship, mutual support, and shared ministry. We encourage congregations to discern the Spirit’s leading for themselves regarding their welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ+ people, and this has meant that our congregations are in different places theologically and practically regarding this. We continue “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond

of peace” (Eph 4:3), recognizing that our unity in Christ is not complete uniformity of belief and practice and that diversity can be a beautiful, if sometimes surprising, gift from God.

In our shared spaces as Mennonite Church Manitoba, we strive to provide a welcoming and safe place for everyone. These shared spaces include our annual Gatherings, our Mennonite Church Manitoba office, our Camps with Meaning camps and programs, our committees and working groups, and our resourcing workshops and events. To make these shared spaces safe for all, we will avoid disparaging remarks about one another’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, and we will respect chosen names and pronouns. We will also avoid disparaging remarks about one another’s perspective on LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation, and we will not promote our congregation’s position as normative for all congregations.

We recognize that this is only one of many important topics we can and should address as a community of congregations. We approve this statement not because this topic is more important than others, but because we recognize it has been a major matter of discernment in our regional and nationwide church life for the past 15 years. It is our hope that we can turn our attention to other important matters of being the church together while still encouraging each congregation’s particular discernment related to LGBTQ+ welcome or affirmation.

May God continue to guide the congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba, and our regional and nationwide churches, in faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ and his way of faith, hope, and love.

Mennonite Church Manitoba Board  
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