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Dear congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba,

This past weekend's attempted assassination of a former U.S. president and current presidential candidate has ratcheted up tensions in the U.S. and Canada. Appeals to "lower the temperature" of the political rhetoric flying back and forth seem largely to be ignored. Polarization and division, aided by this rhetoric and abetted by our media silos and social bubbles, continue at an alarming rate. Further political violence—or societal violence in general—seems almost inevitable.

Now, more than ever, we as Christians and as churches must do the hard work of pursuing peace and striving for unity. We must not give in to the polarizing ways of the world around us. Instead, this is an opportunity for us to model to a watching world what healthy unity in diversity can look like.

It's helpful to remind ourselves that this unity-in-diversity, this diversity-in-unity, is in fact the New Testament vision of the church. One body with many members. One humanity reconciled together through Christ. Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, but all one in Christ Jesus. A great multitude no one can count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. These descriptions—from 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 2, Galatians 3, and Revelation 7—are just a sample of the vision of Christ's church provided by his apostles.

We are called to be unified in the midst of our diversity, just as we are encouraged to be diverse in the midst of our unity.

I can hear the objections to calls for unity, for they echo in my own head. Too often the "unity" being called for actually means "uniformity," everyone thinking and acting the same way. Too often it means collective compromise on core principles. Sometimes appeals for unity can even be power moves, masking injustice and silencing our prophets.

However, none of these reflects the Christian unity described in the New Testament.

The unity of the church is a unity in Christ, given and enabled by the Spirit. This doesn't merely mean that we have a spiritual unity that binds us together, the reality of the Spirit of Christ present in each of us—though this is true. Unity "in Christ" implies a certain way of being, a certain way of thinking and living—a way of being, thinking, and living that is Christ-like. And

indeed, this is what the apostle Paul describes: we are united in the “mind of Christ,” a mindset that works itself out in lives of humble self-giving for one another in love, following Jesus’ example (Phil 2:1-8).

In other words, this is a unity of the Spirit centered on Jesus—his teachings, his way of life, his way of death, his resurrection. It’s a unity that seeks to walk in the Spirit together in Jesus’ way of love, his narrow path of self-giving compassion for all others, including our enemies, and especially in solidarity with those the world deems “last,” “least,” or “lost.”

We will disagree about how best to live out this mind of Christ in each particular situation, and that’s to be expected. We must allow each other to live “for the Lord” according to their conscience, not condemning those we deem more liberal than us or showing contempt for those we deem more conservative (Rom 14:1-11).

And when decisions need to be made collectively, we engage in communal discernment. As congregations, made up of individual members each committed to walking in the way of Jesus, we bring our personal convictions to the table, speaking and listening to each other in humility and good faith and loving respect, to determine together how best to live out this mind of Christ collectively in our context (think Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council). Sometimes, sadly, this discernment might lead to a separation at least for a time (think Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41, immediately after that Jerusalem Council). But when this happens it continues to be guided by humility, love, and mutual respect.

I invite us all to pursue this kind of unity as congregations and as a wider church, centred on Jesus and empowered by his Spirit. The world is watching, and looking for a better way.

Yours in Christ,



Michael Pahl
Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Manitoba