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Dear congregations of Mennonite Church Manitoba,

We are in a consequential moment. This is a time of tremendous political upheaval, leading to considerable economic and social turmoil. This is a time for courage in the way of Jesus.

We are seeing the empowerment of Christian nationalism in the United States, centering a narrow understanding of Christianity within political power structures. One result of this is the overturning of long-held norms in international relations, norms which, however imperfect, have provided stability throughout the world. These realities are having a significant impact on many around the world who are most vulnerable to harm.

In this consequential moment, I urge us to recall the tenets of our faith as Anabaptist Mennonites.

While we may be citizens of an earthly country, ultimately “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). We as the church are to be a colony of heaven, showing a glimpse of heaven to a world that can often seem hostile to God’s ways of love. In the same vein, Jesus’ reign is “not of this world” (John 18:36). It does not originate in or operate according to the kingdoms and nation-states of this world, but according to the loving ways of God. As followers of Jesus we are “aliens and strangers” in the world (1 Pet 2:11), even as we are called to follow Jesus in serving the world in love (John 3:16-17; 1 John 3:16-17).

These truths mean that ultimately it is irrelevant to us as Jesus-followers which earthly nation we are citizens of. Those of us who are settler Canadians have been blessed with much peace and prosperity, and it is hard to imagine losing these. But Canadian peace and prosperity are not our highest goals. Furthermore, our calling is not to create a Christian nation, but to make disciples out of all nations, people from all peoples who will follow Jesus in his way of co-suffering love.

These truths are important for us to remember so that we do not get overly caught up in the nationalistic trends and anxieties swirling around us. We are to walk the balance of being “in the world”—living fully as members of the society we find ourselves in—but not being “of the world”—not sharing in our society’s divisive boundary-marking and enemy-making (John 17:14-19).

I also urge us to remember that as followers of Jesus our first concern should be the impact these political, economic, and social realities have on those most vulnerable to harm. Whether we are speaking of the erasure of trans and intersex identities, severely cutting back USAID throughout

the world, a proposal to remove Gazans from their homeland, or threats of substantial tariffs on Canadian goods, our primary focus should not be on how these and other actions affect us. Our primary focus needs to be on how these actions impact those who are disempowered and marginalized in society.

Our response to these realities should be the response of Jesus: to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21). We must resist all political, economic, and social injustice—non-violently, yet emphatically. “Speak out; judge righteously; defend the rights of the poor and needy,” Proverbs enjoins us (31:9). Show up in solidarity with those in need, knowing that this is the will of God “who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry...[who] watches over the strangers [and] upholds the orphan and the widow” (Psa 146:5-9).

This is the way of Jesus, who came to bring “good news to the poor” and “set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:16-21). We have a robust heritage of responding to the practical needs of others; may we continue to walk in this way of Jesus in this new era of need.

And so I call us to courage. I call us to hope. I call us to a deep and abiding faith in God, and to a strong and compassionate love for others, especially those most in need of this love. May God grant us all these things, along with much wisdom, in this consequential moment.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael".

Michael Pahl

Executive Minister, Mennonite Church Manitoba