

Bethel Congregation,

As you know, Mennonite Church USA will be having their convention in Kansas City June 30-July 5, 2015. Dennis Showalter and I will be representing the congregation during the delegate sessions of this gathering. As the date draws nearer, more information about our business sessions has been made available. Please note the following information and opportunities to learn more and/or process together...

Dates:

- May 19th:

Prayer and Webinar at Bethel Mennonite Church, West Liberty

Are you a delegate for KC2015? Are you interested in what will be taking place at the Delegate Assembly this summer? If so, Bethel Mennonite Church in West Liberty invites you to join others on **Tuesday, May 19** in preparation for the upcoming convention. The evening will provide two options with preparation through prayer and via Webinar. You may come for one or both.

7:00 – 8:00 pm Prayer through scripture, silence and song

8:15 pm Introduction to the Webinar

8:30 pm Webinar with Ervin Stutzman, director of Mennonite Church USA. The Webinar will include:

An introduction to the agenda facing delegates this summer in Kansas City

An overview of Mennonite Church USA's polity and structure

A time of question and answers with Ervin.

For more information on the webinar itself, see:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/delegate-chat-with-ervin-stutzman/>

Other questions may be directed to Dave Maurer or Wanda Stopher.

- June 3 or 4:

Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, will hold two meetings in Ohio during June for delegates to KC 2015, the denominational assembly in Kansas City. Delegates and all others who are interested are invited to attend.

The meetings will take place Wednesday, June 3, at Salem Mennonite Church in Elida, and Thursday, June 4, at the Kidron Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall. Both meetings will begin at 7 p.m. and last about 90 minutes.

During the meetings, Ervin Stutzman plans to cover the following agenda:

- Briefly share the vision for the future of Mennonite Church USA, focusing on Jesus as the center of our faith, community as the center of our lives, and reconciliation as the center of our work

- Provide a guide that outlines the delegates' overall responsibilities at the assembly
- Explain how the results from the online delegate survey shaped the Executive Board's decisions about the agenda
- Distribute an agenda for the delegate sessions, and explain the specific decisions which delegates will be invited to make
- Provide handouts which delegates can use in congregational study groups
- Engage in a time of feedback and discussion

- June 16:

Bethel Delegate Listening Session: This will be a chance to come together to talk with fellow Bethelites and Bethel's delegates in preparation for the Kansas City 2015 MC USA Convention and delegate sessions. More information will be available in the coming weeks.

Resources:

Delegate Resources:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/delegate-resources/>

Convention Prayer Guide:

<http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/On-The-Way-Discernment-Guide.pdf>

Article on Lancaster Leaders proposing "a radical center":

<https://themennonite.org/daily-news/52-lancaster-leaders-propose-a-radical-center/>

Document of "A Radical Center":

<https://themennonite.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/RadicalCenter-Revision-4-29-2015-1.pdf>

Franconia Response to MC USA Pastor Survey Results:

<http://franconiaconference.org/a-call-to-trust-to-lead-to-be-collegial-to-seek-the-spirit-a-response-to-the-mennonite-church-usa-survey/>

Anabaptist Renewal Circles:

<http://anabaptistrenewal.org/about/>

Evana:

<http://evananetwork.org/>

In Christ,

Dave



Resolution Israel-Palestine

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015

Preamble

“For more than 65 years, Mennonites have lived, studied and ministered in

Palestine and Israel. ... We open our hearts when we again hear of the suffering you experience in an occupied land as homes are taken from you, families and communities are separated by walls and checkpoints, and countless large and small indignities and humiliations are visited upon you each day.”

This excerpt from a 2011 letter written by Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, on behalf of the Executive Board, was a response to *Kairos Palestine*, an appeal from Palestinian Christians in December 2009.

Already in June 2007, 10 representatives of Mennonite-affiliated agencies who traveled together to the region reported in an *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine* that, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and the major cause of the ongoing conflict.”

Since 2007, the urgency of the crisis in Israel-Palestine has only deepened, with little progress to show politically and ever-increasing levels of suffering. We find ourselves at a *Kairos* moment, as articulated by Palestinian Christians.

We strongly affirm the longstanding Mennonite presence in the region of Israel-Palestine, including the work of Mennonite Mission Network; Eastern Mennonite Missions; Virginia Mennonite Missions; Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries; Mennonite Central Committee; Christian Peacemaker Teams; and Mennonite Church Canada.

The presence of these workers and others has provided a powerful witness to the way of peace in a place of great conflict. In turn, our understanding of our Anabaptist identity and beliefs has been greatly enriched by interactions with fellow believers and others in the region.

We urge that programs of service to Palestinians and Israelis working for a just peace not only continue but be enhanced, including work by various Mennonite-related groups to improve lives and build peace, and advocacy

initiatives from Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington (D.C.) Office.

We note the personal and congregational concern that Mennonites have long shared for Christian stewardship and the social and environmental impact of our investments. We believe that the finances contributed to our churches will be used to further our Christian witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we believe that these resources should not be used in the furtherance of pain, death and suffering of one people at the hands of another. We affirm Everence’s practice of screening investments with attention to issues of human rights and military involvement, among other considerations.

We affirm the “Come and See” initiative of Mennonite Church USA, which seeks to provide opportunities for Mennonite pastors and other leaders to participate in Israel-Palestine learning tours and to “come and see” the current reality (Purposeful Plan, lines 980–984). We encourage all church members who are considering travel to the region to follow the goals and criteria/tour components for Come and See tours as outlined by Mennonite Church USA.

We acknowledge the long history of violence by Christians against Jews. All actions that stereotype or demonize people based on their religious beliefs or ethnicity are contrary to the teachings of Jesus; we must have no part in them. When addressing the injustice of the current Israeli occupation of Palestine, it is critical that we speak about the policies of the Israeli government and not identify or equate the Jewish people with that government.

Resolution

In light of the foregoing information, we thereby resolve:

- **To encourage the reading and study of the *Kairos Palestine* document.** We affirm our particular kinship as brothers and sisters in Christ with Palestinian Christians. In this context we hear the “cry for help” expressed in the *Kairos Palestine* document issued in 2009. Based in a theology of loving ones’ enemies and sacrificial love, this document is worthy of careful study by member congregations of Mennonite Church USA, as recommended by the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board in 2011. In support of this effort, we

encourage Mennonite Church USA to develop a structure and process for disseminating and studying the *Kairos Palestine* document and appropriate study materials, in conjunction with the Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network. We encourage congregational resource advocates to make available information about Israel-Palestine.

- **That Israel's military occupation of Palestine is sinful, based on injustice and must come to an end; and that as U.S. citizens we are complicit in this sin due to our government's significant and longstanding military support for Israel.** As Palestinian Christian leaders noted in 2009 in the *Kairos Palestine* document, "the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity." Similarly, the 2007 *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations* observed, "The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and the major cause of the ongoing conflict."
- **To consider how our financial lives are enmeshed in the policies of occupation through our investments, individual purchases and tax dollars.** To this end, we direct representatives of the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA along with representatives from Everence, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network, Mennonite Mission Network and other related agencies involved in the region, in mutual consultation, to review—at least on an annual basis—the investments of Mennonite Church USA for the purpose of withdrawing investments from corporations known to be profiting from the occupation and/or destruction of life and property in Israel-Palestine. A report of this review and related activities should be submitted on an annual basis to members of the Executive Board.

We further urge individuals and congregations to avoid the purchase of products that enable the military occupation to continue, including items produced in Israeli settlements.

In keeping with our historic commitments as a peace church and consistent with our opposition to the militarized resolution of conflict, we condemn the use of violence by all sides. We call for an end to U.S. military assistance to all countries, including Israel. We urge nation-states, including our own, to seek security in the only way it may truly be found, through relationships of mutuality and trust and the guarantee of equal rights for all peoples.

- **To pray earnestly for all Israelis and Palestinians.** As commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we commit ourselves to pray ceaselessly for all in Israel-Palestine, particularly our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters; all those working courageously for peace, including Israeli conscientious objectors; and all who have been impacted by violence.

In addition, we request that a report covering all activities related to this resolution be developed and delivered, under the leadership of the director of holistic witness, at the next Mennonite Church USA convention.

Sponsors:

Albuquerque (New Mexico) Mennonite Church

Albany (Oregon) Mennonite Church

Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia

Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster (Pennsylvania)

Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Gainesville, Florida

Eugene (Oregon) Mennonite Church

First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio

First Mennonite Church, Lincoln, Nebraska

Lima (Ohio) Mennonite Church

Living Light of Peace, Arvada, Colorado

Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, Wichita, Kansas

Nueva Vida Norristown (Pennsylvania) New Life Mennonite Church

Pilgrims Mennonite Church, Akron, Pennsylvania

Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, Kansas

Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Endorsed by various Mennonite agencies and many individuals.

FAQs Related to the Proposed Resolution on Israel-Palestine

- 1. How long have Mennonites been involved in Israel and Palestine?** Mennonites have been ministering to human need and witnessing to the way of Jesus in this region for more than 65 years. Mennonite Central Committee first initiated refugee relief efforts in 1949. Today MCC, Mennonite Mission Network, Ten Thousand Villages and Christian Peacemaker Teams have ongoing work in Israel-Palestine.
- 2. Why aren't there any Mennonite churches in Israel or Palestine?** When Mennonites first began working in this region they decided not to plant Mennonite churches but to work in partnership with local Christians and other groups. Mennonites have been respected and trusted because they developed genuine partnerships and weren't viewed as competitors who inserted themselves. As a result, deep and long-standing relationships have been formed with a wide range of Christians in the region.
- 3. What does Israeli occupation of Palestine look like?** Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967. Under military occupation many civilian laws and procedures are suspended. Arrests and extended detention without formal charges are very common, for example. Land seizures, destruction of olive groves, and home demolitions are frequent. Israeli settlements with tens of thousands of residents continue to be built on Palestinian land. The separation wall, settlements, and Israeli-only roads which connect them cut off large swaths of Palestinian land, and in many places cut off Palestinian farmers from both their land and their water resources. Palestinians are denied the rights of self-determination.
- 4. Why is the occupation called sinful in the Kairos document and the proposed resolution?** The resolution does not say that Israelis are sinners nor that Arab Christians and Muslims are not sinners. Specifically, it says that "Israel's military occupation is sinful." While we are more familiar with naming individual actions as sinful, we do also commonly speak of social sins like racism and war. Likewise the ongoing injustices and dehumanization of military occupation are contrary to the will of God and sinful.
- 5. What is Kairos Palestine and what is its main message?** The full title of the Kairos Palestine document is *A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. This appeal to the world was prepared and distributed in 2009 by a remarkably broad group of Palestinian Christian leaders including Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans and Evangelicals. This document is especially compelling to Mennonites because it comes to us from Christian brothers and sisters, and because of its deep commitment to Jesus' way of love even in the face of great suffering and severe injustice. The main message of Kairos Palestine is: The decades-old Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories is a sin against God and humanity. Any theology or interpretation of the Bible by Christians or Jews that justifies this occupation is "far from Christian teachings." Non-violent resistance to this evil is a "right and duty for all Palestinians including Christians." Only a resistance based on love of enemy and a repudiation of revenge can lead to just peace and reconciliation.
- 6. What has been the response of Mennonite Church USA to Kairos Palestine?** In 2011, on behalf of the MC USA Executive Board, Ervin Stutzman wrote a letter to Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters in response to the Kairos appeal. The letter said "We hear in your call the appeal of Christ to us." The letter committed to expanding opportunities for Mennonite leaders to visit and learn firsthand about their suffering, and indicated the need to wrestle with theologies that

support occupation and with the way our financial lives are enmeshed in policies of occupation. An accompanying letter to members of Mennonite Church USA encouraged Mennonites to read and study Kairos Palestine.

- 7. Why should Mennonite Church USA be involved in this problem?** Mennonites have been sharing experiences and working alongside Palestinians and Israelis for decades, seeking to discover our responsibilities in these relationships. The appeal of Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, especially compels us to pray and work for peace in that land. In addition, as citizens of the United States, whose government provides massive financial, military and political support for the state of Israel and its policies of occupation, we feel a particular responsibility to be engaged. Finally, conflict in that small area fuels much mistrust and violence throughout the region and the entire globe, and our commitment to the Prince of Peace beckons us to strive for God's justice and peace in this region.
- 8. Why should Mennonite Church USA, our congregations and members be concerned about how our financial lives are enmeshed in policies of occupation?** As people who seek to follow Jesus in daily life, we know that how we spend and invest our money is an important part of our faith life. Concerns about simplicity, fair trade and sustainability, guide our purchasing decisions. Likewise, Mennonites have spent many years developing investment strategies that reflect our deepest convictions. We do not want to profit or benefit from the suffering of others, including those living under Israeli military occupation. This resolution establishes a process for convening key partners to regularly review church investments with this in mind.
- 9. What is the Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network (MennoPIN)?** MennoPIN was formed in 2013 as a grassroots network of Mennonites seeking to pray and work for peace with justice in the spirit of Jesus. Many participants have deep and long-standing experience in Israel and Palestine.
- 10. Are we "taking sides" in a complicated situation?** In the dynamics of this situation, it might be said that Palestinians and Israelis who use violence are on one side, working against Palestinians and Israelis who are committed to justice and peace on the other side. In some ways, those who use violence need each other, pointing to the violence of the other to justify their own violence. In this situation, Mennonites seek to be on the side of Israelis and Palestinians working for peace with justice. We think that is the side Jesus would want us to take.
- 11. What about the suffering Jews experienced during the Holocaust and the current threats to Israeli security?** As Christians addressing the Palestinian's plight we must acknowledge the shameful role of Christians in the historic persecution of Jewish people. Though these experiences no doubt shape current perspectives, these horrible wrongs should not be used to justify new wrongs. Together with our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters who drafted Kairos Palestine, we long for a future when all the inhabitants of the land will experience peace, justice and security. It is important to be clear that this resolution is about the policies of the Israeli government and not about the Jewish people as a religious, ethnic or cultural community.
- 12. Might this resolution be considered anti-Semitic?** As Sonia K. Weaver has written in *What is Palestine-Israel?*: "Critiquing discriminatory and oppressive policies carried out by the State of Israel is not anti-Jewish; many Jews themselves criticize Israel's destructive policies, arguing that house demolitions, land confiscations, and disproportionate use of lethal force are not compatible with Jewish practice and belief. Christians' critiques of Israeli policies should be made in a spirit of humility and should not use anti-Jewish stereotypes when describing the oppressive Israeli practices in the Occupied Territories."



Resolution

Faithful Witness Amid Endless War

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015

The United States of America is experiencing an era of boundless and endless war.

This era began Sept. 14, 2001, when Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). It is not expected to end within the foreseeable future.

This is a different kind of war, without traditional armies operating under rules of war. The entire world is the battlefield. The enemy is shifting and ill-defined; sometimes it is a group with a history of recent collaboration with the U.S. Often the enemy is described vaguely as “terror” or “insecurity.”

This continuous state of war is the new normal. One consequence is that our nation no longer experiences times of national debate related to the morality of its participation in war.

Drone warfare is emblematic of our current state.

- It is carried out in nations whose governments are not at war with the U.S. It entails no declaration of war and little oversight by Congress. The President decides where, when and whom to kill. It is of doubtful legality under international law and, when directed against a U.S. citizen, of doubtful legality under U.S. law.
- It is a cheap way to conduct war and avoids loss of American life. This changes the calculus of war, making it painless for the vast majority of people living in the U.S.
- It often targets private residences and thus kills many innocent people. It terrorizes civilian populations by making normal routines of daily living acutely stressful.
- Many who experience drone attacks are radicalized by the experience. They perceive it as an acute injustice, which fosters a desire for revenge and heightens the risk of more terror.

We remain committed as a church to the belief that participation in war is contrary to the will of God. Yet as we live in the environment described above, we experience uncertainty about how to make our belief relevant to neighbors and friends and part of the “good news” we have found in Jesus Christ. When our young men were being drafted into the military, our belief translated into a specific witness within our context. Now, we need renewed understanding of how to live out the “new creation” that is in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17).

Again, drone warfare is a revealing example of our current uncertainty. Our congregations have paid little attention to its thousands of victims, many (some would say most) of whom are innocent of any ill intent toward the U.S. When we speak of drone warfare, we are apt to note its advantages as compared to “boots on the ground.” Although innocent individuals are being killed on our behalf, we rarely object. Although a new “generation” of robotic weapons is being developed to protect our “security,” few of us have dissented. This suggests that our moral sensitivities have become calloused and that we are adapting to the normality of continuous war.

Therefore, the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA:

1. **Calls affiliated congregations** to a renewed emphasis on trusting God and the way of Jesus, not violence, for our security. For this teaching to be effective, it must address our society’s commitment to the moral necessity of violence, our government’s undisclosed purposes in its so-called “security efforts,” and our often secret sympathies with so-called security operations. It also must seek the renewal of our minds in Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2).
2. **Calls the agencies, educational institutions and conferences affiliated with Mennonite Church USA** to ministries of healing and renewal in response to the moral injuries experienced by those who feel the guilt for having killed in the name of security and experienced by those who feel no guilt for the killing done on their behalf (John 8:11; Amos 5:21-24).
3. **Directs the staff of Mennonite Church USA** to actively seek and implement forms of public ecumenical witness to our confession: “Some trust in their war chariots and others in their horses, but we trust in the power of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).

Sponsors: Atlantic Coast Conference; Central Plains Mennonite Conference; Lancaster Mennonite Conference; Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, Kan. (Western District Conference); East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa. (Lancaster Mennonite Conference); Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington, (Ind.) (Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference); Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, S.D.



Resolution

On the Status of the Membership Guidelines

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015

Background

The Membership Guidelines were written as part of the plan to merge the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) with the Mennonite Church (MC) to form Mennonite Church USA in 1999. The Guidelines were developed for two purposes corresponding to Parts I and II in the document: 1) to provide a biblical foundation for church membership and 2) to explain the multi-faceted policy and practice of membership now embodied in the Mennonite Church USA bylaws (Articles III and IV).

The Membership Guidelines presented to the 1999 assembly in St. Louis were not approved by both GC and MC delegate bodies, so the merger plan was put on hold. The newly-constituted Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) was charged with responsibility to develop a recommendation to resolve the impasse. The CLC comprises up to three representatives from each area conference and two representatives of Mennonite Church USA constituency groups. In early 2001, the CLC recommended the inclusion of Part III to the Membership Guidelines, clarifying "some issues related to homosexuality and membership." At the 2001 biennial assembly in Nashville, the revised Membership Guidelines passed both GC and MC delegate bodies by a vote of nearly 90%, paving the way for the official merger of the two groups.

Since 2001, leaders across the church have interpreted and implemented the Membership Guidelines in different ways. Some interpreted the guidelines as a temporary agreement written solely for the purpose of launching the new church in 2001, while others interpreted it as a binding covenant for ongoing relationships in the church. In the face of changing societal laws and practices regarding same-sex marriage, some question whether Part III of the Guidelines is still applicable. In 2013, the Executive Board wrote an administrative update to the Guidelines, removing outdated language about charter membership and suggesting that delegates might engage in a broader review in 2015.

After the Mountain State Mennonite Conference (MSMC) granted a ministerial license to a pastor in a same-sex marriage in late 2013, a number of area conferences appealed to the Executive Board. They believed that MSMC failed to honor the covenant they made when they joined the denomination in 2005, since the Membership Guidelines implicitly forbid the credentialing

of a person in a same-sex marriage by stating that "pastors holding credentials in a conference of Mennonite Church USA may not perform a same-sex covenant ceremony."

In its June 2014 meeting, the Executive Board relied on this statement in the Membership Guidelines as the primary rationale for its decision not to recognize the ministerial credential granted by the MSMC. Further, the board stated that the denomination would not recognize licenses and/or ordinations offered by area conferences to persons living in same-sex relationships, unless the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly would change its stated polity. ([See the full text of the statement online.](#))

Therefore the Executive Board is testing the status of the Membership Guidelines by proposing the resolution below to the Delegate Assembly at Kansas City 2015. The board will also gather feedback on an updated version of our ministerial polity called *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership*, which incorporates a statement from the Guidelines on page 70, by request of the area conference ministers. As preparation for the Delegate Assembly, the Executive Board consulted with the Constituency Leaders Council; surveyed credentialed leaders of Mennonite Church USA and delegates to the Kansas City Mennonite Convention; and engaged in conversations with members of our denomination from around the country.

Our interactions show that the church is divided on understandings of human sexuality and same-sex marriage. That is why we also support the resolution calling for grace, love and forbearance in the midst of our differences. We think it best to restate our commitment to the agreements made by delegates in 2001, while exercising Christian forbearance with those who differ in their understanding and application of those agreements. We hope to use the next few years in delegate assemblies to focus on the mission that draws us together rather than arguments that push us apart. At the same time, we urge engagement in honest, transparent conversation about human sexuality, focusing on ways to live faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Resolution

Therefore, be it resolved:

- The Membership Guidelines, adopted by the delegates in 2001 and updated in 2013, shall continue to serve Mennonite Church USA as the guiding document for questions regarding church membership and same-sex relationships/marriages, alongside the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.
- In order to exercise forbearance on matters that divide us and to focus attention on the missional vision that unites us, the delegate assembly will not entertain changes to the Membership Guidelines for the next four years.
- We look to area conferences to interpret and implement these documents in mutual accountability with other area conferences, particularly through the CLC.
- We presume area conferences will grant ministerial credentials consistent with the guidelines in *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership*, as seems best in their context.
- We call on the CLC to take seriously its role as “elders” for the denomination, “discerning and advising the Executive Board, the Delegate Assembly, and the Mennonite Church USA on issues confronting each of them relative to faith and life,” as well as their other functions named in the bylaws (Article IX). We also call on the CLC to exercise mutual accountability by engaging in conference-to-conference peer review when area conferences make decisions that are not aligned with the documents named above, and to make recommendations to the Executive Board if necessary.
- We join hands for the work that binds us together—proclaiming Jesus’ gospel of peace, evangelizing the world and growing as missional Mennonite communities. We desire all people who are inspired by the Anabaptist vision laid out in [the Purposeful Plan of Mennonite Church USA](#) to join us in this work.

Sponsor: Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA.



Resolution

Forbearance in the Midst of Differences

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015

Background

Chicago Community Mennonite Church and Reba Place Church, Evanston, Ill., wrote the following as an explanation for their submission of the resolution at the end of this document, to be considered for adoption by the Delegate Assembly at Kansas City.

Mennonite Church USA is at a critical point — a Kairos moment. As a national church, we are mired in conflict. Many believe a split is inevitable, given our polarization specifically on issues of human sexuality and scriptural interpretation. Conrad Kanagy's report on the recent survey of credentialed leaders concluded by wondering about the dismantling of our church. Might a path forward exist that can be embraced by a significant portion of the church?

The reason we are submitting our resolution is that we believe it will allow us all to move forward as Mennonite Church USA and be church together in the midst of our disagreements. The intended consequence of adopting this resolution is that churches of differing convictions about same-sex covenanted unions may remain together within Mennonite Church USA rather than feel they must separate or be excluded by others. Specifically, this resolution allows us to confess our mishandling of this conflict, affirm ongoing ethical boundaries, name the centrality of Jesus Christ and Scripture to our collective discernment, acknowledge that we do not have consensus on matters related to same-sex covenanted relationships, and affirm terms for moving ahead together. The watching world may see a church that cares deeply about one another and has more to bind it together than its agreement about this one issue — and would need more than disagreement on this one issue to tear us apart.

We believe that many in Mennonite Church USA share our desire for the above outcomes, and wish to have their own congregational processes and convictions respected by the rest of the church, and would therefore support our resolution. Many of us desire to remain in fellowship with one another despite our differences and would welcome the opportunity to repent of the ways in which we've failed one another in these decades of conflict. Many of us desire to be liberated from the entrenched nature of this conflict so that we may be freed to join together in mission, service, witness and joining God's work in the world, allowing God's healing and hope to flow through us to all the world.

We anticipate that some may reject our resolution because they do not believe the status of same-sex covenanted unions can be considered a biblically disputable issue and that the differences in our convictions related to human sexuality are too insurmountable for ongoing fellowship. However, we believe a far greater majority is eager to embrace ongoing fellowship centered on our core Anabaptist Mennonite conviction of walking in the way of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for prayerfully considering our resolution. We are Chicago Community Mennonite Church of Central District Conference and Reba Place Church of Illinois Mennonite Conference. Our two congregations and members thereof find ourselves along the theological spectrum present within Mennonite Church USA; we are not all of one mind on these matters. And yet we have come together to share with you our hope, our counsel and our commitment to remain together as a diverse, discerning body of Mennonite Christ-followers. We are geographical neighbors here in Chicagoland but also represent two area conferences. We are united in our hope that the Holy Spirit will be faithful in completing the good work being done within and through Mennonite Church USA.

Resolution

The ways in which we have engaged the decades-long conflict in the church over issues related to human sexuality have diverted us from our central mission, divided us from each other and damaged the name of Christ in the world. While acknowledging different interpretations, we affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture as an essential part of our collective discernment. We also affirm the goodness of marriage, singleness, celibacy, sexual intimacy within a marriage covenant, and fidelity for all people, and we acknowledge that there is currently not consensus within Mennonite Church USA on whether it is appropriate to bless Christians who are in same-sex covenanted unions. Because God has called us to seek peace and unity as together we discern and seek wisdom on these matters, we call on all those in Mennonite Church USA to offer grace, love and forbearance toward conferences, congregations and pastors in our body who, in different ways, seek to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ on matters related to same-sex covenanted unions.

Sponsors: Chicago (Ill.) Community Mennonite Church (Central District Conference), Reba Place Church, Evanston, Ill. (Illinois Mennonite Conference) and North Baltimore (Md.) Mennonite Church (Atlantic Coast Conference). Endorsed by 12 pastors.



Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at KC2015

Mennonite Church USA's vision statement calls us "... to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace." The 10-year Purposeful Plan (developed in 2011) defines seven priorities of a missional church, dedicated to following Jesus' way of love and nonviolence toward all.¹

These commitments call us to give attention to the tragedy of sexual abuse in our families, churches and communities. According to data collected from the *2006 Church Member Profile*, 21 percent of women in Mennonite Church USA congregations and 5.6 percent of men reported having experienced sexual abuse or violation. We lament that sexual abuse exists not only in our society but also within our own homes, congregations and institutions.

This is not what God intended. God created human beings in God's image and declared this very good. God's incarnation in Jesus also affirms that human bodies are good. Our sexuality is part of this good order, created to enable us to enjoy companionship and intimacy and to form families and build community. Our spirituality and our sexuality are not disconnected or competing aspects of our lives but express our longing for intimacy with God and with others.

When people violate others sexually, the church is called to be a place of healing. Yet we confess that we have often responded with denial, fear and self-preservation. We have tended to listen to voices who have positional power, rather than to those who have been violated and those who are most vulnerable. In this way, we have enabled sexual abuse to continue while silencing and disregarding the testimony of victims. We lament that our inaction permits abuse to continue and the ways we obstruct God's healing.

Abuse wounds the body of Christ. Whenever sexual boundaries are crossed, the wounds extend beyond the direct victims. Abuse also harms the Friends and families of both victims and perpetrators, those called upon to bind up the wounds, and the church itself. We join our anguished cries with all who have been traumatized in this way.

We confess we are uncomfortable with the pain and anger of survivors as well as the behavior of perpetrators. In our discipline processes we struggle to find ways to support survivors as they reclaim their lives. We have often failed to focus first on their needs; we lament our tendency to give more attention to the perpetrator than to victims and survivors.

Finally, we have failed to focus on teaching and supporting healthy sexuality. We have failed to promote relationships that are truly committed, mutual and deeply respectful. In doing so, we have minimized and neglected the needs of those who suffer from sexual violence and abuse.

For all of this, we repent and seek to change our ways.

We resolve to tell the truth about sexual abuse; hold abusers accountable; acknowledge the seriousness of their sin; listen with care to those who have been wounded; protect vulnerable persons from injury; work restoratively for justice; and hold out hope that wounds will be healed, forgiveness offered, and relationships established or reestablished in healthy ways.

What we will do

(See Appendix A: Actions and commitments for more information on each action.)

As congregations:

1. Develop and teach healthy, wholesome sexuality.
2. Make sure that child protection policies and procedures are in place and followed, including compliance with state-mandated regulations or laws requiring training for volunteers and child care workers and the reporting of any violations.
3. Teach members the realities of sexualized violence, especially by church leaders or other trusted individuals.
4. Ensure that worship services and sermons are sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors.
5. Give attention to systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (ranging from the mainstream entertainment industry to pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate that condones or excuses violence against women and children.
6. Make sure pastors' job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.

¹ The 2011 Purposeful Plan identifies these priorities: Christian Formation, Christian Community, Holistic Christian Witness, Stewardship, Leadership Development, Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation, and Church-to-Church Relationships.

As church institutions:

1. Require training in sexuality and professional ethics as part of the credentialing process as well as in continuing education for all ministers.
2. Require all agencies to develop and implement clear, accessible and public policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
3. Provide consultation and adequate supervision for all church leaders. Make sure job descriptions are manageable and employees are practicing self-care.
4. Give attention to systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (ranging from the mainstream entertainment industry to pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate that condones or excuses violence against women and children.
5. Examine religious teachings that make it difficult for victims to protect themselves or speak up when they have been violated and hurt.
6. Teach and model mutuality between men and women and challenge the ongoing legacy of patriarchy in the church.

Sponsors: Mennonite Church USA Discernment Group on John Howard Yoder

Appendix A: Actions and commitments

For congregations:

1. Develop and teach healthy, wholesome sexuality. Create space for conversation and education and remove the secrecy and shame attached to sexuality. Work to dispel the idea that sexuality is “private,” and teach that it is part of our life together as followers of Jesus.
 - a. Offer Sunday school or other classes for all ages. Use resources such as the *Circle of Grace* curriculum (available from DovesNest.net) and [Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God](#) (Faith & Life Resources, 2010).
 - b. Teach sexual literacy. For example, teach children correct names for body parts and their right to say “No!” when something feels wrong or uncomfortable.
 - c. Place written resources in the church library and equip parents for teaching and modeling healthy sexuality at home.
2. Make sure child protection policies and procedures are in place and followed. These should include:
 - a. Safe meeting places with windows in all interior doors.
 - b. Two adults present when meeting with children and youth.
 - c. Screening for all staff and volunteers.
 - d. Regular training for parents, teachers and youth workers about sexual harassment and abuse.
 - e. Procedures for reporting disclosures or allegations of abuse. These should include clear guidance about when police and/or child protection offices should be notified.
 - f. Compliance with all state-mandated laws/regulations for reporting and training.
 - g. Guidelines for relating to a known sex offender in the congregation.
3. Teach members the realities of sexualized violence, especially by church leaders or other trusted individuals.
 - a. Teach everyone about consent and who can ethically/legally consent to sexual activity. Identify power dynamics that render consent impossible (underage, student and/or employee, disabled, etc.)
 - b. Use correct language to speak about sexual abuse; it is not adultery or an affair but a misuse of power, and when committed by a pastor or church leader, a serious violation of one’s professional role.
 - c. Make available in public places (such as restrooms) information about how to report sexual abuse or pastoral sexual misconduct.
4. Ensure that worship services and sermons are sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors.
 - a. Name the sin of abuse in public prayers and laments.
 - b. In teaching about anger, forgiveness, loving enemies and obedience, be aware of how abuse victims and survivors may hear these instructions. Make sure they will hear good news and an invitation to healing and wholeness.
5. Give attention to systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (ranging from the mainstream entertainment industry to pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate that condones or excuses violence against women and children.
6. Make sure pastors’ job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.
 - a. Create clear job descriptions and regular performance evaluations. Ensure that workload and stress are manageable.
 - b. Provide generous leave policies, including opportunities for education and sabbaticals, as well as supports such as accountability, consultation and supervision.
 - c. Share leadership between pastors and lay members and cultivate relationships that are healthy and transparent.
Support pastors in tending their family relationships.

For church institutions:

1. Require training in sexuality and professional ethics as part of the credentialing process, as well as in continuing education, for all ministers. Training should include an understanding of ethical guidelines regarding boundaries, power and authority, and sexual conduct, so that ministers are able to:
 - a. Understand healthy interpersonal boundaries as essential to establishing and maintaining trust.

- b. Recognize the issues of power in our sexual ethics.
 - c. Understand the importance of professional ethics, including the denomination's policies and expectations.
 - d. Be knowledgeable about human sexuality, one's own sexual self and how to deal with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants and vice versa.
 - e. Be familiar with resources for sexual abuse prevention and the denomination's policies for reporting and responding to sexual violation.
 - f. Appreciate the connection between sexual integrity and spiritual wholeness.
 - g. Be conversant with scriptural and theological resources for all of the above.²
2. Require agencies to develop and implement clear, accessible and public guidelines and policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
 - a. Provide training and assistance on prevention as well as procedures for responding to sexual violation.
 - b. Maintain a list of trusted professionals who have experience in dealing with sexual violation by church leaders and require agencies to use their expertise when responding to allegations of abuse.
 - c. Develop ways to hold agencies accountable for implementing these policies.
 3. Provide consultation and adequate supervision for all church leaders. Provide ongoing training on best practices of ministry in areas such as cyber safety, healthy communication, clergy self-care, life-long sexuality education, and ministry with sex offenders.³
 4. Seek to undo systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (ranging from the mainstream entertainment industry to pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate that condones or excuses violence against women and children. Provide training and resources for congregations to use in addressing issues such as date rape, pornography, prostitution and sexual slavery.
 5. Examine religious teachings that make it difficult for victims to protect themselves or speak up when they have been violated and hurt.
 - a. Be especially alert to teachings that advocate:
 - i. Physical punishment of children.
 - ii. Unquestioning obedience to those in authority or leadership.
 - iii. Suffering and bearing the cross as signs of discipleship.
 - iv. Submission of women to their husbands.
 - v. Forgiveness and reconciliation without sufficient attention to justice.
 - b. Provide alternative teachings that are nonviolent and life-giving to all, such as:
 - i. Promoting restorative discipline practices.
 - ii. Encouraging questions and the ability to trust one's instincts and speak up when something feels wrong.
 - iii. Stressing God's concern for life, healing and wholeness and that Jesus' death resulted from his care for those who were suffering and willingness to challenge the forces that excluded and oppressed people.
 - iv. Promoting deep respect and mutuality (mutual submission) between marriage partners.
 - v. Practicing restorative justice as part of the movement toward forgiveness and reconciliation.
 6. Teach and model mutuality between men and women and challenge the ongoing legacy of patriarchy in the church. This should include:
 - a. Attention to complementary teams of male and female leadership.
 - b. Respectful language in all relationships.
 - c. Listening to all voices in making decisions.
 - d. Using healthy conflict resolution skills.
 - e. Recognizing that those in authority need to earn their trust and that their positions are not divinely ordained.
 - f. Stressing God's concern for life, healing and wholeness, especially for those being oppressed or victimized.⁴

² Adapted from UM (United Methodist) Sexual Ethics, at <http://umsexualethics.org/Education/SeminaryCurriculumDevelopment.aspx>

³ Adapted from UM Sexual Ethics, at <http://umsexualethics.org/Education/SeminaryCurriculumDevelopment.aspx>

Appendix B: Lenses for understanding sexual abuse

1. Viewing sexual abuse through a biblical lens

Christians affirm that God created the world and declared it good. This includes human beings and their bodies. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* declares:

We believe that human beings were created good, in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 8:29). ... Because both Adam and Eve were equally and wonderfully made in the divine image, God's will from the beginning has been for women and men to live in loving and mutually helpful relationships with each other.⁵

In addition, human sexuality is one of the good ways in which people express and receive love. The Song of Solomon provides a wonderful example of sexual desire expressed in a joyfully mutual, respectful and committed relationship. Both individuals share their delight in and yearning to please the other without any need to control, misuse or dominate.

Yet the Bible is also painfully honest and shares heartbreaking accounts of people violating others and using them for their own sexual gratification. 2 Samuel 13 details how David's son Amnon plotted to rape his half-sister, Tamar. Remarkably, there is no suggestion that she is to blame. Rather, responsibility lies with the men: Amnon, of course; but also his friend Jonadab, who encouraged Amnon to get what he wanted; and King David, who participated in the scheme. Although David became angry when he learned what happened, he did nothing to support his daughter or hold his son accountable.

Why was David so oblivious to this tragedy and so unable to confront his son? Tellingly, just two chapters earlier, David had done something similar with Bathsheba. He had used his power as king to demand that she be brought to him and then arranged to have her husband killed. Sadly, we know nothing of what Bathsheba felt or what life was like for her in David's house.

Indeed, Bathsheba is often blamed for David's sin, as if she had provoked or invited his attention. Unfortunately, blaming women for introducing immorality is as old as our oldest religious traditions, including the biblical narratives. Particular interpretations of the creation of humans as well as the "fall" of humanity designate the woman as a poor imitation of the first human creature—and therefore subjected to him—and as the conduit through which human sin entered the world. Woman's nature, according to many interpretations of the "fall" narrative, is duplicitous, ignorant, willful, evil and seductive.

As Phyllis Trible has noted in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, conversations between the Bible and American ideology illuminate narratives that influence both the concept of manifest destiny and the liberation motif of those who champion human and civil rights. Trible notes that traditional interpretations of the narrative in Genesis 2:7–3:24 proclaim male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. Woman is the temptress and troublemaker, dependent upon and dominated by her husband. The biblical creation narrative, Trible asserts, is a love story gone awry. Yet it is not the only word in Scripture. As such, there is room within the biblical narrative to craft a foundation for liberation. Trible reads Song of Songs as a liberating text, where the voices of the lovers "extol and enhance" the creation of sexuality in Genesis 2.

A constant thread running through all of Scripture is the directive for God's people to care for the most marginalized: the widows, the fatherless (or children in general), the strangers and the poor. The community is to care for and protect these vulnerable populations.

The narratives of Jesus' encounters with women, including foreign women and women who were estranged from their communities because of illness or allegations of immoral behavior, indicate a reframing of notions that render women as secondary humans. In the gospels, women are persons in their own right with agency and gifts. Jesus holds persons accountable for their actions, including actions that violate the body

⁴ Adapted from *Abuse: Response and Prevention*, Mennonite Central Committee booklet, at <http://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/abuse-prevention>.

⁵ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Article 6, "The Creation and Calling of Human Beings," Herald Press, 1995, 28.

integrity of another person. Marie Fortune notes that Jesus' teaching on lust (Matthew 5:28) can be interpreted to mean that men are responsible not to violate women through any thoughts or actions and that for a man to desire to possess and dominate a woman is an offense against *her*. Applied to the experience of sexual violence, the passage does not emphasize promiscuity—it cautions against the potential for sexual coercion in thought, word and deed (Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, 103).

Leaders in the early church continued to emphasize respect and mutual submission, and to reject self-indulgence or selfishness.⁶ Indeed, Paul urged believers not to use their “... freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence. ... For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:13-14).

Today, all baptized disciples of Jesus—men and women—are responsible to pull back the veils of silence, secrecy and shame that hide the sin of sexual exploitation and male privilege in our communities. With this document, we renew our resolve to walk in the light, “until all of us come ... to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

2. Viewing sexual abuse through a cultural lens

For centuries, western Christians have lived in a context where sexual abuse, including abuse by priests, pastors and other church leaders, has been largely ignored, and the wounds of those who have suffered abuse have been largely unattended. We as Mennonite congregations have participated in this sin, at least minimizing the abuse and blaming or discrediting the victims. Recognizing and dealing openly with this sin is painful. Nevertheless, we are grateful to God and the leading of the Spirit that we live in a time and place in which the injury caused by sexualized violence is becoming widely known and condemned. We believe this opens the door to the possibility of healthier and more genuinely Christian relationships between women and men.

We also acknowledge that some teaching about sexuality contribute to sexualized violence, including a distorted notion that our bodies are shameful and bad. Other distortions include beliefs, endorsed and supported throughout history, that some bodies are more valued—the primary example or standard for humanity—while others are less valued. Violence toward the latter is often overlooked or even condoned. We see this demonstrated in the violence (e.g., lynching, sexual assault, murder) experienced by people of color throughout our history. These patterns are also evident in the disparities between the ways in which people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are charged and sentenced for crimes. White men who are charged and convicted of sexualized violence against women of color routinely receive less harsh sentencing than men of color who are convicted of sexualized violence against white women.

According to ethicist Kelly Brown Douglas, Christianity that is deeply influenced by platonic thought has emphasized the spirit and disparaged the body, thereby giving rise to Christian participation in attacks against Black bodies. This teaching lays the false foundation for belief that certain bodies may be easily disregarded and allows for the dehumanization—or even demonization—of those who are defined only by their sexuality. This foundation has allowed for the participation of Christian people in the lynching and sexual abuse of the bodies of both Black men and women.

Additionally, some persons have used Scripture to uphold the belief/practice that women and children are the property of men for their service and pleasure. These distortions of Scripture add fuel to the economic and cultural conditions that feed the sex trade, prostitution, pornography, advertising, the fashion industry, etc. This distortion also leads to shaming girls and women for their sexuality while at the same time ignoring or excusing boys and men who engage in abusive sexual behavior.

These distorted notions also create conditions for some who have institutional power to create rules and regulations that benefit them and to disregard or ignore rules and regulations that might hold them accountable and protect those who are vulnerable. This enables those with power to overlook and abuse

⁶ Ephesians 5:21, 25-33.

less valued persons, such as those who are poor, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer), disabled or female.

3. Viewing sexual abuse through a justice lens

“Justice” has a variety of meanings in our context and English language. In American society, “justice” often means following legally prescribed procedures (e.g., “justice has been done” when courts make a decision where the rules have been followed properly) or retribution (e.g., one who has stolen from another should “pay” for that injustice by spending time in prison). There are also other meanings.

As Mennonite Christians, we understand “justice” to mean “restorative justice.”⁷ This understanding of justice is intimately connected to the biblical term *shalom*, which refers to the well-being of the community.⁸ When there is *shalom*, things are the way they should be, and relationships are right. When anyone in the community impoverishes, injures or abuses another, they sin. Things are not OK. Restorative justice refers to processes through which we work to restore relationships and well-being. Restorative justice is especially attentive to the poor, weak and oppressed since they are typically the main victims when *shalom* is absent.

A number of elements are needed for right relationships to be restored. We list some of them here, noting especially how they apply when we seek to restore *shalom* when it has been broken by sexual abuse.⁹ In tending to these elements, congregations can be part of a network of support for individuals and families.

- a. **Truth-telling.** The sin of sexual abuse must not remain hidden or minimized if relationships are to be righted within the community that is affected by it. This does not mean demonizing offenders, but it does mean naming abuse as sin that disrupts *shalom*. This may include working with those who have been violated to contact the appropriate local governing authorities to report the abuse, which is required by law in cases involving children. Congregations can still provide support and resources for a restorative justice process when the legal system is involved.
- b. **Acknowledgement.** Giving the victims space to tell their story and stating clearly that what was done to them was wrong.
- c. **Compassion.** Listening with loving care to those who have been wounded, taking seriously their accounts of their experiences and being willing to suffer with them. This has often been lacking in our dealings with sexual abuse in the past. It also means treating the one accused of abuse with care and fairness in the midst of the difficult process of confronting him or her with evidence of abuse.
- d. **Protecting vulnerable ones from further injury.** We should surround those who have been abused with support and seek to make sure that they and other potential victims are safe from any further abuse.
- e. **Accountability.** Holding abusers accountable for their actions, refusing to blame victims and refusing to accept excuses or minimize abusive behavior.
- f. **Restitution.** In order to make things right, efforts must be made to find ways of making restitution to the victims; restoring to them what has been taken, insofar as and in whatever ways are possible.
- g. **Validation of the victims/survivors.** Stating clearly that they were wronged, setting them free from shame and restoring them to the community.
- h. **Repentance.** For right relationships to be fully restored, abusers need to own up to their guilt. They need to confess, take responsibility for the abuse, make long-term changes in beliefs and behavior and make restitution. According to Ezekiel 18:30-32, “... repentance involves getting a ‘new heart.’”¹⁰
- i. **Forgiveness.** This, like other elements listed here, cannot be forced, demanded or rushed. In fact, if the victim forgives too quickly, forgiveness can seem to make things right before there is a chance to

⁷ See *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* by Howard Zehr and *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment* by Christopher Marshall.

⁸ Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace*. Evangel Publishing House, 1998.

⁹ Points a–g are adapted from Marie Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999.

¹⁰ *Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver*, 2nd edition. Mennonite Central Committee, 2011, 20.

understand the serious harm done and what repentance and restoration really entail. Yet the vision of *shalom*, the Christian gospel, holds out the hope that, over time, forgiveness can lead to further well-being.

Survivors may choose forgiveness as a gift to themselves so they can move on and live their lives with joy and peace. Ultimately, forgiveness is a process she or he "... experiences by the grace of God, so that the abuse does not dominate her or his life anymore. It is a process of letting go and moving on in healthy ways."¹¹

For the offender, receiving forgiveness can mean gaining freedom from debilitating guilt and accepting his or her need for accountability. Seeking forgiveness means acknowledging the seriousness of the sin and releasing any anger or bitterness toward those who reported the abuse and are holding him or her accountable. It also means doing the hard psychological, emotional and spiritual work of making sure he or she will not abuse again.

For all, including the whole community affected by the abuse, forgiveness can mean naming both the grievous sin with its impact on others and the unmerited grace that cannot be earned but only received.

- j. **Restoration of *shalom*: reconciliation.** The ultimate hope of restorative justice is to establish or reestablish right relations in the community. In situations of sexual violence, reestablishing personal relationships between victims and their offenders may not be possible or wise. At the same time, the larger community can promote healing and safety for those who have been harmed; protect those who are vulnerable; and insist on learning, accountability and support for those who have violated others. In this way, all can move toward the vision of God's *shalom* for all.

4. Definitions

Sexual abuse refers to sexualized behavior that occurs in a relationship where one party has more power than the other and meaningful consent is difficult, if not impossible. Sexual abuse takes advantage of another in order to use, control or intimidate him or her for one's own purposes. It is violence that has been sexualized.¹² It can include actual physical contact of a sexual nature, such as hugs, kisses, touching, assault and intercourse. Sexual abuse can also involve more covert acts such as using sexual innuendo or pornography in the relationship, emotional and spiritual manipulation, or inappropriate disclosures of a personal nature regarding sexual matters.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual or gender-specific nature. It can interfere with a person's ability to work, get an education or engage in ministry, among other things. It often takes two forms:

- *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when someone is pressured to trade sexual favors in return for a job, promotion or grade.
- Environmental harassment refers to unwelcome sexual behavior that creates a hostile environment. It can include sexually suggestive remarks, jokes or gestures, displaying degrading pictures or objects, unwelcome propositions and unwanted physical contact such as touching, hugging, pinching, patting or other sexual demands.

Sexual immorality: While all sexual abuse is immoral and sinful, not all sexual immorality is abusive. Sexually immoral behavior can occur when individuals of relatively equal power voluntarily engage in intimate, sexual acts outside of a committed, monogamous relationship and/or violate their marriage covenant by engaging in such acts with someone other than their spouse.

Professional power and responsibility: It is important for all professionals to recognize the power they hold by virtue of their training and position in the community. This includes pastors, teachers, counselors, administrators or anyone in a position of trust or leadership. Even when they may not feel powerful, it is

¹¹ Ibid, 20.

¹² Some use the term "sexualized violence" to address the fact that great violence has been done to the person.

important for leaders to recognize that others see them as strong and authoritative and often defer to them. Understanding this dynamic helps guard against misusing power or overstepping appropriate boundaries. Because they have greater power, leaders always bear primary responsibility to protect the boundaries of the relationship. It is also their responsibility to act in the best interests of the person with lesser power, rather than to use the person or exploit any of his or her vulnerabilities.

Appendix C: Resources

Sermons

- [Untold Stories \(2 Samuel 13:1-21\)](#)—Meghan Larissa Good, Albany (Ore.) Mennonite Church

Books and pamphlets

- Body and Soul, Healthy Sexuality and the People of God. Faith & Life Resources, 2010.
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- Yoder, Carolyn. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened*. Good Books, 2005.

Websites

- Clergy Sexual Misconduct Awareness and Prevention, Baylor University: <http://www.baylor.edu/clergysexualmisconduct>
- Dove's Nest, Faith Communities Keeping Children and Youth Safe: <http://DovesNest.net/>
- Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE): <http://netgrace.org/>
- The Hope of Survivors: <http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/>
- Safe Church Project, Samaritan Counseling Center: <http://scclanc.org/clergy-congregation-care/safe-church/>
- Our Stories Untold: <http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com>
- Survivors Network of Persons Abused by Priests: <http://www.snapnetwork.org>
- Andrea Smith blog: <https://andrea366.wordpress.com>
- United Methodist Sexual Ethics: <http://umsexualethics.org>