

February 12, 2014

Dear members of the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board,

We, the undersigned Conference Ministers/Moderators, appreciate that the board will be addressing issues of human sexuality and request the opportunity to share our concerns as you deliberate on key matters facing Mennonite Church USA.

First, we are committed to pray for you and the leadership responsibilities you hold on behalf of Mennonite Church USA. We value your experience, insights, and concerns as you provide leadership to us. We hope that you can hear our concerns as we experience the challenges associated with same gender attraction and relationship initiatives within Mennonite Church USA.

As Conference leaders, we have experienced the unprecedented combination of leadership decisions by Eastern Mennonite University's Listening Process surrounding the practice of same gender employment opportunities and the Mountain States Mennonite Conference decision to license Theda Good, a person in a committed same gender relationship, as catastrophic for our constituencies. These two decisions have led pastors to raise a number of concerns:

- The Membership Guidelines distributed at the Delegate Assembly July 2013 are being abandoned by the leaders of Mennonite Church USA. These pastors' concerns can be articulated with the reference to:
  - “We hold the Saskatoon (1986) and Purdue (1987) statements describing homosexual, extramarital and premarital sexual activity as sin to be the teaching position of Mennonite Church USA.”<sup>1</sup> Pastors raising this concern highlight the incongruence of an official position that homosexual behavior is sin while advocating in EMU's case to hire someone to teach or provide guidance to youth and young adults, and/or a congregation/conference hiring a person as a spiritual leader and providing ministerial credentials.
- The progressive side of the theological divide has expressed surprise that Mennonite Church USA has allowed the credentialing of Theda Good, a person in a same gender committed relationship, without an intentional churchwide discernment on the morality of same gender relationships that includes biblical and theological reflection alongside of the knowledge we gain from the sciences and social sciences.
- A number of pastors in each of our conferences have begun questioning their continued affiliation with Mennonite Church USA in light of these latest developments. It is our perception that our conferences will begin losing congregations very soon as these conversations continue to drag on without resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Membership Guidelines – Distributed as an administrative update to the Delegate Assembly July 2013, p.4.

Two primary concerns warrant your consideration:

1. Common Vision and Commitments. At the core of our corporate relationship is a commitment by congregations and conferences to a set of statements of belief.
  - a. Congregations are admitted into a conference on the basis of accepting the common vision and commitments as presented in By-laws of Mennonite Church USA.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Conferences are granted the duty of admitting congregations on the basis of “taking into account the common vision, commitments and membership guidelines of Mennonite Church USA.”<sup>3</sup>

It seems to us that the spirit and intent of the core beliefs surrounding Mennonite Church USA have been challenged by the action of Mountain States Mennonite Conference for which some form of response is essential by the Executive Board. It is our perspective that governing within the spirit and intention of the By-Laws of Mennonite Church USA is an essential component of Executive Board responsibility.

2. We are requesting clarification from the Executive Board concerning credentialing of leaders. It is our perspective that the Ministerial Leadership Office does not process ministerial requests of persons in a same gender covenant relationship nor heterosexual persons cohabiting without marriage. In the case of Theda Good, did Mountain States Mennonite Conference violate our covenant to be transparent on ministerial leadership issues when seeking a ministerial credential for Theda?

We offer these reflections and concerns with the awareness that your work on behalf of Mennonite Church USA is a continued discernment that gives shape and form to the vision and purpose of our denomination. We remain open to your clarifications and will seek to walk with you in the spirit of care and compassion for your work and Mennonite Church USA.

Sincerely,

Clyde Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, Virginia Mennonite Conference  
Keith Weaver, Moderator, Lancaster Mennonite Conference  
Gene Miller, Executive Conference Minister, New York Conference  
Ertell Whigham, Executive Conference Minister, Franconia Conference  
Allen Lehman, Executive Conference Minister, Franklin Mennonite Conference

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<sup>2</sup> “Common Vision and Commitments,” Article III Congregations, By-Laws for Mennonite Church USA, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> “Duties,” Article IV. Area Conferences, By-Laws for Mennonite Church USA p.6.