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Patricia Shelly, Moderator
Executive Board of MC USA

Dear Patricia,

The Panel for Sexual Abuse Prevention has made a request for Virginia Mennonite Conference to lay aside our independent review concerning the inappropriate behavior of Luke Hartman and the various leadership responses.

Our plan was to have three woman and two men serve on an independent panel. The participants would not be members of Virginia Mennonite Conference, but would come from a sister conference. We believed that it would be necessary to have the skill and experience represented on this panel that included a) an expert on sexual abuse, b) a therapist who understands the breadth and nuance of human behavior, c) a church leader that understands how the church functions, d) a pastor that has experience in responding to pastoral care issues in a congregational context, e) an attorney for the purpose of understanding the law in relationship to legal issues associated with personal privacy, clergy issues, and organizational responses.

Our plan did not include a review of Eastern Mennonite University responses to the Hartman case. It is our perception that Virginia Mennonite Conference does not have jurisdiction over Eastern Mennonite University. We also recognized the complexity of an organization like Eastern Mennonite University that has federal mandates, human resource policies, and other policies that may be governed by regulatory agencies. We believed that the Executive Board or Mennonite Education Agency would need to be involved to develop a separate investigation that would meet these complex issues with integrity.

We recognize that there are two distinct narratives about the Luke Hartman and Lauren Shifflett inappropriate relationship. The tension in our community is over how Lindale Mennonite Church leaders hold pastoral and confidential internal information about Luke Hartman's and Lauren Shifflett's relationship. In contrast, there is a public narrative that reflects the pain these experiences cause for victims of sexual abuse. It was our hope to acknowledge the pain and anguish that exists as a result of the Hartman-Shifflett relationship and sexual abuse victims. We hoped to bring clarity to the way in which leaders and individuals acted within the scope of their role as they responded to an extremely difficult set of circumstances.

After discernment with Elroy Miller (Moderator) and Patsy Seitz (Faith and Life Commission Chair) we are ready to defer to the Executive Board. Therefore, we are encouraging the Executive Board of Mennonite

Church USA to establish an independent review panel of Mennonite Church USA, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia Mennonite Conference, and Lindale Mennonite Church on the matter of leadership practices in response to Luke Hartman's inappropriate conduct.

In addition, in the event the independent review panel, appointed by the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA, discovers information that reaches the level of professional misconduct, Virginia Mennonite Conference is receptive to the panel filing the necessary complaint. We will follow through with our processes with integrity and purpose on behalf of not only Virginia Mennonite Conference, but also Mennonite Church USA. We have also communicated this awareness to Nancy Kauffmann, denominational minister, serving on the Panel for Sexual Abuse Prevention.

The Panel on Sexual Abuse Prevention requested that Virginia Mennonite Conference secure Lindale Mennonite Church's participation in an independent review. The leaders of Lindale Mennonite Church, including the chair of the Elders, Gloria Lehman, and pastor Duane Yoder, were willing to be part of the Virginia Mennonite Conference proposed independent review. In my most recent communication with Gloria Lehman, I received affirmation that Lindale Mennonite Church will cooperate with an independent review appointed by the Executive Board. At the same time, Gloria has made two specific requests in relationship to the function of the independent review: a) clear definitions for the terms that will be used to describe the scenario that are agreed to at the beginning of the review, b) clear parameters for the review group set in advance.

Virginia Mennonite Conference through the Faith and Life Commission is developing protocols for a) pastoral responses to sexual abuse, b) pastoral and congregational leadership responses to member pastoral care cases that have a sexual dimension, c) pastoral protocols in relationship to a church agency when a member's inappropriate behaviors is discovered in a pastoral care relationship. Additionally, we are providing educational resource events for pastors to assist them in their leadership practices and ethical behavior in difficult pastoral cases.

Patricia, thank you for your leadership. Be assured of my continued prayers for your wisdom and courage as a leader in this time of rapid social change.

With sincere appreciation,



Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister
Virginia Mennonite Conference

CC: Elroy Miller, Moderator of Virginia Mennonite Conference
Patsy Seitz, Chair of Faith and Life Commission
Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of MC USA
Nancy Kauffmann, Denominational Minister, MC USA
Terry Shue, Denominational Minister, MC USA
Loren Swartzendruber, President, Eastern Mennonite University
Gloria Lehman, Chair, Elders, Lindale Mennonite Church
Duane Yoder, Pastor, Lindale Mennonite Church
Dawn Monger, Associate Pastor, Lindale Mennonite Church