

June 26, 2020

Dear Conference Council and Delegates of the Virginia Mennonite Conference,

Amidst the backdrop of renewed societal attention to racial injustice in America, Executive Conference Minister Clyde Kratz was emboldened to invite leaders in Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) to share their individual experiences as non-White participants in the conference in an effort to learn how the VMC could better demonstrate respect, equity, and justice to all people within the conference. Hence, on Friday, June 19, 2020 (the historical Juneteenth holiday commemorating the emancipation of America's enslaved) African American, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White leaders met regarding the topic of "Race Relations Within Virginia Mennonite Conference." The group recognized the pivotal opportunity Virginia Mennonite Conference has to urgently and strategically address the barriers established and maintained by racism, racial injustice, racial insensitivity, and a lack of racial consciousness.

Although many in VMC profess not to be racist, that is simply not enough. The opposite of racist is **anti-racist**. In contrast, as identified in the discussion on race relations on June 19, 2020, there are several things that Virginia Mennonite Conference and the Conference Council can do to begin eradicating racism throughout the conference including, but not limited to, the following:

1. Review VMC documents and bylaws to remove racist language and undertones and to incorporate clear statements that the congregations, conference, and its affiliates are anti-racist.
2. Provide mandatory training to all credentialed leaders on racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, anti-racism, and inclusion.
3. Provide mandatory training opportunities for all credentialed leaders to complete the Intercultural Development Inventory.
4. Provide training at the congregational level to all congregations on racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, anti-racism, and inclusion.
5. Take steps to ensure that there is equitable representation of non-White leaders, constituents, or stakeholders in initial planning groups.

Furthermore, as white congregational leaders and constituents participate in the continued dialogues on race the group recognized the need for white leaders and constituents to:

1. Show up and truly participate in the continued conversations on race relations.
2. Change their conversational posture from debating and/or dismissing the voices and information shared by persons of color to genuinely listening to understand the experiences and perspectives shared by persons of color.
3. Identify and hold constituent groups/congregations accountable for discontinuing racist practices and policies.
4. Remain vigilant to removing the barriers caused by systemic racism.
5. Shoulder the responsibility to effect change in partnership with non-White race leaders and constituents.

At this time, Virginia Mennonite Conference has yet to transparently render absolute veracity on its stance concerning racism nor has it acknowledged in writing or otherwise that it is an anti-racist organization dedicated to abolishing all systemic policies and practices which contribute to and foster racism in the conference. The time to do so is now! Continued inaction or the claim to simply not be racist resonates only as a refusal to dismantle racism and a failure to promote anti-racism. In the years and generations to come, where will history show Virginia Mennonite Conference stood in this matter...in support of racism or in support of anti-racism? We urge the latter.

Prayerfully,

Armando Sanchez, Pastor, Iglesia Enciende una Luz and Iglesia Shalom
Basil Marin, Pastor, New song Anabaptist Fellowship
Bishop Leslie Francisco, III, Oversight Pastor, C3 Hampton
Dr. Lesley Francisco McClendon, Senior Pastor, C3 Hampton
James Rhee, Pastor, CrossWay Mennonite Church
Veronica Sanchez, Pastor, Iglesia Enciende una Luz and Iglesia Shalom

cc: Clyde G. Kratz, Executive Director of Virginia Mennonite Conference
Joe Longacher, Chair of Faith and Life Commission