

Lancaster Conference

of Mennonite Church USA

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Dear Credentialed Leaders,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we enter a new year and a new decade, we rejoice that although times have changed, God's faithfulness has not.

We are especially aware of the changes in our culture regarding understandings of sexuality and marriage. In the last number of months, you likely have heard about certain persons and groups who, without approval of Mennonite Church USA, have been advocating for changes in the denomination's stance with regard to the historic Christian beliefs about marriage. For the clarity of our Christian witness, we once again emphasize what we believe the Word of God teaches about human sexuality. We have shared our convictions in a recent letter to the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA.

We believe that marriage is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman and that sexual union is right only when it takes place within marriage. We do not affirm same-sex covenants. We believe that sexual relations outside the marriage relationship, abusive or coercive sexual relations, and the use of pornography are sins. We believe that the correct response to any sin in our lives is to repent, to receive God's forgiveness, and to walk in newness of life as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. These understandings are consistent with the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) and the Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963). We expect our credentialed leaders and congregations in Lancaster Mennonite Conference to affirm these understandings in their teaching and practice.

In 1997, as a conference we adopted a statement titled The Church and Homosexuality. This represents a summary of our understanding of what the Bible teaches on this subject. We recommend this booklet to our congregations for reading and study. You can order copies for \$1.00/ea. by contacting the conference office at the address listed above.

We believe that, as God's people, we need to learn more about what it means to care for those God is bringing into our lives. This pastoral concern will include both those already in the church and those who come to us who experience same-sex sexual attraction. We confess that sometimes we act in ways that hurt people when we should be caring for them. We need to work at making our congregations communities of healing and hope. We need to create safe places where trusting relationships can be fostered and where persons can share their stories and experience God's grace and love. The church should be a place where people can find healing in all areas of sexual struggles and brokenness. We as a Conference desire to provide our congregations with resources that help us minister healing and wholeness in the area of human sexuality.

"new, revitalized, and multiplying congregations extending God's kingdom"

As we teach, witness, and disciple, we will talk with persons who disagree with our position on sexuality. Recognizing the need for God's redeeming grace in our own lives, we can share our convictions in the spirit of the Lord Jesus who is calling all persons to repentance, forgiveness, and discipleship. We do not support entering into discernment that calls into question the historic Christian understandings of marriage.

We are grateful for the many leaders and congregations in the Mennonite church who are remaining faithful to the Bible's teaching on marriage as a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. Among those faithful leaders and churches, we especially note with gratitude the Mennonite racial/ethnic congregations, as well as the church groups with whom Lancaster Mennonite Conference relates in many places throughout the world. Together we can encourage one another to be committed to the truth of God's Word and the faithful proclamation of the good news of Jesus.

Thank you for your faithfulness in ministry and your partnership in the Gospel. May you experience the peace of Christ in this new year.

Your servants in Christ,

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