

Feb 5, 2014

Dear Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA Leadership Team,

It is with deep sadness and concern that we have learned about the unprecedented action taken by our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Mountain States Mennonite Conference to license a pastor who is in a committed same-sex relationship. We recognize that this decision was only made after seeking the Lord's will in prayer and after several listening meetings across the conference and consultation with others from MC USA. However, we believe the decision to be inconsistent with the teaching of the Scriptures on homosexual behavior and guidelines for leadership in the church. We are also concerned that this action was taken contrary to the teaching position of the church as expressed in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and prior to reaching any new consensus through a legitimate church-wide discernment process. We believe this unilateral action devalues our shared commitment to unity, to give and receive counsel, and to be faithful followers of Jesus together.

This decision by Mountain States Mennonite Conference has direct and indirect consequences for the witness, discipleship, and unity of our congregations. It becomes an obstacle for missions when persons in our communities hear about such actions and are led to misunderstand or misrepresent the beliefs and practices of our congregations. We are concerned that it may cause weaker members to stumble if we are not unified in our understanding of godly expressions of sexuality and human relationships. And when our members hear of not just other individuals, or even congregations, but of whole conferences that hold views contrary to our own it becomes more and more difficult to promote a distinctly Anabaptist identity and understanding of Scripture.

We are also greatly concerned by the inaction of our sister conferences that have not revoked the credentials of licensed and ordained pastors who have performed same-sex marriages or covenant ceremonies. This lack of accountability to our common convictions and practice also threatens our unity and raises the unhappy possibility that our conference may no longer be able to fully recognize those who have been licensed or ordained in other conferences in our own denomination.

Our sincere hope and desire is that our brothers and sisters in Mountain States Mennonite Conference would reconsider and reverse their decision upon counsel from the wider church and the movement of the Holy Spirit so that we can remain in good fellowship with one another. However, if this is not possible, we must with great anguish and sorrow call upon our fellow delegates of Ohio Conference to affirm the following resolution at our next Annual Conference Assembly.

We, as the gathered delegate body of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA, do hereby call for our staff, our Leadership Team, and any representatives of our conference at the Constituency Leaders Council or other church-related meetings, to first of all urge Mountain States Mennonite Conference to reconsider and reverse their decision to license a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship. Secondly, if Mountain States Mennonite Conference remains committed to this course of action, we call our conference leadership and representatives to

request that the Constituency Leaders Council and Executive Board suspend Mountain States Mennonite Conference membership in Mennonite Church USA and bring a motion for the removal of Mountain States Mennonite Conference from membership in Mennonite Church USA at the delegate assembly during the 2015 National Convention in Kansas City.

We remain hopeful that such action will not be necessary and that the Holy Spirit can restore our unity as a faithful church. We do not wish for such an action to be experienced as punitive or inflammatory and we desire to continue to bless one another as we pursue God's calling to be a missional people in a broken world. Yet our own conscience and commitment to speaking the truth in love lead us to call one another to repentance and greater faithfulness to the teaching of Scripture and the way of Jesus.

May God be with us all as we continue to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction in these difficult times.

James Harr – Pastor Hillside Chapel Mennonite Church
Glenn Rader - Pastor Pike Mennonite Church
Herman F. Myers – Retired Pastor
Sanford Oyer – Retired Pastor
Rodney Bapst, pastor - Owl Creek Mennonite Church, Lucasville, OH
Jim Sutton - Interim Pastor at Aurora Mennonite Church
Sam Olarewaju -Pastor Berean Fellowship Church, Youngstown, Ohio
Matt Flinner - Youth/Associate Pastor Martins Creek Mennonite Church
Joel Mast - Youth Pastor Smithville Mennonite Church
Chet Miller-Eshleman - Pastor LifeBridge Community Church
Larry Augsburger - Maple Grove Mennonite Church Hartville, Ohio
Jay Conn – Martins Creek Mennonite
Sean Evans - Gilead Mennonite Church
Marc Hochstetler - Pastor Moorhead Mennonite Church
Don Hamsher - Pastor Walnut creek Mennonite Church
Haroldo Nunes, Hispanic Pastor at Salem Mennonite Church of Wooster
Timothy Singenstreu – Pastor Salem Mennonite Church of Wooster
Jeff Linthicum –Pastor First Mennonite Church Berne
Ross Miller – Pastor Hartville Mennonite Church
David Windham – Pastor Hartville Mennonite Church
Harold Mansfield – Pastor Hartville Mennonite Church
Carl Wiebe – Pastor Kidron Mennonite Church
Matt Hamsher – Pastor Longenecker Mennonite Church
Glenn Coblenz – Pastor North Clinton Mennonite Church
Brad Faler - Pastor North Clinton Mennonite Church
Wendell Nofziger – Pastor North Clinton Mennonite Church
Melanie Nofziger – Pastor North Clinton Mennonite Church
Doug King – Pastor Tedrow Mennonite Church
Todd Martin – Pastor Smithville Mennonite Church
Jesse Johnson –Pastor Midway Mennonite Church
Robert Wengerd – Pastor North Lima Mennonite Church
Randy Carr – Pastoral Intern/Elder North Lima Mennonite Church

James Cox – Elder North Lima Mennonite Church
Ken Strite – Elder North Lima Mennonite Church
Owen Witmer – Elder North Lima Mennonite Church

Leadership Team North Clinton

Rod Nofziger
Reggie Beck
Jim Short
Lila Miller
Brian McClarren
Darrel King

Elders at Smithville Mennonite Church

Sara Mast
Paul Roher
Robert Shetler

Leadership team First Mennonite Church Berne

Naomi Lehman - Moderator
Greg Meyer - Treasurer
Sharon Neuenschwander - Secretary
Darin Ringger - Chair Spiritual Guidance Cabinet
Neal Reusser - Spiritual Guidance Cabinet
Paul Norr - Spiritual Guidance Cabinet
Milly Fox - Spiritual Guidance Cabinet