

# Resolution re: Forbearance in the Midst of Differences

*Sponsors: Chicago (Ill.) Community Mennonite Church (Central District Conference), Reba Place Church, Evanston, Ill. (Illinois Mennonite Conference) and North Baltimore (Md.) Mennonite Church (Atlantic Coast Conference). Endorsed by 12 pastors, the CLC, and the MC USA Executive Board.*

The ways in which we have engaged the decades-long conflict in the church over issues related to human sexuality have diverted us from our central mission, divided us from each other and damaged the name of Christ in the world.

While acknowledging different interpretations, we affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture as an essential part of our collective discernment. We also affirm the goodness of marriage, singleness, celibacy, sexual intimacy within a marriage covenant, and fidelity for all people, and we acknowledge that there is currently not consensus within Mennonite Church USA on whether it is appropriate to bless Christians who are in same-sex covenanted unions.

Because God has called us to seek peace and unity as together we discern and seek wisdom on these matters, we call on all those in Mennonite Church USA to offer grace, love and forbearance toward conferences, congregations and pastors in our body who, in different ways, seek to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ on matters related to same-sex covenanted unions.

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## Observations about this resolution

This moderate resolution seeks a place in MC USA for those who adhere to the traditional position and those who support full inclusion of LGBTQ Christians. It is an alternative to the seemingly unending efforts in MC USA to punish, expel, denigrate, or separate from the “other side.” If it passes, one would expect to see the following:

- In MC USA, it is primarily congregations who are empowered to decide their membership, choose their pastor, and determine what rites and blessing their pastor can offer. Grace, love, and forbearance would yield to the congregation on these matters.
- In MC USA, it is primarily conferences that are empowered to grant and hold ministerial credentials. Grace, love, and forbearance would yield to the conference on matters of credentials.
- In MC USA, it is primarily the denomination that is empowered to articulate teaching positions and periodically update them. Grace, love, and forbearance would yield to the Executive Board’s decision on when changes to the current teaching position will be entertained.

Forbearance does not mean that dialogue, discernment, and debate stop. But it should suggest some parameters for how we respond to those with whom we disagree. Those who take on the spiritual discipline of grace, love, and forbearance will seek to listen deeply, soften their heart, and make room for those whose faithful following of Jesus leads them down different paths.

Grace, love and forbearance is consistent with many public calls for a new way forward, including:

- the 52 Lancaster Conference pastors and leaders<sup>1</sup> who are calling for “a Christ-like radical center” that “strengthens unity and does not require a solution in which congregations must decide which ‘side’ of the split they will follow;”
- a statement from nine pastors of Hispanic congregations<sup>2</sup> in Western District Conference that said, “Knowing that God has called us to live in peace and unity, we declare with fear and respect that if people, pastoral leaders or individual congregations, perceive homosexuality differently ... we will respect what they decide and will not impose an obligation to change or criticize their decisions, let alone question their Christian values. At the same time, we hope that our position will be respected ...”

## Commentary

*Grassroots resolution brought by those who do not have the same views on same-sex unions, but who share a vision for the unity of the church*

*Confession: names the legacy of the conflict in the church*

*Makes affirmations: there is still much that forms our unity.*

*Acknowledges the lack of consensus on one contentious issue.*

*The new approach: neither left nor right gets their perspective to be the winning perspective. Rather we all are called to grace, love, and forbearance*

<sup>1</sup> <https://themennonite.org/daily-news/52-lancaster-leaders-propose-a-radical-center/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mennowdc.org/themes-bubble-up-from-wdcs-uncertainties-on-sexuality-governance/>