

Resolution On the Status of the Membership Guidelines

Sponsor: Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA.

Be it resolved:

- The Membership Guidelines, adopted by the delegates in 2001 and updated in 2013, shall continue to serve Mennonite Church USA as the guiding document for questions regarding church membership and same-sex relationships/marriages, alongside the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.
- In order to exercise forbearance on matters that divide us and to focus attention on the missional vision that unites us, the delegate assembly will not entertain changes to the Membership Guidelines for the next four years.
- We look to area conferences to interpret and implement these documents in mutual accountability with other area conferences, particularly through the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC).
- We presume area conferences will grant ministerial credentials consistent with the guidelines in A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership, as seems best in their context.
- We call on the CLC to take seriously its role as “elders” for the denomination, “discerning and advising the Executive Board, the Delegate Assembly, and the Mennonite Church USA on issues confronting each of them relative to faith and life,” as well as their other functions named in the bylaws (Article IX). We also call on the CLC to exercise mutual accountability by engaging in conference-to-conference peer review when area conferences make decisions that are not aligned with the documents named above, and to make recommendations to the Executive Board if necessary.
- We join hands for the work that binds us together—proclaiming Jesus’ gospel of peace, evangelizing the world and growing as missional Mennonite communities. We desire all people who are inspired by the Anabaptist vision laid out in the Purposeful Plan of Mennonite Church USA to join us in this work.

Commentary

Reaffirms the 2001 Membership Guidelines (MG) whose section on “homosexuality” contains the positions that have embroiled the denomination for the last many years.

The only mention of “forbearance” is this mandate that delegates not change the MG for at least 4 years [aimed solely at the inclusion wing of the church]

What does “mutual accountability” mean? Will it result in efforts to punish conferences if they don’t interpret documents correctly?

Who determines what is and isn’t consistent?

Is the CLC not taking its role seriously?

“Conference-to-conference peer review” is left undefined. It has the potential to turn what has been a safe, consultative, and collaborative body into one with power to recommend discipline on each other.

Observations about this resolution

- This is the only resolution **not** formally recommended by the CLC. In fact, it incorporates language from the conservative resolution (the “Lower Deer Creek” resolution) which the CLC chose not to recommend.
- It creates “winners” and “losers.”
It sides with those who want to maintain 15 year old teaching positions and those who want to enhance the power of leadership to enforce those positions, and it restrains those who want to change the status quo.
- It threatens to undermine the forbearance resolution
The resolution on forbearance – which was brought by people who do not have the same views on issues related to same-sex unions, but who share a vision for the unity of the church -- calls for “all those in MC 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.” It’s an alternative to the current punitive response to our disagreements.
- At a time when trust is low and conflict is high, a vague resolution that hints at giving greater power to leadership to punish and discipline will not ease tensions in the church. It will escalate tensions.