

## Special Delegate Session:

The Leadership of Ohio Mennonite Conference would like to prepare congregational leaders and delegates for our special delegate session on Aug. 9, 2014. The purpose of our special delegate session is to discuss and vote on the proposed resolution that was tabled at our regular delegate session in March. The motion is as follows:

*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.*

The reason for tabling the decision was to give congregations more time to discuss and prepare for voting on the resolution as well as to hear the results of the denominational Executive Board decisions made at their June meetings and the report from the Ohio Conference delegation that visited with Mountain States representatives.

At the special delegate session we will decide whether or not to approve a resolution for consideration at Kansas City by the delegate body at the national assembly in July 2015. Our vote in August will not change the conference's commitment to uphold the *Confession of Faith* (1995) or the *Membership Guidelines* as policy and practice of Ohio Conference.

This document intends to help prepare congregational leaders and delegates for the special delegate session. Congregations should consider examining two important issues related to the tabled motion: 1. how we read scripture (biblical interpretation) and 2. how we understand our relationship to sister conferences and the broader denomination (polity). A number of additional helpful resources (listed below) can be found on the Conference website ([www.ohiomennoniteconference.org](http://www.ohiomennoniteconference.org)) under: "Special Delegate Session."

1. Concerned Pastors' Letter and Resolution
2. Ethical Continuum
3. Certainty-Mystery Continuum
4. Orrville Mennonite Church's study process
5. Wooster Mennonite Church's study process
6. Constituency Leaders Council table group summaries outlining suggestions for the Executive Board
7. Link to Mennonite Church USA website for the Confession of Faith and Mennonite Church USA membership guidelines

# Guidelines for Conversation:

Pastors and other leaders need to create a safe space for congregational study and conversation. The following principles can assist them in pursuing this goal. Some churches may also find it beneficial to use a “Sharing Our Stories” format as part of their study and discussion process (for more information about this contact Dan Hooley, danhooley@cantonfirstmennonite.org).

## 1. Prepare:

- Pray for the grace to listen to others who may disagree.
- Pray to release any sense of needing to defend people or to defend God. Let God defend himself. Let your commitment to listen protect people.
- Pray for God to reveal truth.
- Pray for relationships to grow.

## 2. Determine:

- To hold each other as friends
- To be willing to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit
- To seek first to understand, then to be understood

## 3. Labels:

- Avoid labels that divide us, such as traditional and progressive, conservative and liberal, legalistic and worldly, etc.
- When labels are important, create labels that encourage appreciation, not division.

## 4. Rules for Listening:

- Invite other people to offer their understanding and ask questions.
- Give people positive feedback.
- Seek to Understand.
- Do not interrupt
- While someone is talking, listen to what they are saying instead of preparing what you want to say next.
- Continually pray, “God, what do you want me to learn from this?”

## 5. Rules for Talking

- Own your feelings and emotions. No one makes you angry or frustrated. Anger and frustration are voluntary and controllable responses.
- Keep the volume down.
- Stay seated.
- No interrupting.
- Criticize ideas, not people.
- Say things that are relevant. Say only things that are relevant.
- Take turns talking.
- Don't dominate discussion. Everyone should talk.
- No private conversations.

## **Biblical Interpretation:**

The following information could be useful in exploring the topic of biblical interpretation. This list provides general interpretive principles as well as Anabaptist distinctives.

1. **Dependence on the Holy Spirit:** Every believer can understand the Bible through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and understandings of what you read and hear.
2. **Humility:** Understand that we all read from our own perspectives, our own situations, our own experiences, locations, and time, and so we must approach the Bible with humility. We must not seek to insert our beliefs into the Bible but rather let the Bible speak to our understandings and beliefs.
3. **Respect for Context:** Understand a passage in its broader context.
  - How does the passage or text fit into the verses around it and broader book?
  - Use the whole canon of Scripture to inform your reading of the text. What do the Biblical books say together?
  - Place the passage in its proper historical, cultural, and literary context.
4. **Centrality of Jesus:** Jesus is central to faith, life and interpretation of Scripture. We read and interpret the whole Bible through the lens of Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection.
5. **Discipleship:** Discipleship is critical. True understanding does not come without obedience to God's Word.
6. **Community:** Reading the Bible with other Christians in your church community enriches understanding. This is also true for reading scripture with the broader Christian community. What have the majority of Christians understood or taught about the Bible passages you are reading?

### **Applying General Principles of Biblical Interpretation:**

1. Look at the context of the following passages.
2. Look at any pertinent historical information.
3. Look at the whole counsel of Scripture.
  1. Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:10; with Hebrews 7:18-19; Galatians 3:23-25; Romans 6:14, 7:4
  2. Genesis 1:26-31, 2:4-25; Romans 1:24-32 with Matthew 19:4-6
  3. Matthew 19:11-12 with Isaiah 56:3-5

In light of these passages, how do we maintain Christian fellowship with those with whom we disagree in significant ways?

Please study and discuss the following scriptures:

Matthew 7:1-5, Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 2:1-4 alongside Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, Galatians 6:2-5; 1 John 5:16-17; 1 John 5:18; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Jude.

### **Related Passages:**

Below is a list of additional passages that are relevant to the broader discussion of homosexuality and Christian faith.

1 Timothy 5:14	1 Corinthians 7:2-5	1 Corinthians 11:3
Ephesians 5:25-33	Romans 8:1-15	1 Corinthians 5
Hebrews 13:4	Romans 3:23	Proverbs 6:16-19
1 Corinthians 6:12-20	1 Thessalonians 4:3-8	Galatians 5:19-21
Genesis 19:1-13	Colossians 3:5	Romans 13:12-14
1 Timothy 3:16,17	2 Samuel 22:31	Exodus 20:1-7
Psalms 119:11	Psalms 119:105	Proverbs 30:5
Hebrews 4:12	James 1:22	Romans 6:16-18
Matthew 9:12,13	John 8:2-11	Hebrews 13:8
Psalms 51:10	Romans 6:23	Romans 14:1-13
Matthew 19:28-30	1 Corinthians 5-7	Jude

## **Polity:**

Pastors should discuss polity with their leaders, delegates, and (potentially) broader congregation. The following information could help in this discussion.

### **1. Videos on Mennonite Polity:**

- Introduction to what polity is, and the basic ways Mennonites have structured themselves (6 minutes long): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEIRm6Q7LP0>
- Membership Guidelines—their history and how different conferences have worked with them (19 minutes long) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW4QmdK\\_EE0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW4QmdK_EE0)

- 2. Ethical Continuum:** Chart providing six common views Christians have about homosexuality. This chart is available on the conference website under: “Special Delegate Session.”

## **Worship Resources**

In preparation for congregational study and conversations pastors and church leaders may desire to address specific themes or topics in Sunday morning worship. The following themes are examples of what could be used.

### **1. Biblical Interpretation:**

**Text:** Hebrew 1:1-4

**Song Suggestions:**

STJ: 27 - God of the Bible

STJ: 62 - Christ's is the world

STJ: 79 - As I went down to the river

**2. Healing Divisions in the Church**

**Text:** Ephesians 2:13-16

**Song Suggestions:**

STJ: 13 - My soul is filled with joy

STJ: 14 - Lord Jesus, you shall be my song

STS 115 - Beauty for brokenness

HWB 372 - O healing river

**3. Human Sexuality:**

**Text:** Genesis 2:4-24

**Song Suggestions:**

HWB 6 - Here is this place

HWB 13 - Blessed Jesus, at your word

HWB 299 - New earth, heavens new

Task force that developed this study resource for our congregations:

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