

## Orrville Mennonite Congregational Discussion Process

Preparatory material put together by Bill Seymour and Norm Sohar.

Some of Norm's research included:

Michael King *Fractured* 2001. Pandora Press, USA and Herald Press  
Perry Yoder, *Toward Understanding the Bible* 1978. Herald Press

### Prepare:

1. Pray for the grace to listen to others who may disagree
2. 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.
3. Pray for God to reveal truth
4. Pray for relationships to grow

### Determine:

1. To hold each other as friends
2. To be willing to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit even if the Spirit moves you in a different direction from what you currently believe is true.
3. To seek first to understand, then to be understood.

### Regarding Labels

1. Let's agree to avoid labels that divide us, such as traditional and progressive, conservative and liberal, legalistic and worldly, etc.
2. Instead, when labels are important, let's create labels that encourage appreciation, not division.
3. An example:
  - a. Michael King suggests homemakers (hold on to what we have) and explorers (seek new ways). These labels recognize that without homemakers we would be homeless and without people to explore, we would all die at home. His argument is that there is room for both in the family.

### Rules for Listening

1. Invite other people to offer their understandings and ask their questions.
2. Give people positive feedback.
3. Seek to Understand
  - a. Learn to accurately and fairly state the opinions with which you disagree.
4. No interrupting
5. While someone is talking, listen to what they are saying instead of preparing what you want to say next.
6. Continually pray, "God, what do you want me to learn from this?"

### Rules for Talking

1. Practice Self-control
  - a. Own your feelings and emotions. No one makes you angry or frustrated. Anger and frustration are voluntary and controllable responses.
  - b. Keep the volume down.
  - c. Stay seated.
  - d. No interrupting.
  - e. Criticize ideas, not people.
  - f. Say things that are relevant. Say only things that are relevant.
  - g. Take turns talking.
  - h. Don't dominate discussion. Everyone should talk.
  - i. No private conversations.

## **The Discussion, June 4**

3-hour meeting (2 hours, 40 minutes scheduled below)

Bill will facilitate the discussion outlined below.

This part of process revised from process used by Terry Shue in February, 2014 with Ohio Conference pastors.

### **Introduction and Review (20 minutes)**

1. Call to begin – Bill
2. A brief review of what has brought us to this conversation -- Bill
  - a. Mountain States and EMU
  - b. Years of build up as we have largely ignored the conversation
3. **Goals of These Two Congregational Conversations** – review by Bill
  - a. To talk about homosexuality and its place in the church while honoring and holding each other as dear friends.
  - b. To understand and appreciate what our dear friends of our fellowship understand regarding homosexuality.
  - c. Offer feedback to Ohio Conference Delegates regarding our feelings about whether or not Ohio Conference should send a letter to Mountain States Conference requesting they change their direction or we will call for their removal from MCUSA.
  - d. To begin to address the question, “How can we have fellowship with one another if we disagree significantly on the issue of homosexuality?”
4. Ask for input about ground rules for listening and talking. Agree on some basic rules.
  - a. Bill will seek some input from those gathered in order to gain buy in to listening with grace.
    - i. What ground rules do you think would be helpful as we listen to and talk with each other?
    - ii. Bill will suggest the ones we have already listed out as
    - iii. Encouragement regarding the value of listening – Bill
      1. We all have prejudices and this is not bad
      2. We all may hold a piece of the truth
5. Review the agenda for the evening -- Bill
6. Pray – someone assigned by Bill if not Bill

### **Main Session**

#### **Directed Silent Reflection (10 minutes)**

Hopes and Fears

In silence write a sentence of a hope and on another sheet your fear about this issue

Scripture

What one or two Scriptures are important to you as you think about this issue  
(hold on to this)

#### **Collect and read hopes and fears out loud (10 minutes) Bill or and Elder**

### **Discuss Together in small groups or 2 or 3 (45 minutes)**

Share:

The biggest challenge you faced in your youth (10)

The first time you became aware of or affected by issue homosexuality (15)

When, where and who ?

Share Scriptures - one scripture important to you on this topic

Write text reference on a chalk board as you dismiss from the small group.

### **Break for a song and a bathroom possibility (10 minutes)**

### **Discuss in groups – merging into groups of 4 and 5 (45 minutes)**

#### **What I believe right now**

1. Hand out and discuss the grid.
2. Groups talk about and process the grid.
  - a. Express frustrations and limitations
  - b. Receive clarifications that are possible to give
  - c. Receive encouragement to press on in spite of imperfect tool
3. Silent reflection and mark where you are on the grid
4. Mark one to turn in (no names)???
5. Sharing at table, practicing the listening and talking rules

#### **Reflection (15 minutes)**

1. What you have just done
  - a. Admitted what you believe
  - b. Begun to unfold some of your history that has led you to where you are now
    - i. Bible passages
    - ii. Personal story
  - c. Check the goals:
    - i. Do you feel like you understand someone you didn't previously understand?
    - ii. Are you walking away as dear friends with those in your sharing group?
    - iii. Do you feel like you have learned something about sharing something difficult like this?
2. Next Step
  - a. Continue to reflect how you have arrived at your current position
  - b. Look at some Scripture
  - c. Return for another discussion on June 18 where we will look at Scripture and how we understand Scripture
  - d. We will also discuss the question of the proposed letter to Ohio Conference. On the church website there will be some information posted for review ahead of that meeting (a couple of youtube videos about polity and some other info).

#### **Dismissal (5 minutes)**

Song

Prayer

## **Orrville Mennonite Church Elder Discussion Scripture and Homosexuality**

This process was used with the Elders at Orrville Mennonite at a session following one like the one above  
Designed by Bill Seymour

### **Five Basic Principles for Understanding the Bible:**

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and understandings of what you read and hear.
2. Do not impose your beliefs on the Bible. Let the Bible speak into your thoughts and understandings and beliefs.
3. Understand the verses in context.
  - a. What does it say before and after? How does the verse you are looking at fit into the book it's in and the verses around it.
4. Use the whole counsel of Scripture.
  - a. When studying an issue of any kind look at all the things the Bible says about it and seek to understand what they say together.
5. Historical/cultural/literary understanding – this is part of context and whole counsel.
  - a. Historical and cultural setting is easy. Literary is a little stickier, because we can take it too far if we want. Nevertheless poetry is different from prose and a Gospel is different from a modern history book or newspaper article. There is a different sense of accuracy. There is accuracy, but it is different than our Western understanding.

### **Four Basic Anabaptist Principles of Understanding the Bible**

Significant input for these principles came from Kevin Himes, Matt Hamsher and [www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org).

1. 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.  
Matthew 5:17, Romans 8:3-4, 10:4, Galatians 3:23-25, Ephesians 2:15, Galatians 5:1-26, Hebrews 1:1-3, John 14:1-14
2. Discipleship is critical. True understanding does not come without obedience to God's Word  
John 8:31-32, John 14:21, James 2
3. Every believer can understand the Bible through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit  
1 Peter 2:9-10  
We do not need a pope or a Scripture interpretation dictator. We all have access to God  
John 14:19-26  
The truth of the Bible is accessible to every believer through the Holy Spirit  
Ephesians 4:11, Hebrews 13:17, Acts 17:11 (the Bereans)  
We do need teachers and equippers and should respect them, first by checking their words with Scripture and prayer
4. Understanding comes in community  
1 Corinthians 14:29-33

**April 22**

**Applying General and Anabaptist Interpretation Principles:**

**Leviticus 18:22, 20:13**

1. Look at the context
2. Look at any pertinent historical information.
3. Look at the whole counsel of Scripture, looking back at Leviticus allowing the New Testament in general and Jesus in particular to interpret the Old Testament in general and the Law in particular.

New Testament to look at for this exercise:

Hebrews 7:18-19

Galatians 3:23-25

Romans 6:14, 7:4

**Genesis 1:26-31, 2:4-25**

1. Look at the context
2. Look at any pertinent historical information.
3. Look at the whole counsel of Scripture, looking back at Genesis, allowing the New Testament in general and Jesus in particular to interpret the Old Testament in general and the Law in particular

New Testament Passages to consider for this exercise:

Matthew 19:4-6

Romans 1:24-32

Look at the context of both of these passages as well.

**Categories:**

In order to help focus the Scripture discussion, as you read the Scriptures, place them in one of the categories below.

Creation/Design

Marriage & Family/Man and Woman

Prohibition of homosexual acts

Grace

Love

General teaching on sin and its effects

Teaching/Instruction/Judgment

Responding to Others about their sin

Judging

Purpose of Scripture

**Homework:**

For May 20:

1. Go through pages 5-7 in this document
  - a. Answer the questions that are there
  - b. Write other questions you have
2. Take the list of passages at the end as well as the ones embedded in the questions and place them in the categories suggested above.

## **Elder Discussion for May 20**

### **The Original Plan (review)**

Genesis 1:26-31, 2:4-25  
Matthew 19:4-6

### **What about Homosexual Union?**

Word Study from the prohibition passages on the text translated homosexuality

#### Old Testament prohibition:

Leviticus 18:22  
Leviticus 20:13

#### New Testament prohibition:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11  
1 Timothy 1:10  
Romans 1:24-27

### **Getting Along with Others: Two important questions:**

1. If homosexual monogamous union is a sin, how should we respond to fellow Christians living in such unions?
2. Can we/How do we maintain Christian fellowship with those with whom we disagree in significant ways?

How do these passages speak to these two questions?

How do we understand Matthew 7:1-5, Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 2:1-4 alongside Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, and Galatians 6:2-5?

Does 1 John 5:16-17 help? What about 1 John 5:18? 1 Corinthians 6:18?  
What about the book of Jude?

### **Related Passages:**

Below is a list of other passages that may speak in to what we do with homosexuality in the people of faith. Read them as you can, looking carefully at the larger context. For each passage ask, "What question is being

answered by this statement?" Search for the clues to that question before and after the passage you are reading.

Look at these two passages together:

Matthew 19:11-12

Isaiah 56:3-5

1 Timothy 5:14

1 Corinthians 7:2-5

1 Corinthians 11:3

Ephesians 5:25-33

Romans 8:1-15

2 Corinthians 5 (did you mean 1 Cor. 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 read together

Jude