

TO: Ohio Conference Constituent Congregations
FROM: Ohio Conference Executive Committee and Ministerial Staff
DATE: March 24, 2000
RE: Affirmation of Sexuality Statements

We are aware of the controversy that has surrounded the discussion of homosexuality and its place in the new Mennonite Church USA. This discussion has begun to take place within Ohio Conference congregations, even though no conference congregation is directly facing this issue in the way some of our sister conferences are experiencing the discussion.

We recognize that the issues of sexuality are many beyond that of homosexual activity. While these also deserve attention (as is done well in *Human Sexuality in the Christian Life*, the study document preceding the 1987 statement cited below and in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*) we realize that homosexual activity is a potentially divisive issue being raised in Ohio Conference currently. In addressing this issue we do not intend to undermine other areas of sexual activity that are also specifically addressed in the whole of the following cited denominational statements. However, realizing a call for clarity and leadership related to this issue it seemed good to us that we would jointly and publicly state our understandings.

As congregations and a conference we need to work with the sensitive issues of our day. As we do so denominational and conference faith statements (as reflections of our biblical understanding) are the basis from which Conference leadership and staff will help congregations in their local discernment. In order to be clear about the position of the Executive Committee and Ministerial Staff of the Ohio Conference on the specific subject of homosexual activity, we want to re-affirm those portions of **“A Call to Affirmation, Confession, and Covenant Regarding Human Sexuality” adopted by the Mennonite Church General Assembly, July 8, 1987** that specifically address the question of homosexual activity. To that end we cite the following paragraphs under the heading, "A Call to Covenant":

"We covenant with each other to study the Bible together and expand our insight into the biblical teachings relating to sexuality. We understand the Bible to teach that genital intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in a marriage covenant and the violation even within the relationship, i.e. wife

battering, is sin. It is our understanding that this teaching also precludes premarital, extramarital, and homosexual genital activity. We further understand the Bible to teach the sanctity of the marriage covenant and that any violation of this covenant is sin.

We covenant with each other to mutually bear the burden of remaining in loving dialogue with each other in the body of Christ, recognizing that we are all sinners in need of God's grace and that the Holy Spirit may lead us to further truth and repentance. We promise compassion and prayer for each other that distrustful, broken, and sinful relationships may experience God's healing."

We add to these words the following citation from *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (pg. 72, adopted by the Mennonite General Assembly, July 1995):

"We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. Christian marriage is a mutual relationship in Christ, a covenant made in the context of the church. According to Scripture, right sexual union takes place only within the marriage relationship."

With these as our background, we make the following affirmations:

The statements cited above contain our denomination's interpretation of the Bible, it's church history, and the current leading of the Spirit on the issue of homosexual activity. These are the statements that we believe and affirmations that the Executive Committee declare as Ohio Conference policy and under which the Ministerial Staff functions as they serve congregations and pastors.

Executive Committee:

Ross Miller, Moderator

Carl Wiebe, Assistant Moderator

Dan Greaser, Member-at-large

Maxine Bartholomew, Secretary

Wanda Stopher, Member-at-large

Ohio Conference Ministerial Staff:

Tom Kauffman, Conference Minister

Mary Nitzsche, Regional Pastor

Wayne Nitzsche, Regional Pastor

Herman Myers, Regional Pastor