

To: Ohio Conference Congregations, Pastors, Delegates, Members and Attendees
From: Ohio Conference Leadership Team
Subject: Response to MC USA Membership Guidelines Advisory Group Report
Date: Jan. 29, 2020

In March 2016 the delegate body of Ohio Conference passed a resolution titled “Statement on Remaining with MC USA.” Part of that resolution included the following:

With this decision to remain we also wish to convey some boundaries around events which would trigger a discernment process of Ohio Conference to leave MC USA:

- substantive changes to the 1995 Confession of Faith
- substantive change to the Membership Guidelines
- any denominational requirement that Ohio Conference recognize the credentials of individuals licensed or ordained in other conferences.

Over the past many years, several conferences and congregations of Mennonite Church USA have interpreted in different ways how the MC USA Membership Guidelines were meant to be used, specifically Part III, which addresses credentialed ministers performing same-sex ceremonies and the credentialing of pastors in same-sex relationships. The reality of that was recognized at the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly at Kansas City in 2015 with the passing of *On the Status of the Membership Guidelines* and *Forbearance in the Midst of Differences* resolutions.

The *On the Status of the Membership Guidelines* resolution stated that “the delegate body would not entertain changes to the Membership Guidelines for the next four years.” Since 2015, many have anticipated that the membership guidelines would be revisited after the four-year period, particularly as there are differences in understanding as to how long the Guidelines were meant to be in place and that these Guidelines may not be in the best interests of the denomination moving forward.

At the MC USA Delegate Assembly in Kansas City in 2019, the majority of delegates expressed the need for a two-year biblical discernment process, culminating in a delegate decision on the status of the Membership Guidelines. At the same time, the majority of delegates expressed doubt that their constituents would give time and energy to a long-term biblical discernment process that focused on the status of the Membership Guidelines. One of the reasons expressed in moving forward on reviewing the Membership Guidelines is to seek an agreement that accurately reflects the variety of approaches and practices across the conferences that make up MC USA in relation to Part III, which only addresses same-sex relationships. Parts I and II of the Membership Guidelines are currently contained in the denominational Bylaws.

In light of this, the Executive Board of MC USA convened a 21-person Membership Guidelines Advisory Group for a one-time working session on Nov. 15–17, 2019, in Chicago. The Advisory Group members were carefully selected to represent all regions of the country and to try to ensure a balance of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, and theological breadth. The Advisory Group then submitted a recommendation to the Executive Board on how best to move forward on the Membership Guidelines. That report, *Report from the Advisory Group on MC USA Membership Guidelines*, was released on Jan. 27, 2020.

It is important to note that the recommendations contained in the report are non-binding and offer suggestions on how MC USA might move forward in addressing the Membership Guidelines. The Executive Board is offering no additional input at this time. The next step is for the report and recommendations to be processed at the MC USA Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) meeting on March 26–28, 2020, in Kansas City. The CLC will then offer feedback to the Executive Board. Ohio Conference has three members on CLC (Dick Barrett, Lynn Miller and Paula Snyder Belousek). The goal is that whatever changes might be suggested to the Membership Guidelines, most likely in the form of a resolution to the MC USA Delegate Assembly in Cincinnati in July 2021, will be made by mid-year 2020, giving churches, conferences, and delegates a year to discern.

As the Leadership Team of Ohio Conference, we are monitoring the process as it relates to the Membership Guidelines. We believe that the Executive Board of MC USA has tried to be as transparent as possible in the process to date. We acknowledge the difficult work that the Membership Guidelines Advisory Group engaged in on behalf of the denomination. We also believe that Ohio Conference, our churches, pastors, delegates, members and attendees will have the opportunity to participate in the discernment process at many levels. We invite you to keep the discernment process in your prayers as we seek the Holy Spirit's leading as a Conference and as a member of Mennonite Church USA.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact someone from the Leadership Team: [Dick Barrett](#) (Conference Minister), [Lynn Miller](#) (Conference Moderator), [Paula Snyder Belousek](#) (Assistant Conference Moderator), [Dean Falb](#) (Stewardship Ministry Chair), [Mel Hathaway](#) (Gifts Discernment Ministry Chair), [Vickie Yoder](#) (Credentialing Ministry Chair); or one of our Regional Pastors: [Ralph Reinford](#) (east), [Tony Doehrmann](#) (west).

Documents referred to:

Report from the Advisory Group on Mennonite Church USA Membership Guidelines: <http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/REPORT-MGAdvisoryGroup-Final-2.pdf>

Membership Guidelines: http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/MembershipGuidelines_2013_July.pdf

On the Status of Membership Guidelines: http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ResolutiononStatusofMembershipGuidelines_Final.pdf

Forbearance in the Midst of Differences: <http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ForbearanceResolution.pdf>

Mennonite Church USA Bylaws: <http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Bylaws-Approved-by-Delegate-Assembly-July-2019-1.pdf>