

## Timeline of Membership Guidelines

1860	General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) founded
1898	Mennonite Church (MC) founded <sup>i</sup>
1983	First joint session of GC and MC held in Bethlehem, PA
1995	<i>Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective</i> and new vision statement <sup>ii</sup> adopted at combined assembly in Wichita, KS
1999	Membership Guidelines (Parts I and II <sup>iii</sup> ) written as part of the plan to merge GC and MC to form Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) <sup>iv</sup> but failed to pass due to lack of clarity around the status of dual conference congregations that had been disciplined by one denomination but not the other for allowing openly gay members
Early 2001	Constituency Leaders Council (CLC), charged to develop recommendation to resolve impasse, recommended Part III to Membership Guidelines
July 2001	Membership Guidelines, which now included Parts I, II, and III, approved at Delegate Assembly in Nashville by nearly 90% of both MC and GC in order to integrate the denominations into a new denomination <sup>v,vi</sup>
2007	CLC began a review of the Membership Guidelines. Conflict caused the review to be difficult and to not move forward
July 2013	Membership Guidelines distributed as an administrative update to the Delegate Assembly; no delegate vote taken <sup>vii</sup>
Late 2013	Mountain States Mennonite Conference (MSMC) granted ministerial license to a pastor in a same-sex marriage A number of area conferences appealed to the Executive Board (EB) because of belief that MSMC failed to honor the covenant to the denomination they made when joining MC USA in 2005
July 2015	Delegate Assembly adopted the resolution <i>On the Status of the Membership Guidelines</i> <sup>viii</sup> and the resolution <i>Forbearance in the Midst of Differences</i> <sup>ix</sup>
2019	EB appoints an Advisory Group to review the Membership Guidelines
January 2020	Advisory Group recommends that Part III of Membership Guidelines be removed from the Membership Guidelines
October 2020	CLC recommends to EB to retire Membership Guidelines
Jan. 23, 2021	EB finalizes a resolution the retire the Membership Guidelines
Mar. 12-13, 2021	CLC to review latest proposed resolution to retire the Membership Guidelines and offer feedback to EB.
April 15-17, 2021	EB meeting – will make final decision about resolution based on feedback from CLC.
	It is anticipated that shortly after the EB’s meeting in April, 2021 a resolution to retire the Membership Guidelines will be presented to MC USA’s delegates to be discerned and voted on at MC USA’s next in person delegate assembly, spring of 2022 at the earliest.

<sup>i</sup> Many urban churches affiliated with both denominations and had dual membership.

<sup>ii</sup> Vision Statement: “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.”

<sup>iii</sup> Parts I and II of the Membership Guidelines are also found in the *Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA*, approved by Delegates at the 2001 Assembly in Nashville, in Articles II-IV.

<sup>iv</sup> Developed as Parts I and II only, the Membership Guidelines were created

- 1) to provide biblical foundation for church membership
- 2) to explain the multi-faceted policy and practice of membership embodied in the Mennonite Church USA bylaws (Articles II-IV)

<sup>v</sup> They were originally to be reviewed after six years, in 2007.

<sup>vi</sup> Since 2001, leaders have interpreted and implemented the Membership Guidelines in different ways, including viewing the Guidelines in one of the following ways:

- 1) a temporary agreement written solely to launch the new church in 2001

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2) a binding covenant for ongoing relationships in the church

<sup>vii</sup> The update removed outdated language about charter membership and suggested that delegates engage in a broader review of the Guidelines in 2015.

<sup>viii</sup> This resolution includes the following:

- 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 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.

<sup>ix</sup> This resolution states the following:

*The ways in which we have engaged the decades-long conflict in the church over issues related to human sexuality have diverted us from our central mission, divided us from each other and damaged the name of Christ in the world. While acknowledging different interpretations, we affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture as an essential part of our collective discernment. We also affirm the goodness of marriage, singleness, celibacy, sexual intimacy within a marriage covenant, and fidelity for all people, and we acknowledge that there is currently not consensus within Mennonite Church USA on whether it is appropriate to bless Christians who are in same-sex covenanted unions. Because God has called us to seek peace and unity as together we discern and seek wisdom on these matters, we call on all those in Mennonite Church 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.*