

Franconia Mennonite Conference

**Church Together Statement**

**Faith and Life**

Authored by: The 2015 Church Together Statements Committee

**Purpose/Reason:**

The Church Together Statements process of inviting the conference members to submit statements that help give guidance for what we as a conference should be focusing on has been meaningful. The Church Together Statements Committee wants to express our thanks to all those who participated in this process and to the pastors who came together on October 15<sup>th</sup> for discernment regarding the statements. As we consider the wide range of perspectives in our conference on matters of sexuality here are some of our observations:

- We have heard the call that there is a strong desire for the conference to stay together with a yearning to focus on mission and fulfilling the Great Commission.
- We observed that our body (delegates, pastors, and congregations) hold differing perspectives in the way in which the Confession of Faith is to be utilized and applied on matters of faith and life. What is a confession and is the Confession of Faith prescriptive or descriptive in its application? We believe these differing perspectives on the Confession of Faith is at the root of much of our discord, and we believe a shared understanding of how the Confession of Faith is used and applied would help to strengthen our unity.
- We are divided on what we believe about sexuality. We are representative of the larger Mennonite Church, and many other denominations, in that Christians who thoroughly love the Bible and seek God's leading are continuing to come to different conclusions on matters of sexuality.
- We observe that there is distrust among congregations and pastors that has led to a lack of engagement and discernment together.
- We have heard that our church leaders have not spent time studying scripture together in recent years.
- We acknowledge that as a conference our delegates affirmed joining MCUSA and out of respect for that decision and our relationship with the denomination we do not wish to challenge the discernment of that body.

**Statement:**

Given the items stated above:

- We confess that we have failed to talk and discern together on issues of sexuality in ways that are honoring of Christ within each of us.
- We acknowledge that harm was done through our conversation around the issue of sexuality in 1997 and that the pain has continued to inform the ways we engage and do not engage with one another.
- While affirming the current positions of the denomination and conference on credentialing and marriage, we also affirm pastors and congregations who seek to offer pastoral care to LGBTQ individuals and their families as they have been marginalized from our communities.
- **We call on the conference to reestablish the Faith and Life Commission for the purpose of providing at least quarterly gatherings for pastors to discern and study scripture together. This should include looking at case studies, hearing from teachers, professionals, and sages in various fields with the focus of developing relationships of mutual trust and accountability in the convictions we hold and for the congregations we lead.**