



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

June 2022

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

MC USA special delegate session

Central District Conference delegates reflect on the experience

Delegates at Mennonite Church USA's (MC USA) Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, May 27-30, passed three resolutions that help to remove barriers for LGBTQ people and those with disabilities and adopted a fourth resolution, "For Justice in the Criminal Legal System," for denominational study.

"A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation," which calls the church to repent for harm done to LGBTQ people and calls for broader inclusion of LGBTQ people, passed ... at 55.7%.

"Clarification on Mennonite Church USA Polity and the Role of the Membership Guidelines of Mennonite Church USA," an "organizational resolution" that directly impacts church polity, was approved by 82.8% of the delegates. This resolution retires the denomination's Membership Guidelines, which,

among other things, prohibits pastors from performing same-sex covenant ceremonies. It also calls the church to "commit to the difficult work of being church together amidst our differences, working at biblical justice and reconciliation where there is conflict."

"This weekend, we did the demanding work of struggling together as the body of Christ," said MC USA Executive Director Glen Guyton. "We will continue to live into our Renewed Commitments of following Jesus, witnessing to God's peace and helping those we encounter to experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit."

Excerpted from a release on the MC USA website: www.mennoniteusa.org/news/mc-usa-delegate-assembly-widens-the-circle-for-lgbtq-people-and-those-with-disabilities/



Mennonite Church USA

Delegates worked in table groups throughout the session, giving opportunities to learn with and from others representing the breadth of Mennonite Church USA.

Jan Lugibihl, Chicago Community Mennonite Church, president-elect of Central District Conference

I hadn't been to a Mennonite Assembly for a while, so I was a bit anxious. Anxious about COVID, my table group and, especially, the discussions on the resolutions to retire the Membership Guidelines and commit to Repentance and Transformation.

At past Assemblies I'd seen LGBTQIA people demeaned and intentionally excluded from discussions and decisions about them. I have friends who left the Mennonite Church because of actions the church took or didn't take and I grieve for the loss of their gifts and their presence. I prayed that this time everyone would be treated with the respect and dignity we all deserve as God's beloveds. (continued on p. 2)

As we talked about the resolutions addressing LGBTQIA inclusion, I had a visceral sense of being surrounded by the spirits of those who had been part of similar conversations over the last 20 years and those who were watching to see what would happen this time.

While the votes on the Membership Guidelines were being counted, I joined a group singing in the Inclusive Pastors' room and was reminded of how much we gain when all voices are included and how our singing together pleases God.

I know there will be hard times ahead for MC USA as churches and conferences decide how to respond to the actions taken. And, I look forward to seeing how we celebrate and live into the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation.

Austin Sachs, Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va.

Something that arose in my mind during the session and has stuck there since, is how do we continue and improve communication outside the delegate sessions. What I heard throughout the weekend from congregations and conferences who were hesitant to vote yes on reconciliation was that it feels rushed. But at the same time it has been seven years since the forbearance resolution and decades since the conversation of LGBTQ arose in the denomination, which makes me feel like we have failed to communicate outside our congregations and conferences during non-convention years. Especially as the Central District is less and less a geographic conference, is there a role we can play to talk to other conferences that we live near (for us at Shalom that would be Virginia Mennonite and Allegheny Mennonite as both have congregations in Harrisonburg)? And even further, what are we doing to communicate and converse with Lancaster Mennonite Conference, Conservative Mennonite Conference, etc.? As there will be churches who will leave MCUSA, how do we ensure that this weekend was not our last time in conversation?

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Michael Crosby, First Mennonite Church, Urbana, Ill., member of CDC Ministerial Committee

The majority of our decision-making was focused on two momentous resolutions.

The first, ... resolved to "retire the Membership Guidelines." The sticking point was the third and final section of the Guidelines ... "Section Three" has hung over MC USA for the two decades of the denomination's existence. It presented a harmful theology of gender and sexuality, and called for disciplinary practices that have hurt LGBTQIA people and their allies within and beyond the church. The resolution to retire the Guidelines passed overwhelmingly, with 82% of delegates voting in favor ...

But many of us believed that wasn't enough. The second resolution, "A Resolution for Repentance & Transformation" (R&T), was written by the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors leadership team, of which I'm a part ...

R&T bore witness to the collective violence and harm done to LGBTQIA Mennonites and their families. It named ways that the church has perpetuated this harm, and in so doing opened up a path for the whole church to begin working on healing and restoration from the brokenness caused by our denomination's "policies, practices, and theologies." Hallelujah, the resolution passed, with 55% of delegates voting in favor.

R&T challenged the delegate body. Many people heard the testimonies of pain and hope, but simultaneously felt grief over their own congregations or conferences, full of people who were closed off to this testimony and likely to reject it. Some heard these testimonies for the very first time. An older pastor at my table told us tearfully (I'm paraphrasing): "I've never had this experience before. I'm breaking in two. I realize now that I have to choose between sacrificing LGBTQIA people and sacrificing my family and other people in my church who have rejected their testimony. I see that LGBTQIA people have been sacrificed for too long, so I'm voting for this resolution."

My sense is that many people experienced this kind of opening and felt this fracturing, which made a momentous, joyful moment also a tender and tearful one.

— Excerpted from a blog by Michael Crosby