

Discussion of Article 19 CDC Annual Meeting - 2026

From the Introduction to the *Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective*:

How do Mennonite confessions of faith serve the church?

- *First, they provide guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture. At the same time, the confession itself is subject to the authority of the Bible.*
- *Second, confessions of faith provide guidance for belief and practice. In this connection, a written statement should support but not replace the lived witness of faith.*
- *Third, confessions build a foundation for unity within and among churches.*
- *Fourth, confessions offer an outline for instructing new church members and for sharing information with inquirers.*
- *Fifth, confessions give an updated interpretation of belief and practice in the midst of changing times.*
- *Sixth, confessions help in discussing Mennonite belief and practice with other Christians and people of other faiths.*

Introduction

In Central District Conference we are engaging in a discussion about Article 19 from *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*—the confession of faith that is ours as part of Mennonite Church USA. Our discussion is in response to questions that have come to CDC leadership from congregations considering whether to join our conference and who seek clarity about our understanding and implementation of Article 19—especially the language that limits sexual intimacy to a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. While acknowledging this reflects traditional Christian teachings, our conference, as well as our denomination, has embraced a broader understanding of faithful, covenantal sexual relationships than that represented in Article 19.

Because we value the Confession of Faith, we want to interact with it and clarify it, not replace it. We are trying to embody the love of God in our words and our statements as well as our actions. Our end goal is to create a formal response to Article 19 that we can affirm as a conference and that will provide guidance about what we believe about healthy relationships.

During this year's mid-year gathering, we asked participants what they affirmed and do not affirm in Article 19, and what was most important to them as we revisit our relationship to the Confession of Faith. Here are some of the main themes that came from that discussion: We can affirm that God created humans to be in relationship, and we have a responsibility to one another. Article 19 recognizes the importance of community beyond the family, and single people are given equal respect to married people. Children, while not the sole goal of marriage, are a blessing and should be loved and respected.

We found the language about marriage being between only a man and a woman to be problematic. In Article 19 divorce is seen as a failure and sex is only condoned in the context of marriage.

The participants listed the following themes as being most important in our work of revisiting this statement:

- emphasis on committed relationships built on mutuality and love rather than emphasis only on marriage
- adoption and children outside the context of marriage
- emphasis on unity rather than progeny
- space for divorce without shame, not all marriages are “for life” and believing this often has led to the oppression of and violence against women
- creating a positive sexual ethic rather than a document of rules to be followed—an aspirational document rather than a judgmental one
- naming the reality that many people have sex outside of marriage and sex and cohabitation only in marriage is not a requirement for church membership
- affirm queer perspectives

This morning we ask you to reflect on a few of these themes in your table groups by discussing the following questions. Please keep in mind that we are a diverse gathered group, and that opinions at your table will differ. This is ok! We can have a discussion that involves disagreement. We encourage you to approach these questions with a sense of curiosity and to hold each other with love and respect during your discussion.

1. One of the most prominent themes that came out of the mid-year gathering was the desire to affirm relationships based on a covenant of mutuality that includes, but is not limited to, marriage. How might emphasizing covenant and respect in relationships benefit those in your congregation in different life circumstances (such as older adults, disabled persons, LGBTQIA+ persons and relationships, young couples, those who are single, etc.)?
2. What are some of the ways we affirm/embrace family that go beyond the way family is defined in Article 19 (mother, father, biological children)? Why is it important to include different kinds of families in a statement of faith?
3. What are some of the key features you would like to see in a positive sexual ethic (such as intimacy based on respect, an emphasis on mutual care, or other characteristics of healthy relationships)?