

March 12, 2017 Congregational Forum: A report

- About 70 people attended the forum
- Led by implementation team members Becky Bontrager Horst, Marilyn Graber, and Phil Waite
- A review of the process so far, opportunity for prayer, conversation around tables, sharing in the full group
- Individual feedback on a survey sheet to indicate support of the proposed statement on a “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” spectrum; questions related to willingness to continue relate to each other as fellow believers across this spectrum
- Interpretation offered in both Spanish and ASL

The forum confirmed that we have a diversity of beliefs among us. Approval or rejection of the proposed welcome statement may not change the belief of any individual among us. It is certain that action on the statement will not introduce beliefs not already present within our congregation.

Some of us ...

- Believe that any same-sex relation is a sin in God’s eyes and that if CMC adopts this welcome statement, we are making a terrible mistake.
- Believe that we should welcome LGBT Christians at CMC, but they must remain celibate in order to be faithful to God’s will.
- Are conflicted by the proposed welcome statement. We want to practice hospitality, but we don’t want the congregation to split or be mired in conflict over the issue of welcoming LGBT persons as “out of the closet” participants at CMC.
- Believe strongly that we must openly welcome LGBT persons as part of God’s good creation, but are unsure about implications if a same-sex wedding might be officiated by a CMC pastor sometime in the future or if we might call an LGBT leader sometime in the future.
- Believe that this welcome statement is long overdue and perhaps does not go far enough—that we should join the network of supportive congregations and explicitly state that same-sex marriages are affirmed at CMC.

All of us want to be faithful to God’s will and God’s ways, but we have had different experiences with the Bible and different experiences with LGBT Christians.

Some of us ...

- believe that the scriptures clearly prohibit same-sex relations.
- believe that Jesus and the early church showed us to use scripture as an important guide, but one that must sometimes be superseded by God’s higher law of love.
- have never met an LGBT Christian.
- may have only met LGBT Christians who have decided to remain celibate for life.
- have family members or students or colleagues or friends who are both LGBT and also committed Christians who exhibit fruits of the spirit, and who may be single or married.

(over)

March 26, 2017 Congregational Meeting: An invitation

Please join us on March 26 at 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall for prayer, discernment and action on the proposed welcome statement. At this meeting, the congregation will also take action on renewing terms for Daniel Yoder and Talashia Keim Yoder.

The proposed welcome statement:

We believe that all individuals are created in God's image, and all people, regardless of age, gender, race, citizenship status, abilities, or sexual orientation, are welcome as full participants in the life of our congregation.

What does full participation mean?

- Not synonymous with membership, but contains the possibility of membership, with *all of its commitments and obligations, rights and privileges*.
- Basically, the statement clarifies that (like the other things on the list), citizenship status and sexual orientation are not *extra hurdles* that have to be overcome before participating in any aspect of congregational life, including seeking membership.
- Qualifications and expectations for those under consideration for any particular role in congregational life would not be greater (or less) than what is required of any other participant.
- If the congregation is strongly supportive and the board approves, it may also mean that CMC pastors would be free to choose to officiate at same-sex weddings. We remain sensitive to implications for conference and denominational credentialing of our pastors. (CMC practiced such sensitivity when we were ready to credential female pastors before the conference was at that point.)

If approved, we will use this statement to inform and represent the practice of our congregation. *CMC members unable to attend the congregational meeting, may submit absentee ballots at the church office or via email (board@collegemennonite.org) before 9:30 a.m. March 26.*

As we prepare to act on the proposed statement, this is a word from our congregational and pastoral leadership:

It is our prayer and hope that everyone who has felt welcome here before the proposed action will be able to continue to seek and find meaningful ways to live out their Christian faith together with each other. If the statement is approved, we hope other seekers who have in the past doubted whether they would find welcome here, will indeed find that welcome. We want all who wish to respond to the invitation to follow Christ to feel that welcome among us.

CMC Board:

Becky Bontrager Horst
Richard Kauffman
Ron Kennel
Max Mertz
Rebecca Sommers
Joe Springer
Seth Yoder

CMC Pastoral Team:

Gwen Gustafson-Zook
Marty Lehman
Phil Waite
Daniel Yoder
Pamela Yoder
Talashia Keim Yoder