

**College Mennonite Church
Minutes – Congregational Meeting
November 13, 2016**

1. **Opening:** Max Mertz, congregational moderator, convened the meeting at 4:00 p.m. and recited the congregational vision statement. He introduced the agenda for the meeting, and then the group sang “Where Charity and Love Prevail” (to the tune of “Amazing Grace”).
2. **Strategic priorities update:** Chairs of action groups related to priority #3 (Community and Unity) reported on their activities:
 - Caryl Guth said that the group working on goal 3.1 has focused on real, not ideal or abstract, ways to transform our physical space to be more welcoming. After assessing the exterior and interior of the building, the group concluded that the southeast doors should be designated as the main entrance; a new digital sign should be installed on the grounds; new interior directional signs should be brightly colored, with more readable type and Spanish translations; and some of the interior Gathering Room walls should be converted to glass so that people can see into the memorial garden.
 - Carol Grieser said that the group working on goal 3.2 has focused on ways to enlarge our circles of comfort. Ideas include an “upset the fruit basket” approach to the Wednesday evening meal, where folks are randomly assigned to tables where they don’t know everyone, and a revised “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” activity in January. This action group is collaborating with other action groups in looking at small groups, since some goals are overlapping. Carol encouraged “eyeball to eyeball” interaction, introducing ourselves and getting to know each other.
3. Don Garber reviewed the **minutes** of the congregational meeting of June 6, 2016, which were approved.
4. Most of the rest of the meeting was focused on the **LGBT inclusion statement discernment process**. Becky Horst reviewed CMC’s history over the past 20 years of trying to understand the relationship between homosexuality and Christian faith. In light of strong support for an LGBT inclusion statement during the 2015-16 strategic planning process, the church board named a special task group to propose a discernment process that would promote both Community and Unity (strategic priority #3) and Hospitality and Welcome (priority #1). The task group (with Becky as chair) met six times from June to September and submitted its report, with a proposed welcoming statement for CMC, which the church board addressed in its October meeting.

Now begins the congregational discernment process to determine what our welcoming statement will say and what it will mean. The expectation is not that all of us will end up thinking alike (the LGBT task group was not all of one mind when it concluded its work), but rather that we increase our understanding of and respect for each other. The goal is to bring the proposed welcoming statement to the March 2017 congregational meeting. Between now and then there will be opportunities for us to dialogue with each other respectfully across our differences. At the end of this meeting a handout will be distributed with the proposed welcoming statement and a tear-off form asking for affirmations, concerns, and suggestions for the discernment process.

Becky concluded with a list of four things required for effective Christian discernment:

- **Faith** – trust in God’s Holy Spirit at work among us

- **Freedom** – to speak honestly, which results from respectful listening
- **Clear information** – sent out in timely fashion and received thoughtfully
- **Consensus** – aims not to change people’s minds, but to discover common ground that is already in the group

Pastoral team leader Phil Waite affirmed the work of the group (which the assembled group supported with a round of applause). Although Phil had planned to be part of the task group, he encouraged the group to proceed during his sabbatical absence, and its work concluded before his return. Phil said that he trusted the people in the group and is pleased with the results.

Phil shared some reflections on marriage as a way to express his own positions and feelings. He noted that in our throw-away culture, marriage is countercultural. He expounded on three positive contributions that marriage provides for society: permanence, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. In light of his study of the scriptures and reflections on his own experience and the Christian tradition of blessing marriages, Phil said that he has come to believe that the church should extend the gift of marriage to same-sex couples.

Phil expressed some concern about the discernment process. He encouraged us not to think in terms of winners and losers; the church at its best is patient. He concluded by saying that our practices will change us—the trajectory we are on is leading us to become more open.

5. **Table discussion: CMC hospitality.** In her remarks earlier, Becky Horst had noted that, while some congregations began their discernment with the issue of membership, we will focus on hospitality at CMC. Time was allotted for table group discussion of the following questions:

- Who would probably not feel welcome at College Mennonite Church?
- If I’m honest, who would I feel uncomfortable with if they attended College Mennonite?
- What CMC participants are not here today? How might we hear their voices in the LGBT welcome discernment process?

In response to a question about next steps, it was noted that the implementation team will use the table group comments and those in response to the handout to plan activities that will carry the discernment process forward.

6. The moderator asked if there were **other items of business** to consider. There being none, the meeting was **adjourned** about 5:30 p.m. with singing led by Merle Sommers. Attendance: 132.

Recorder: Don Garber