



MOSAIC
mennonite
conference

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An Open Letter to the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board

Dear Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA:

The past few years have been a tumultuous time. Together we have weathered a global pandemic, navigated political unrest, and struggled to find unity around church polity in Mennonite Church USA. At the same time, we have continually sought to follow wisely and faithfully in the way of Christ's peace.

In Mosaic Conference, we have noticed new tensions and emerging realities. At our annual assembly, Mosaic Conference delegates affirmed our Pathway process, which includes a time of discernment around our denominational affiliation and our conference's strategic plan and vision. We want to share with you some of what we are thinking and experiencing, so we can journey this path of discernment together.

First, we want you to know that we appreciate you. We respect each of you and the commitment you have to following Jesus together. We acknowledge that voluntary board leadership is hard work that is often underappreciated. Thank you for serving and leading the Church.

We are also grateful for the ways that we have been enriched by participating in Mennonite Church USA—for friendships across geography and for opportunities to learn and worship together at conventions, camps, and retreats. We are grateful for MC USA staff and agencies that have helped us to flourish as a conference and a community, for the provision of healthcare through The Corinthian Plan, and for the educational foundation generations of students have received through Mennonite colleges and universities. Many of us feel strong loyalties to these agencies and schools and desire them to flourish in these tumultuous times.

Second, we admit that Mosaic Conference can be a challenge. Our realities have been constantly shifting since 2019, when Eastern District Conference and Franconia Conference voted to reconcile and become this new entity, Mosaic. Immediately, a group of churches joined Mosaic from Florida, and we have experienced continued growth in California. Our network of immigrant churches and leaders continues to expand and challenge our historic geographic understandings. Our historical rootedness is often masked by the newness of our fellowship together.

Finally, we apologize for times when we seem to be self-centered and non-collaborative. We have witnessed a significant movement of God's Spirit in our conference in the last few years, and it is easy for us to forget that God is also moving elsewhere in the denomination. We acknowledge that there are good things happening beyond Mosaic Conference communities, and that we too have much to learn. We are sorry for our lack of humility, for our boastfulness, for our pride. We commit to walking alongside you with a posture of learning, listening, and loving.

In the coming months, our conference is entering into a time of discernment. During the pandemic, we committed to becoming a new community together, and we are still trying to figure out what that means. As we have moved forward into our new identity, we have increasingly felt a disconnect between the mission and direction of our conference and the mission and direction of Mennonite Church USA. While we share many values—a commitment to anti-racism, justice, and reconciliation is among them—the ways in which we go about pursuing those values have diverged. Changes in our geography, demographics, and cultures have transformed us; we are not who we were 20 years ago when Mennonite Church USA was formed.

At the same time, our conference has been unable to shift perceptions of us in the wider denomination. Sometimes it feels like we do not belong, and that the relationship has even become adversarial. We want to bring our gifts and our questions, our newness, and our rootedness into the conversation with the broader community of Mennonite Church USA. We wonder how we could grow in our relationships with the wider church so that we can find ourselves mutually transformed by the gifts that we each bring.

Mutual transformation is central to who we are becoming as a conference. For the last decade, “interculturalism” has been a priority that has shaped how our conference functions, interacts, and makes decisions. As we have grown more ethnically diverse, we have become more aware of the variety of cultures already existing in our conference: theological and spiritual streams, generational differences, “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” Mennonites, among others. We have struggled to figure out how all this diversity can co-exist in one conference, and yet somehow it (mostly) does. We are learning how to love and respect one another in and through our differences. It is an ongoing process, one that we are far from perfecting, and it is messy. Coalitions don’t always form along the lines we would expect, and surprising conflicts often pop up. Loving and respecting each other takes dedication, care, and commitment. But we are trying our best to live into this “Mosaic” vision that God has given us and, as hard as it is, we want to stay together.

Diversity and challenge have emerged anew following the special delegate sessions at Kansas City. Our conference has over 100 ministries and congregations and 150 credentialed leaders in eight states. Within those communities, we find a complexity of perspective, understanding, and vision. The passing of the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation has been a particular challenge for our Conference life. Many in our conference see the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation as a departure from the 2000-year legacy of Christian faith and consider this resolution to be at odds with the denomination’s stated positions in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and Mosaic’s Grace and Truth statement, which is one of our conference’s formation documents.

At the same time, many of us recognize in another Mosaic formation document, the Going to the Margins statement, that we need to extend grace to LGBTQ+ persons in ways that we have not in the past as well as to repent for actions and attitudes that have not evidenced the peaceable way of Jesus. While this posture of repentance and the accompanying possibilities for transformation need our attention, some in our conference believe that there would have been ways of stating and enacting the Resolution for Repentance and Transformation that may have been more closely aligned with the practices and postures of our Anabaptist tradition. We also experience frustration with the process by which the Executive board brought this resolution forward to the delegate body. In response to the Kansas City special delegate session, some members of our conference are delighted with the denominational decision to retire our membership guidelines and are searching for opportunities to integrate repentance and transformation into their congregational practice. Others voted to retire the membership guidelines and, although they strongly support LGBTQ+ inclusion, could not vote for the Repentance and Transformation resolution because they disagreed with its tone or assumptions. Others supported retiring the membership guidelines but felt that the decision-making process at Kansas City was flawed and non-inclusive. Still others felt that the membership guidelines should remain in place and desired to reaffirm a traditional view of marriage. Several congregations have already removed themselves from Mosaic since the Kansas City meetings.

In addition to these perspectives, we heard from many BIPOC leaders in our conference that the delegate session was difficult and even harmful for those who did not come from the white dominant culture. This was true even for some of our leaders of color who voted in favor of the recommendation. The emphasis on linear time and task-orientation at the expense of event-based time and relationship-building felt rushed and disrespectful. For those who speak English as a second language, the quick timing was even more difficult as they sought both to comprehend what was going on and to formulate ways to express what they were thinking and feeling. These leaders felt excluded and unwanted. Some have since urged us to withdraw from the denomination quickly. We would request focused Mennonite Church USA staff attention alongside these leaders, some of whom are present at the Constituency Leadership Council as representatives of BIPOC constituency groups.

It is in the midst of these complexities that our conference board anticipates moving into a time of discernment together as a conference. What does it mean to be Mosaic in the face of such differences? Is

there a way for us to continue to partner together in our missional, formational, and intercultural priorities and to walk a new path together, one that does not allow our complexities to separate us? During this time of discernment, we ask the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA for your support in the following ways.

At our annual assembly, Mosaic Conference delegates approved a change in our bylaws that allows congregations to suspend their membership in Mennonite Church USA. We request that MC USA honor our decision in the ways you talk about and relate to our conference while we acknowledge that Mennonite Church USA membership is derived by membership in a Conference at this time. Are there new ways we can explore relating to one another?

Our shared value of reconciliation calls us to work on those parts of our relationship that are hurtful or fractured. Whether or not Mosaic decides to maintain an affiliation with Mennonite Church USA, we desire to be reconciled to one another: going separate ways does not need to result in schism. Over the next two years, we invite representatives of Mennonite Church USA to join representatives of Mosaic Conference in conversation and openness. We ask you to meet us in the hard work of changing how we relate to each other so that we witness to the reconciling love of Jesus in our broken and beautiful world—together.

As we discern over the next two years, we ask that you walk alongside us. We desire your presence, your accompaniment, and your love and support as we seek God's future for our conference. We understand how easy it could be to withdraw as you wait for the result of our discernment, but we need you. We need you to seek God with us, to share your wisdom and your stories, to listen to our confusion and our wonderings, to sit with us in silence and in prayer. Is it possible to find ways that our flourishing might be possible together? Continue to include Mosaic Conference as a full Mennonite Church USA member in this time as we navigate, which includes possible board and committee appointments that can help to strengthen our relationships, trust, and communication. We will also do our best to lean toward strengthening relationships through staff and board level engagement.

As we together seek the Spirit's leading, we are grateful to know that we are a part of the continuum of God's story; the Church doesn't begin or end with us, yet we are gifted with a role to play. We are thankful to be following Jesus in this time and this place with all of you, our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we pray that together we may experience *the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that we will be filled entirely with the fullness of God. Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen. (Ephesians 3:18-21, CEB)*

In the way of Jesus,

Mosaic Mennonite Conference Moderators,



KEN BURKHOLDER



ANGELA MOYER WALTER



ROY WILLIAMS