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To: Mennonite Church Canada Congregations, Area Churches

General Board Confession

As the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada anticipates potential change following the Special Assembly, we are reminded of things done, and not done. We are deeply aware of weakness and strength. We are aware of successes and failures. We are aware that the journey is not over, and significant challenges remain.

We want to take this opportunity to share with you, sisters and brothers of MC Canada, some final reflections and confessions, especially as related to one of the most difficult parts of the journey that we have travelled, namely, our efforts to help our Church discern faithfulness as related to questions of same-sex relationships.

The delegate assemblies of the General Conference Mennonite Church (Saskatoon, 1986) and Mennonite Church (Purdue, 1987) passed resolutions articulating the position of their denominations regarding same sex relationships. Both resolutions committed the denominations to ongoing conversations regarding same sex relationships and with same sex attracted persons and their supporters.

At its formation in 2000 Mennonite Church Canada integrated the Canadian congregations of these two bi-national denominations and agreed to uphold and implement these resolutions of the bi-national denominational bodies. The General Board of Mennonite Church Canada had and continues to have the responsibility to lead the implementation of the inherited resolutions. An important aspect of these resolutions is a commitment to “mutually bear the burden of remaining in loving dialogue with each other.”

We acknowledge that few if any LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, or Queer) individuals have characterized these 30 years as reflecting a loving dialogue. The General Board acknowledges the difficult experiences expressed by LGBTQ individuals involved in this process.

As we reflect on our past actions, we acknowledge that until recently LGBTQ individuals and groups were not permitted access or exposure at Mennonite Church Canada assemblies. Furthermore, LGBTQ individuals have been requested to discontinue their positions of leadership. We admit that this is not how mutual discernment should occur.

The *Being a Faithful Church 1-7* (BFC) process was another attempt, in part, to fulfill the promise to remain in “loving dialogue.” This was a more intensive and sustained conversation - with 7 cycles of congregational feedback.

While the BFC process was not restricted to discernment of same-sex relationships, it was designed to encourage our church to function as a discerning/interpreting community and be



a resource and guide to discerning God's call in various questions facing the church. It was our intention, however, that the subsequent documents and assemblies would allow us as a church to faithfully discern questions of same-sex relationships, scripture, and the Christian tradition all within our 21st century context.

The General Board decided at the outset, that the process of the BFC should reflect the congregationally-based polity of the denomination. This meant that discernment of faithfulness would emerge from the congregations and not only from the academy, advocacy groups, institutional structures, or a representative committee. The BFC Task Force was mandated by the General Board, not to do the discerning, but to design a process that would allow all voices in our Church to speak, to be heard, and to hear what others were saying.

Despite this sustained effort, LGBTQ individuals bear testimony to being ignored, verbally abused, and silenced at times during the BFC 1-7 process. Despite our best planning we can see now how past decisions and actions limited LGBTQ experiences and perspectives from being heard in our documents as well as in the planning and leading of assemblies. We sincerely regret and apologize for the actions and decisions within our Body that caused such testimony to emerge. We confess that at times the Body of Christ did not act like his Body.

While we recognize that hurtful words were expressed by persons from various perspectives, we acknowledge that the dominant group needs to take primary responsibility for failure of loving dialogue.

Therefore the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada apologizes to our LGBTQ members as well as their family and friends for these mistakes.

Understanding that the structure of the church is again under significant change and not knowing the future role of the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada we ask the future leadership of the church to learn from our mistakes. We ask for greater care and attentiveness to the past and present harm experienced by LGBTQ individuals. We ask the church to ensure that all relevant voices are properly present and acknowledged in all matters of discernment and decision making.

General Board
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