RMF Statement for the Brethren Mennonite Council:

In this time when some congregations within Mennonite Church USA are debating whether the word "inclusive" applies to members of the LGBTQIA+ community, Rochester Mennonite Fellowship affirms its longstanding position that our community excludes no one from joining because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, disability, economic status or other diverse backgrounds. We have never required doctrinal orthodoxy or even certainty of belief from those who want to be with us. We trusted that in our seeking to live out the Mennonite values of peace, community, and simplicity, we would build strong relationships that would keep us together, and form us into a community that is attractive and inviting to those around us.

Besides those traditional Mennonite values, we have identified four core values at the heart of our community and articulated them in a 2012 document. They form part of the covenant of membership we renew with each other annually. Regarding the questions currently vexing some within MC USA, probably the most relevant of our core values is "Affirming." Our document states: "We are a community of safety and welcome." This statement is not qualified; it contains no exceptions; we believe we offer safety and welcome to all. Another of our core values relevant here is "Reconciling," about which we say, "We restore right relationships: between each other, between us and God, and between us and the rest of creation." People bruised by other church communities for no reason other than because of who they are have found some peace and healing with us. Finally, our core value of "Following Christ" describes our fundamental commitment: "We are disciples of Jesus Christ and model our own lives and faith after his example and teaching." We do not see Jesus turning away people who are eager to seek him. That means we must do the same. For our Fellowship, those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and those who do not are equally welcome.

Our core values speak to what we see as central concerns of the Gospel: compassion, liberation, and healing. We see in God's salvation history that understandings of other contentious issues have evolved over generations. We now recognize slavery, misogyny, and war as atrocities, and as a corruption of the love that God bestows on all people equally. Likewise, we unequivocally believe that degrading the humanity of LGBTQIA+ persons and denying them the rights that even the secular world is recognizing they have is contrary to the life and teachings of Jesus. We confess that we have and will continue to make mistakes in living out this belief, and sometimes we do not act in accordance with our professed values. However, we acknowledge that God is merciful and forgiving and will send the Holy Spirit to guide and transform us. We live in the hope that one day the Reign of God will manifest on earth as it is in heaven, and so we believe that attitudes, speech, and actions that condone and foster these sins of denial and exclusion will also change. In the meantime, we will challenge each other to live our values more fully and embody Christ's love in action. We seek to develop and embrace a theology that honors LGBTQIA+ persons and to pursue their full inclusion as members, leaders, and ministers in our community and in the broader Church.

Life includes conflict, and we welcome respectful and charitable discussions with those who have different understandings than we do on this issue and other topics. However, we will not compromise our core values and knowingly put our members in situations where they will face discrimination or other harm. We believe anything short of fully accepting their humanity and place among those who follow Jesus is harmful.

We pray that we and our fellow Christians will learn to love each other as Christ loves us.

Adopted February 2023