

Special Congregational Meeting 9/18/22 after potluck

Discussion and Response to the report from the task force re:

Options for Addressing Misalignment between RMF and NY Mennonite Conference.
(text below)

- Learn what information the task force has found
- Hear thoughts and feedback from everyone about the report and the options
- Remember that we care about the relationships we have within our congregation more so than with other congregations in our conference.

Notes/Questions that we came up while sharing at this meeting

1. How strongly do we want to continue alignment with MCUSA
2. Ditto NYMC?
3. Are there folks who feel so strongly about the views of some in NYMC that we cannot remain affiliated with them?
4. Would the current NYMC proposal be sufficient for folks in RMF to be comfortable with staying with the conference? Would people feel safe?
5. What are potential consequences of leaving NYMC?
6. Important to see where the NYMC settles? Also, where the churches therein land
7. What do queer members of our community need with regard to our core values? Do they feel safe with us remaining in NYMC?
8. What do we (RMF) receive and give to NYMC?
9. How to we weigh equitably the values of those in RMF who have invested heavily in relationships with NYMC with need to affirm Queer community?
10. Need to look at the statement that is currently on table from NYMC leadership to see if we agree? Do we want to propose an edited/amended statement?

These notes were taken by Bob Carter at the meeting.

OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN RMF AND NY CONFERENCE

The NY Conference currently has a significant proportion of leaders/churches preaching oppressive theology, in addition to a lack of clear credentialing policy, that so far has been understood to mean that LGBTQIA pastors are only welcome if single. Though not exhaustive, we have come up with the following options:

1. Stay in NY Conference, and
 - a. divest of financial contributions to the conference and/or
 - b. initiate sessions to discuss LGBTQIA inclusion
 - c. carefully and clearly articulate to our members and NY conference members where our congregation stands in relation to LGBTQIA inclusion
 - d. Recommend sample policy language for inclusive credentialing and embracing LGBTQIA members *Already undertaken by Rachel, and in review by the conference.
 - e. Consider how past harm might be acknowledged and addressed
 - f. Create a Queer Caucus for the NY Conference.
2. Wait and see what happens with other churches in the conference, who may leave the denomination based on the recent MC USA resolutions
3. Explore dual affiliation (with NY conference and another conference)
4. Leave NY Conference and join another conference within MC USA

Other actions to take not dependent on this decision:

1. Join the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (more info below).
2. Become supporters of Pink Mennos, if they are still an active group, as we already support Mennonite Men and Mennonite Women.
3. Explore trainings offered quarterly by Community of Hope Mennonite Church on LGBTQIA Mennonite inclusion.

Below are reports from our Task Force members as we considered what information we need as we collectively decide how to respond.

Christin did research on **LGBTQIA-friendly Mennonite Churches**. There are 62 Mennonite churches listed on gaychurch.org (in addition to ours), a resource for LGBTQIA Christians who are looking for churches that are inclusive. From the websites that stated they were part of an MC USA conference, Christin learned the following:

- The language on the websites around LGBTQIA inclusion is bold. There is no question about the place of LGBTQIA people in these congregations. Many have a pride symbol embedded on their website.
- Many show on their website that they are members of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests. There is a \$200 annual contribution to their work to become a member.
- We are the only church in the NY Mennonite Conference with any statement of LGBTQIA inclusion on our website.

- Many of the churches that are LGBTQIA inclusive also have strong stances on other issues that are important to our congregation, including dismantling racism (and honoring indigenous peoples), working for climate justice, and immigrant/refugee justice.

Izzie spoke with Sheri Hostetler, Pastor at the **First Mennonite Church of San Francisco**. MCSF decided about thirty years ago to share the gospel of inclusion through humanizing LGBTQIA Mennonites. This has been one of the main missions of their congregation and it is led by a large group of elder LGBTQIA Mennonites who founded the church. The church's stance reflects the consensus and leadership of these elders. They have never watered down their strong message of LGBTQIA inclusion, but rather have consistently invited the conference leadership to join them in fellowship and mutual dialogue. This work has taken decades and has included hosting an assembly and inviting and hosting people from the conference who had opposing theological viewpoints to stay in their homes as a strategy for helping them gain understanding of LGBTQIA lives. Over time they have changed hearts and minds.

Younger LGBTQIA members of the church have not always been in alignment with this message of inclusion, but there is no obligation for them to be fighting the fight. Straight allies pushed for withdrawing funding from the conference when the Pastor was sanctioned for performing a wedding, but the elder LGBTQIA group has wanted to maintain relationships, and instead responded with an invitation to the conference to share a meal at their church.

SFMC members have a high level of support for their missional work – around a third of the members are LGBTQIA and mutually supportive, the city is supportive, their conference minister is supportive and they have a strong history of success that helps them to maintain this work. They also have been able to do additional missional work on anti-racism and dismantling the doctrine of discovery, which has been particularly meaningful for them.

Tom researched the **Allegheny Conference**. The conference has 16 churches, which are geographically spread out with churches mostly in Western PA and congregations also in VA, MD, WV and DE. There are congregations in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and smaller suburban and rural churches. Six are clearly affirming of LGBTQIA members in the life of their churches. Each has a very affirming and positive welcoming statement on their website. The conference seems to be in tight financial circumstances and in 2019 had a deficit budget that was covered from accumulated surplus. The conference also includes two churches formed by recent immigrants/refugees.

Nancy researched the **Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC)**. The conference has 30 churches, including four from NYC. All the rest are in PA apart from two in MA and one in MD. Our church is most similar to the Manhattan fellowship. Wendy (previous member of RMF) attends an ACC church in Lancaster, PA, which is affirming of LGBTQIA Mennonites. She reports that around half of ACC churches are also LGBTQIA affirming. Conservative churches in the conference have not been protesting LGBTQIA marriages. The city churches tend to be affirming and the rural ones not so much. Wendy's pastor suggested that if we are looking for a conference that was all affirming, the Allegheny Conference is the one that would most align with us.

Nancy also talked with Sonya (another previous RMF member) who pastors a congregation in the **Mosaic Conference**. This is conference of around 100 churches and is located over a wide geographical area. Sonya reported that the Mosaic conference is more conservative than the ACC conference and has a more 'top down' leadership style. Currently the conference has a mandate not to perform LGBTQIA marriages, but when one pastor did so they were not sanctioned and this is forcing more conversation in

the conference. Sonya likes the Mosaic conference because there is a lot of mission work in cities and there is a high level of racial diversity within the conference.

Bryan has friends in Atlanta Mennonite Church, part of the **Central District**, a large conference that spans from the Midwest to Florida. 'It seems to have a reputation of being on the more progressive end of MCUSA. While they have a spectrum of theology within the conference, the leadership is progressive and they have a number of written guidelines in place for conference gatherings. One of the things he appreciated about the conference is the ability to find churches doing similar work in similar areas to bounce ideas off of'.

Update on New York Mennonite Conference as of late August:

Jesus Church will leave the conference due to their non-alignment with the MCUSA resolution.

Rachel anticipates one other church leaving in advance of the Annual Celebration on September 17th, which would reduce the number of churches in the conference to twelve.

NYMC has prepared a statement to all churches in the conference for review and is requesting feedback prior to the celebration.