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January 26, 2015

To: Pastors, Church Council/Congregational Leaders; cc: *Canadian Mennonite*

From: Hilda Hildebrand, Moderator; Willard Metzger, Executive Director

Subject: Being a Faithful Church 6 – Last Call for responses

Greetings in the name of Christ, who courageously and compassionately incarnates the love and wisdom of God for us.

Recent media attention to the first same-sex marriage in a Mennonite Church Canada congregation has further sharpened our focus to continue our communal discernment around the question of congregational response to same-sex attraction, through our work with the Being a Faithful Church Process.

We regret that some congregations, because of their particular circumstances, have moved ahead of the BFC process, either by blessing same sex unions or deciding to leave our fellowship. Those who have invested hard work, energy, and patience with the BFC process feel as if the process has been compromised.

The BFC process, initiated by the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada in 2008, was to guide our denomination's discernment in a number of important matters, including the church's response to same-sex attraction. BFC 6 (*Unity, Christ' Love, and Faithfulness in Discerning Matters of Sexuality*) is the most recent discernment document in the BFC process. The discernment questions in BFC 6 were affirmed by the delegate body (90%) at the Assembly 2014 in Winnipeg. (You can find the BFC 6 document at [www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/17279](http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/17279).)

The discernment questions ask how we will maintain unity in Christ while we understand matters of same-sex relations differently. How will we express our desire to demonstrate the love of Christ towards all, irrespective of sexual orientation, different understandings of Scripture, and our denomination's *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*?

We are grateful for those who continue to challenge one another's understandings in love. We urge congregations to stay with the discernment process –to continue to engage in study together, pray together, wait for guidance from the Spirit together, honour those with whom we disagree, and offer counsel to the national body. We can take as our example the Council of Jerusalem from Acts 15. We encourage you to revisit this scripture passage for insight on disagreement.

BFC 1 (*Testing the spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment*) declared that discernment is an essential on-going task of the church. The church must always speak again and when the church speaks

*"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11*



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again in discernment, she can say what has been said before, modify what has been said or say something new. Congregations through their delegates have also said that until we speak again as a body on the matter of sexuality, we are guided by previous confessions and agreed upon polity.

As a refresher, we provide here a brief outline of our journey so far:

- BFC 1: Testing the spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment
- BFC 2: “Peace Church” as “Pacifist Church (this was a way to test the proposed BFC process)
- BFC 3: A Plan to Discern Faithfulness on Matters of Sexuality
- BFC 4: Using the Bible in Helpful and Unhelpful Ways
  - BFC 4.1: Exercising Our Interpretive Muscles: Testing our Interpretive Framework
- BFC 5: Between Horizons: Biblical Perspectives on Human Sexuality
  - BFC 5.1: Between Horizons: Biblical Perspectives on Human Sexuality
- BFC 6: Unity, Christ’s Love, and Faithfulness in Discerning Matters of Sexuality (this is the current document to which we need congregational response by Feb. 28, 2015)

Please be assured that the BFC Taskforce reads and studies all submissions carefully and reports its findings regularly to the General Board. Your submissions are vital to the Task Force as we move forward together as a family of God. Some congregations have already responded – we thank you. If your congregation has not yet responded, **we ask that your feedback be returned by Feb 28, 2015 to:** [wmetzger@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:wmetzger@mennonitechurch.ca).

Discernment within the national body is not easy, especially on a matter over which we are not agreed, often even within individual congregations. We commend our congregations for consistently offering excellent feedback throughout the BFC process and look forward to receiving the feedback to the questions of BFC 6.

We offer our sincere prayers for each of our family of congregations across Canada, trusting that God will indeed hold us close during this time.

Hilda Hildebrand, Moderator

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