



# Memo

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Date: January 6, 2005  
To: Pastors and Church Councils of MC Canada Congregations  
From: Henry Krause on behalf of the General Board  
Copies: Area Conferences

Grace to you and peace from God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

*In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. (Colossians 1.3-6)*

Mennonite Church British Columbia (MCBC) has raised concerns about how Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada) has worked at same-sex issues and broader questions of the relationship between congregations and area conferences to MC Canada. We recognize that these are issues that concern all of our congregations across the country. We offer this letter as a report to all our member churches on progress to date.

1. MCBC and MC Canada have been working together on discerning our relationship over the past year. On April 19, 2004 a letter from the General Board was sent to the MCBC congregations and was also made available to all our churches on the MC Canada website (see <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/statements/ssm/>). The letter outlined actions taken by the General Board since November, 2003 to address questions raised by MCBC.

2. Several actions were taken at our 2004 assembly in Winkler

a) The "Resolution on the issue of homosexuality" from the Stratford annual meeting in 1998, and a "Commentary on the 1998 resolution on the Issue of Homosexuality" were included in the Report Book. Also included was a statement titled "General Board's Commitment to Continuing Dialogue" which said, in part, that "the General Board acknowledges that human sexuality is a difficult issue and chooses to walk toward conflict rather than walking away from it. MC Canada will seek to engage those with whom we disagree in loving and peaceful dialogue on an ongoing basis. The General Board's task in these dialogues is to facilitate and provide leadership. Throughout the year this involves responding pastorally to impacted families and continuing to respond to congregational and area conference initiatives."

b) A letter was also distributed to all the delegates, giving an overview of meetings and actions taken in MCBC and with MC Canada since the Annual assembly in St Catharines in July, 2003. (<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/statements/ssm/stand.htm>)

c) Some people have expressed unhappiness with the way *Canadian Mennonite* has dealt with these issues. On the day prior to the Winkler 2004 Assembly representatives of all the area conferences, MC Canada and the Canadian Mennonite Publishing Services Board gathered to share their concerns with each other. This resulted in an agreement to work through the various concerns around the editorial policies and practice and the current funding arrangement for *Canadian Mennonite*. A committee representing the seven partners has been appointed to do further work on this.

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d) A Winkler 2004 round-table discussion topic on “Leading the church in discerning theology, ethics, polity and practice,” asked what kind of leadership we want from the national church on such issues. A second round-table discussion invited participants to share what was happening in their churches as they relate to gay and lesbian persons, their families and friends, and what helpful support from MC Canada would look like. A summary of these responses has been reported in *Canadian Mennonite* and posted on the internet at <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/events/winkler/>.

On the national church’s role in dealing with questions of theology, ethics, polity and practice almost half of the table groups expressed a strong preference for the national church body to provide proactive guidance, direction and resources for congregations, and to facilitate conversations. About one in eight table groups called for “a strong voice, including authority to close discussion and settle disputes.” A quarter of the groups said the national church should “not mandate or dictate,” while others said that listening to congregations and area conferences was important. The General Board is preparing a recommendation for the 2005 assembly that will implement the delegates’ counsel.

On the question of what congregations are doing about issues related to homosexuality, half of the congregations represented reported that they were addressing the issue, while one quarter said their congregations were doing “nothing obvious” in addressing the question.

In discussing ways that MC Canada (delegates, board, staff, others) could be helpful to congregations on these matters a strong preference was stated for proactive guidance. More than one in three wanted the national church to provide resources and teaching, and almost as many want the denomination to facilitate dialogue. Almost one in five wanted MC Canada to “take decisive action,” with many of those calling for an end to what they perceived as unfruitful dialogue. The General Board is exploring ways to support area conferences and congregations in their discernment. We commend Mennonite Church BC on the initiative they have taken with their congregations.

3. MCBC held a conference, “Walking in Grace” on Oct 22-23 which included theological reflection by Willard Swartley, former dean and professor of New Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and personal stories from members of “Living Waters,” a ministry for those struggling with a variety of sexual and relational problems. This provided an opportunity for representatives from the MCBC congregations to listen and talk to each other at round tables. Sven Eriksson, Denominational Minister for MC Canada, and Dave Brubacher, Minister to Conference from Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC), were on hand to listen to the discussion. Some described it as a time when the “church was being the church.” A second meeting for MCBC members, this time on issues of polity (how we make decisions and are accountable to each other in congregations and conferences), will be held in February.

4. In the November 11-13, 2004 meeting of the General Board we renewed our commitment to work in partnership with congregations and area conferences across Canada to encourage and foster conversations between people who are struggling with these issues and questions. We have recommended that the meeting of Moderators, Secretaries and Conference Ministers in March 2005 should explore ways to further collaborate and network on the common issues and challenges faced by area conference leaders.

We continue to covet your prayers and your counsel on these and other issues that face the church. We pray that God’s Spirit will continue to guide us during this time and are confident that “the one who has begun a good work among us will bring it to completion.”