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November 2003, *Equipping*

To: **Congregations of Mennonite Church Canada**

From: Henry Krause and Dan Nighswander

Subject: Understanding of the church's position regarding same-sex issues

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the churches of Mennonite Church Canada:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

A number of churches and individuals across Canada have identified questions, concerns and anxieties about Mennonite Church Canada's position on same-sex issues. These include the member churches of Mennonite Church British Columbia, who are holding meetings to discern their participation in MC Canada. These matters weigh heavily on our minds, and will be on the agenda of the General Board when it meets November 6-8.

Our spirits echo the words of the apostle Paul, who wrote to the church in Rome: "I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14). "Nevertheless," he continues, "on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus..." (vv. 15-16a). Because of God's grace and calling, we too are bold to address you at this time.

The context of Paul's words is found in verses 14:1 – 15:13 of the letter, in which he addresses a church divided over fundamental questions of the most important ethical issues that the early church faced. Paul exhorts the church members not to pass judgement on one another — neither the "weak" on the "strong" nor the "strong" on the "weak" (14:10-13) — but to "welcome one another ... just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (15:7).

In the middle of this passage, Paul says to his readers that even in matters of life and death, Christians belong to the Lord and not to themselves (14:7-9). This is a reminder that the church belongs to God, not to its members, and that the work of God — what we have been calling the missional vision — must take priority over matters that divide Christians from one another. "Do not, for the sake of [disagreements over ethical issues], destroy the work of God" (14:20).

We commend to you all the careful study of Romans 14-15. And we ask congregations and leaders in the rest of Mennonite Church Canada especially to uphold MC BC in prayer.

We value all the churches that are part of Mennonite Church Canada. We believe that we can continue to work together as we "grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world" (Vision: Healing and Hope).

Let us together pray that the concerns of the present time will not destroy our hope in God nor our hope for the people of God. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Krause".

Henry Krause, Moderator

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Nighswander".

Dan Nighswander, General Secretary

On behalf of the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada

*PS: Attached you will find a document entitled **Where does MC Canada stand? A report on our understanding of the church's position regarding same-sex issues**. This document was first created as background for Mennonite Church BC as they discuss this topic, and we offer it to all our congregations for information and discussion. Note also the other background documents referred to there. Feel free to distribute any of these in mailboxes, post them on your bulletin board, or re-publish them in your church newsletter. All of these documents are available from <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/statements/ssm/>.*