

Discernment regarding Sexual Orientation and Following Jesus

In April of 2012, our congregation embarked on a deliberate 6-month discernment process to clarify our position regarding sexual orientation and membership at WPMF. We began by covenanting as a congregation to healthy ways of working together, and trusting God's Spirit. And so we shared our hopes and fears, our personal stories and beliefs, and listened to one another deeply. Together, we studied Scripture, our own assumptions, and prayed. There was openness and vulnerability as we began to look at our own lives, not just the lives of others. We took time to hear from as many voices as possible by facilitating a variety of settings and formats for dialogue.

In November 2012, we approved by consensus the proposal below from Pastoral Team:

We affirm that the phrase "Any person" [in our current membership guidelines] does include persons of any sexual orientation. We understand living out one's sexuality with faithfulness and integrity to be part of the commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Lord. All members are welcomed and encouraged to participate fully in the life and leadership of the congregation.

We have been encouraged and humbled by the level of dedication to work at this together: the openness and vulnerability in sharing, and the patience, respect, love and care shown to each other. We expressed our disagreements, our pain, and our joy along the way. And we have grown stronger as a congregation and closer to each other in this process.

During this time of discernment, we have expressed a desire for a deeper relationship with Christ, and a continued journey towards faithfulness. Many of us continue to live with questions concerning sexual orientation and faithful living as followers of Jesus. Yet we are committed to work together as Christ's body, allowing for disagreement while seeking God.

We have also expressed the desire to broaden our understanding of inclusiveness; and to seek healthy sexuality for all. We want to reflect on 1) inclusiveness in other areas such as ethnicity, and economics; and 2) healthy sexuality for all sexual orientations. We recognize the need to look at our own brokenness and biases, and be open to God's healing in our attitudes and actions in these areas.

We have also expressed a desire to stay connected to Franconia Mennonite Conference and the larger Mennonite Church. We recognize that within the Mennonite Church there is not agreement on this issue, and that this is a time of discernment for the larger church. We will continue to journey as a congregation and with our sisters and brothers in MCUSA, holding the tension of disagreeing in love.

And so we desire to seek ways to communicate and demonstrate hospitality to all who Jesus calls our neighbor.