

## **Robotic Warfare Resolution**

Whereas for nearly 500 years Mennonites have stood in faithful witness to Christ's teachings of compassion and love of enemies, steadfastly opposing the terrible violence of war;

Whereas, in the 20th and early 21st centuries, Mennonite Central Committee has worked tirelessly, while opposing war in general, to expose and curb particularly terrible wars and weapons systems, including efforts to ban land mines and cluster munitions, as well as supporting international efforts to outlaw chemical, biological, and nuclear arms;

Whereas internationally renowned military scholars such as Dr. P.W. Singer (director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings Institution) warn that "robots on and above the battlefield are bringing about the most profound transformation of warfare since the atom bomb" (July 2010 *Scientific American*);

Whereas the church has often played a key role in speaking as a prophetic voice on war, slavery, and other deep societal concerns:

Therefore we as Mennonites, as Christians, as people seeking to follow Jesus Christ, resolve:

(1) That the increasingly powerful and autonomous machines known as drones, robotic weapons and military robots should be viewed with profound concern;

(2) That the particularly worrisome threat which mechanized and increasingly powerful autonomous or semi-autonomous killing machines pose to humanity should place them in the same category as chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, along with land mines and cluster munitions;

(3) That in addition we view with profound spiritual concern and dismay efforts to manufacture multitudes of synthetic artificial "life forms" through the accelerating merger of robotics and biotechnology, posing incalculable risks to the integrity of God's natural Creation, the natural life forms of the Earth, including humanity;

(4) We support conscientious efforts to bring these perilous developments into the light of public scrutiny, to nonviolently challenge them, and to declare that the key to real security lies not in robotic weapons but in God's call to love our neighbors and even our enemies.

*Sponsorship: Seattle (Wash.) Mennonite Church (Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference).  
Endorsed by more than 70 individuals.*

## **Faithful Witness Amid Endless War Resolution**

The United States of America is experiencing an era of boundless and endless war. This era began September 14, 2001, when Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). It is not expected to end within the foreseeable future.

This is a different kind of war, without traditional armies operating under rules of war. The entire world is the battlefield. The enemy is shifting and ill-defined; sometimes it is a group with a history of recent collaboration with the U.S. Often the enemy is described vaguely as “terror” or “insecurity.”

This continuous state of war is the new normal. One consequence is that our nation no longer experiences times of national debate related to the morality of its participation in war.

Drone warfare is emblematic of our current state.

It is carried out in nations whose governments are not at war with the U.S. It entails no declaration of war and little oversight by Congress. The President decides where, when and who to kill. It is of doubtful legality under international law and, when directed against a U.S. citizen, is of doubtful legality under U.S. law.

It is a cheap way to conduct war and avoids loss of American life. This changes the calculus of war, making it painless for the vast majority of people living in the U.S.

It often targets private residences and thus kills many innocent people. It terrorizes civilian populations by making normal routines of daily living acutely stressful.

Many who experience drone attacks are radicalized by the experience. They perceive it as an acute injustice, which fosters a desire for revenge and heightens the risk of more terror.

We remain committed as a church to the belief that participation in war is contrary to the will of God. Yet as we live in the environment described above, we experience uncertainty about how to make our belief relevant to neighbors and friends and part of the “good news” we have found in Jesus Christ. When our young men were being drafted into the military, our belief translated into a specific witness within our context. Now, we need renewed understanding of how to live out the “new creation” that is in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17).

Again, drone warfare is a revealing example of our current uncertainty. Our congregations have paid little attention to its thousands of victims, many (some would say most) of whom are innocent of any ill-intent toward the U.S. When we speak of drone warfare, we are apt to note its advantages as compared to “boots on the ground.” Although innocent individuals are being killed on our behalf, we rarely object. Although a new “generation” of robotic weapons is being developed to protect our “security,” few of us have dissented. This suggests our moral

sensitivities have become calloused and that we are adapting to the normality of continuous war.

Therefore, the delegate assembly of Mennonite Church USA:

1. Calls affiliated congregations to a renewed emphasis on trusting God and the way of Jesus, not violence, for our security. For this teaching to be effective, it must address our society's commitment to the moral necessity of violence, our government's undisclosed purposes in its so-called "security efforts," and our often secret sympathies with so-called security operations. It also must seek the renewal of our minds in Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2).
2. Calls the agencies, educational institutions and conferences affiliated with Mennonite Church USA to ministries of healing and renewal in response to the moral injuries experienced by those who feel the guilt for having killed in the name of security and experienced by those who feel no guilt for the killing done on their behalf (John 8:11; Amos 5:21-24).
3. Directs the staff of Mennonite Church USA to actively seek and implement forms of public ecumenical witness to our confession: "Some trust in their war chariots and others in their horses, but we trust in the power of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20:7). (insert recommended actions here) are specific actions where the witness of the broader U.S. church is urgently needed.

(The following is a list of approved recommendations that the Resolutions Committee may include in the final resolution presented to delegates:

- Repeal of Authorization for Use of Military Force
- Restrictions on weaponized drones and other forms of robotic weaponry by placing them in the same category as chemical, biological and nuclear weapons
- Passage of Peace Tax Fund authorizing diversion of tax payments from military use
- Prohibition of presidential "kill lists"
- Regular publication in church newspapers of names and photos (if available) of persons killed by U.S. drone strikes)

*Sponsorship: Lancaster Mennonite Conference; Atlantic Coast Conference; Bethel College Mennonite Church, North Newton, Kan. (WDC); East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa. (Lancaster Mennonite Conference); Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington (Ind.) (Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference); Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, Sioux Falls, S.D. (Central Plains Mennonite Conference).*

## Israel-Palestine Resolution

### Preamble

“For more than sixty-five years, Mennonites have lived, studied and ministered in Palestine and Israel...We open our hearts when we again hear of the suffering you experience in an occupied land as homes are taken from you, families and communities are separated by walls and checkpoints, and countless large and small indignities and humiliations are visited upon you each day.”

This excerpt from a 2011 letter written by Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, on behalf of the Executive Board, was a response to *Kairos Palestine*, an appeal from Palestinian Christians in December 2009.

Already in June 2007 ten representatives of Mennonite-affiliated agencies who traveled together to the region reported in an *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine* that, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and a major cause of the ongoing conflict.”

Since 2007 the urgency of the crisis in Israel-Palestine has only deepened, with little progress to show politically and ever-increasing levels of suffering. We find ourselves at a *Kairos* moment, as articulated by Palestinian Christians.

We strongly affirm the longstanding Mennonite presence in the region of Israel-Palestine, including the work of Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Church Canada.

The presence of these workers and others has provided a powerful witness to the way of peace in a place of great conflict. In turn, our understanding of our Anabaptist identity and beliefs has been greatly enriched by interactions with fellow believers and others in the region.

We urge that programs of service to Palestinians and Israelis working for a just peace not only continue but be enhanced, including work by various Mennonite-related groups to improve lives and build peace and advocacy initiatives from Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington (D.C.) Office.

We note the personal and congregational concern that Mennonites have long shared for Christian stewardship and the social and environmental impact of our investments. We believe that the finances contributed to our churches will be used to further our Christian witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we believe that these resources should not be used in the furtherance of pain, death, and suffering of one people at the hands of another. We affirm Everence’s practice of screening investments with attention to issues of human rights and military involvement, among other considerations.

We affirm the “Come and See” initiative of Mennonite Church USA, which seeks to provide opportunities for Mennonite pastors and other leaders to participate in Israel-Palestine learning tours and to “come and see” the current reality (Purposeful Plan, lines 980-984). We encourage all church members who are considering travel to the region to follow the goals and criteria/tour components for Come and See tours as outlined by Mennonite Church USA.

We acknowledge the need for repentance of our own complicity in the history of violence committed by Christians against Jews. All actions that stereotype or demonize people based on their religious beliefs or ethnicity are contrary to the teachings of Jesus and we must have no part in them.

## Resolution

In light of the foregoing information, we thereby resolve:

- **To encourage the reading and study of the *Kairos Palestine* document.** We affirm our particular kinship as brothers and sisters in Christ with Palestinian Christians. In this context we hear the “cry for help” expressed in the *Kairos Palestine* document, issued in 2009. Based in a theology of loving ones’ enemies and sacrificial love, this document is worthy of careful study by member congregations of Mennonite Church USA, as recommended by the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board in 2011. In support of this effort, we encourage Mennonite Church USA to develop a structure and process for disseminating and studying the *Kairos Palestine* document and appropriate study materials, in conjunction with the Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network. We encourage congregational resource advocates to make available information about Israel-Palestine.
- **That Israel’s military occupation of Palestine is sinful, based on injustice and must come to an end; and that as U.S. citizens we are complicit in this sin due to our government’s significant and longstanding military support for Israel.** As Palestinian Christian leaders noted in 2009 in the *Kairos Palestine* document, “the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity.” Similarly, the 2007 *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations* observed, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and the major cause of the ongoing conflict.”
- **To consider how our financial lives are enmeshed in the policies of occupation, through our investments, individual purchases and tax dollars.** To this end, we direct representatives of the Executive Board of the Mennonite Church USA along with representatives from Everence, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Palestine Israel Network, Mennonite Mission Network, and other related agencies involved in the region, in mutual consultation, to review, at least on an annual basis, the investments of Mennonite Church USA for the purpose of withdrawing investments from corporations known to be profiting from the occupation and/or destruction of life and property in Israel-Palestine. A report of this review and related activities should be submitted on an annual basis to members of the Executive Board.

We further urge individuals and congregations to avoid the purchase of products that enable the military occupation to continue, including items produced in Israeli settlements.

In keeping with our historic commitments as a peace church and consistent with our opposition to the militarized resolution of conflict, we condemn the use of violence by all sides. We call for an end to U.S. military assistance to all countries, including Israel. We urge nation-states, including our own, to seek security in the only way it may truly be found, through relationships of mutuality and trust and the guarantee of equal rights for all peoples.
- **To pray earnestly for all Israelis and Palestinians.** As commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we commit ourselves to pray ceaselessly for all in Israel-Palestine, particularly our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, all those working courageously for peace including Israeli conscientious objectors, and all who have been impacted by violence.

In addition, we request that a report covering all activities related to this resolution be developed and delivered, under the leadership of the Director of Holistic Witness, at the next Mennonite Church USA convention.

*Sponsorship: Sixteen congregations from various area conferences. Endorsed by Mennonite Central Committee U.S., Everence, Mennonite Church USA Holistic Witness, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and many individuals.*

## Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse

Mennonite Church USA's vision calls us "... to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace." The 10-year Purposeful Plan (2011) defines seven priorities of a missional church, dedicated to following Jesus' way of love and nonviolence toward all.<sup>1</sup>

These commitments call us to give attention to the tragedy of sexual abuse in our families, churches and communities. According to data collected from the *2006 Church Member Profile*, 21% of women in MC USA congregations and 5.6% of men reported experiencing sexual abuse or violation. We lament that this is a reality not just in the larger society but exists as well within our own homes, congregations and institutions.

This is not what God intended. God created human beings in God's image, and declared this very good. God's incarnation in Jesus also affirms that human bodies are good. Our sexuality is part of this created order, created for good, to enable us to enjoy companionship and intimacy, and to form families and build community. Our spirituality and our sexuality are not disconnected or competing aspects of our lives but together express our longing for intimacy with God and with others.

When people violate others sexually, the church is called to be a place of healing. Yet we confess that we have often responded with denial, fear and self-preservation. We have tended to listen to voices who have positional power, rather than to those who have been violated, and those who are most vulnerable. In this way, we have enabled sexual abuse to continue, while silencing and disregarding the testimony of victims. We lament that our inaction permits abuse to continue, and we become obstacles to God's healing.

Abuse wounds the Body of Christ. Whenever sexual boundaries are crossed the wounds extend beyond the direct victims. Also hurt are friends and families of both victims and perpetrators, those called upon to bind up the wounds, and the church itself. We join our anguished cries with all who have been traumatized in this way.

We confess we are uncomfortable with the pain and anger of survivors as well as the behavior of the perpetrators. In our discipline processes we struggle to find ways to support survivors as they reclaim their lives. We have often failed to focus first on their needs and lament a tendency to focus more attention on the perpetrator than victims and survivors.

Finally, we have failed to focus first on teaching and supporting healthy sexuality. We have failed to promote relationships that are truly committed, mutual and deeply respectful. This has tended to minimize and neglect the needs of those who suffer from sexual violence and abuse.

For all of this, we repent and seek to change our ways. We resolve to tell the truth about sexual abuse, hold abusers accountable, acknowledge the seriousness of their sin, listen with care to those who have been wounded, protect vulnerable persons from injury, work restoratively for justice, and hold out hope that wounds will be healed, forgiveness offered, and relationships established or reestablished in healthy ways.

### What we will do

#### As Congregations:

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<sup>1</sup> The 2011 Purposeful Plan identifies these priorities: Christian Formation, Christian Community, Holistic Christian Witness, Stewardship, Leadership Development, [Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation](#), and Church-to-Church Relationships.

1. Develop and teach healthy, wholesome sexuality.
2. Make sure child protection policies and procedures are in place and followed.
3. Teach members the realities of sexualized violence, especially by church leaders or other trusted individuals.
4. Ensure that worship services and sermons are sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors.
5. Make sure pastor's job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.

As Church Institutions:

1. Require training in sexuality and professional ethics as part of the credentialing process as well as continuing education for all ministers.
2. Require all agencies to develop and implement clear, accessible and public guidelines and policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
3. Provide consultation and adequate supervision for all church leaders. Make sure job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.
4. Give attention to systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (such as pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate which condones or excuses violence against women and children.
5. Examine religious teachings which make it difficult for victims to protect themselves or speak up when they have been violated and hurt.
6. Teach and model mutuality between men and women and challenge the ongoing legacy of patriarchy in the church.

**Appendix A: Actions and Commitments**

For Congregations:

1. Develop and teach healthy, wholesome sexuality. Create space for conversation and education and remove the secrecy and shame attached to sexuality. Work to dispel the idea that sexuality is "private" but is rather part of our life together as followers of Jesus.
  - a. Offer Sunday School or other classes for all ages. Use resources such as the *Circle of Grace* curriculum (available from DovesNest.net) and *Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God* (from MennoMedia).
  - b. Teach sexual literacy. For example, teach children correct names for body parts, and their right to say No! when something feels wrong or uncomfortable.
  - c. Place written resources in the church library and equip parents for teaching and modeling healthy sexuality in the home.
2. Make sure child protection policies and procedures are in place and followed. These should include:
  - a. Safe meeting places, with windows in all interior doors.



- b. Two adults present when meeting with children and youth.
  - c. Screening for all staff and volunteers.
  - d. Regular training for parents, teachers and youth workers about sexual harassment and abuse.
  - e. Procedures for reporting disclosures or allegations of abuse. These should include clear guidance about when police and/or child protection offices should be notified."
  - f. Guidelines for relating to a known sex offender in the congregation.
3. Teach members the realities of sexualized violence, especially by church leaders or other trusted individuals.
    - a. Teach everyone about consent and who can ethically/legally consent to sexual activity. Identify power dynamics that render consent impossible (underage, student and/or employee, disabled, etc.)
    - b. Use correct language about sexual abuse; it is not adultery or an affair but a misuse of power and when committed by a pastor or church leader, a serious violation of one's professional role.
    - c. Make available in public places (such as restrooms) information about how to report pastoral sexual misconduct.
  4. Ensure that worship services and sermons are sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors.
    - a. Name the sin of abuse in public prayers and laments.
    - b. In teaching about anger, forgiveness, loving enemies and obedience, be aware of how abuse victims and survivors may hear these instructions. Make sure they will hear good news and an invitation to healing and wholeness.
  5. Make sure pastor's job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.
    - a. Create clear job descriptions and regular performance evaluations. Ensure that workload and stress are manageable.
    - b. Provide generous leave policies, including opportunities for education and sabbaticals, as well as supports such as accountability, consultation and supervision.
    - c. Share leadership between pastors and lay members and cultivate relationships that are healthy and transparent.
    - d. Support pastors in tending their family relationships, to keep them strong and healthy.

For Church Institutions:

1. Require training in sexuality and professional ethics as part of the credentialing process as well as continuing education for all ministers.
  - a. Training should include an understanding of ethical guidelines regarding boundaries, power and authority, and sexual conduct, so that ministers are able to:
    - i. Understand healthy interpersonal boundaries as essential to establishing and maintaining trust,
    - ii. Recognize sexual ethics as an issue of power more than a question of morality,
    - iii. Understand the importance of professional ethics, including the denominations policies and expectations,
    - iv. Be knowledgeable about human sexuality, one's own sexual self and how to deal with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants and vice versa,

- v. Be familiar with resources for prevention and the denomination's policies for reporting and responding to sexual violation,
  - vi. Appreciate the connection between sexual integrity and spiritual wholeness,
  - vii. Be conversant with scriptural and theological resources for all of the above.<sup>2</sup>
2. Require agencies to develop and implement clear, accessible and public guidelines and policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
    - a. Provide training and assistance on prevention as well as procedures for responding to sexual violation.
    - b. Maintain a list of trusted professionals who have experience in dealing with sexual violation by church leaders; and require agencies to use their expertise when responding to allegations of abuse.
    - c. Develop ways to hold agencies accountable for implementing these policies.
  3. Provide consultation and adequate supervision for all church leaders. Make sure job descriptions are manageable and leaders are practicing self-care.
    - a. Provide ongoing training on best practices of ministry in areas such as cyber safety, healthy communication, clergy self-care, life-long sexuality education, and ministry with sex offenders.<sup>3</sup>
  4. Give attention to systems that create and sustain institutionalized sexual violence (such as pornography and prostitution) by feeding a climate which condones or excuses violence against women and children.
    - a. Provide training and resources for congregations to use in addressing issues such as date rape, pornography, prostitution and sexual slavery.
  5. Examine religious teachings which make it difficult for victims to protect themselves or speak up when they have been violated and hurt.
    - a. Be especially alert to teachings which advocate:
      - i. Physical punishment of children
      - ii. Unquestioning obedience to those in authority or leadership
      - iii. Suffering and bearing the cross as signs of discipleship
      - iv. Submission of women to their husbands
      - v. Forgiveness and reconciliation without sufficient attention to justice.
    - b. Provide alternative teachings which are nonviolent and life-giving to all, such as:
      - i. Promoting restorative discipline practices
      - ii. Encouraging questions and the ability to trust one's instincts and speak up when something feels wrong.
      - iii. Stressing God's concern for life, healing and wholeness and that Jesus' death resulted from his care for those who were suffering and willingness to challenge the forces which excluded and oppressed people.
      - iv. Promoting deep respect and mutuality (mutual submission) between marriage partners.
      - v. Practicing restorative justice as part of the movement toward forgiveness and reconciliation.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from UM Sexual Ethics, at <http://umsexualethics.org/Education/SeminaryCurriculumDevelopment.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from UM Sexual Ethics, at <http://umsexualethics.org/Education/SeminaryCurriculumDevelopment.aspx>

6. Teach and model mutuality between men and women and challenge the ongoing legacy of patriarchy in the church. This should include:
  - a. Attention to complementary teams of male and female leadership.
  - b. Respectful language in all relationships.
  - c. Listening to all voices in making decisions
  - d. Using healthy conflict resolution skills
  - e. Recognizing that those in authority need to earn their trust and their positions are not divinely ordained.
  - f. Stressing God's concern for life, healing and wholeness, especially for those being oppressed or victimized.<sup>4</sup>

## **Appendix B: Lenses for Understanding Sexual Abuse**

### **1. Viewing sexual abuse through a biblical lens.**

Christians affirm that God created the world and declared it good. This includes human beings and their bodies. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* declares:

We believe that human beings were created good, in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 8:29)...Because both Adam and Eve were equally and wonderfully made in the divine image, God's will from the beginning has been for women and men to live in loving and mutually helpful relationships with each other.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, human sexuality is good, one of the ways in which people express and receive love. The *Song of Solomon* provides a wonderful example of sexual desire expressed in a joyfully mutual, respectful and committed relationship. Both individuals share their delight in and yearning to please the other without any need to control, misuse or dominate.

Yet, the Bible is also painfully honest and shares heartbreaking accounts of people violating others and using them for their own sexual gratification. 2 Samuel 13 details how David's son Amnon plotted to rape his half-sister Tamar. Remarkably, there is no suggestion that she is to blame. Rather, responsibility lies with the men: Amnon of course but also his friend Jonadab who encouraged Amnon to get what he wanted, and King David who participated in the scheme. Although David became angry when he learned what happened, he did nothing to support his daughter or hold his son accountable.

Why was David so oblivious to this tragedy and so unable to confront his son? Tellingly, just two chapters earlier, David had done something similar with Bathsheba. He used his power as king to demand that she be brought to him and then arranged to have her husband killed. Sadly, we know nothing of what Bathsheba felt or what life was like for her in David's house.

Indeed, Bathsheba is often blamed for David's sin, as if she had provoked or invited his attention. Unfortunately, blaming women for introducing immorality is as old as our oldest religious traditions, including the biblical narratives. Interpretations of the creation of humans as well as the "fall" of humanity designate the woman as a poor imitation of the first human creature and therefore subjected to him, and as the conduit through which human sin entered

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Abuse: Response and Prevention, MCC booklet, at <http://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/abuse-prevention>.

<sup>5</sup> Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 6, "The Creation and Calling of Human Beings," Herald Press, 1995, 28.

the world. Woman's nature, according to many interpretations of the "fall" narrative, is duplicitous, ignorant, willful, evil and seductive.

As Phyllis Trible has noted in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, conversations between the Bible and American ideology illuminate narratives that influence both the concept of manifest destiny and the liberation motif of those who champion human and civil rights. Trible notes that traditional interpretations of the narrative in Genesis 2:7-3:24 proclaim male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. Woman is the temptress and troublemaker, dependent upon and dominated by her husband. The biblical creation narrative, Trible asserts, is a love story gone awry. Yet it is not the only word in scripture. As such, there is room within the biblical narrative to craft a foundation for liberation. Trible reads *Song of Songs* as a liberating text, where the voices of the lovers "extol and enhance" the creation of sexuality in Genesis 2.

A constant thread running through all of scripture is the directive for God's people to care for the most marginalized: the widows, the fatherless (also children in general), the strangers, and the poor. These vulnerable populations are to be cared for and protected by the community. (Can expand this with specific texts...)

The narratives of Jesus' encounters with women, including foreign women and women who were estranged from their communities because of illness, or allegations of immoral behavior indicate a reframing of notions that render women as secondary humans. In the gospels, women are persons in their own right with agency and gifts. Jesus holds persons accountable for their actions, including actions that violate the body integrity of another person. Marie Fortune notes that Jesus' teaching on lust (Matthew 5:28) can be interpreted to mean that men are responsible not to violate women through any thoughts or actions and that for a man to desire to possess and dominate a woman is an offence against *her*. Applied to the experience of sexual violence, the passage does not emphasize promiscuity – it cautions against the potential for sexual coercion in thought, word and deed. (Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, pg 103)

Leaders in the early church continued to emphasize respect and mutual submission, and rejected self-indulgence or selfishness.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Paul urged believers not to use their "...freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence...For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14).

Today, it continues to be the responsibility of all baptized disciples of Jesus, men and women, to pull back the veils of silence, secrecy and shame that hide the sin of sexual exploitation and male privilege in our communities. With this document, we renew our resolve to walk in the light, "until all of us come ... to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

## **2. Viewing sexual abuse through a cultural lens.**

For centuries western Christians have lived in a context where sexual abuse, including abuse by priests, pastors, and other church leaders, has been largely ignored and the wounds of those who suffered abuse have been largely unattended. We as Mennonite churches have participated in this sin, at least minimizing the abuse and blaming or discrediting the victims. Recognizing and dealing openly with this sin is painful. Nevertheless, we are grateful to God and the leading of the Spirit that we live in a time and place when the injury caused by sexualized violence is becoming widely known and widely condemned. We believe this opens the door to

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<sup>6</sup>Ephesians 5:21, 25-33.

the possibility of healthier and more genuinely Christian relationships between women and men.

We also acknowledge that some teaching about sexuality contributes to sexualized violence, including a distorted notion that our bodies are shameful and bad. Other distortions include beliefs, endorsed and supported throughout history, that some bodies are more valued - the primary example or standard for humanity - while other bodies are less valued. Violence toward these bodies is often overlooked or even condoned. We see this demonstrated in the violence (e.g. lynchings, sexual assaults and murders) experienced by African American women and men, and the high numbers of rape, disappearance and murder of Native American women (and men). These patterns are also evident in the disparities of criminal charges and sentencing between races. White men who are charged and convicted of sexualized violence against women of color routinely receive less harsh sentencing than men of color who are convicted of sexualized violence against white women. (Citation will be from The Sentencing Project)

According to ethicist Kelly Brown Douglas, Christianity that is deeply influenced by platonic thought has emphasized the spirit and disparaged the body, thereby giving rise to Christian participation in attacks against Black bodies. A foundation is built for certain bodies to be easily disregarded and also allows for the dehumanization or even demonization of those who are defined only by their sexuality. This foundation has allowed for the participation of Christian people in the lynching and sexual abuse of the bodies of both Black men and women.

Additionally, some persons have used Scripture to uphold the belief/practice that women and children are property of men, for their service and pleasure. These distortions of Scripture add fuel to the economic and cultural conditions which feed the sex trade, prostitution, pornography, advertising, the fashion industry, etc. This distortion also leads to shaming girls and women for their sexuality while at the same time ignoring or excusing boys and men who engage in abusive sexual behavior.

These distorted notions also create conditions for some who have institutional power (usually white men) to create rules and regulations that benefit them and to disregard or ignore rules and regulations which might hold them accountable and protect those who are vulnerable. This enables those with power to overlook and abuse less valued persons, such as those who are poor, lgbtq, disabled or female.

### **3. Viewing sexual abuse through a justice lens.**

“Justice” has a variety of meanings in our context and English language. In American society “justice” often means following legally prescribed procedures (e.g., “justice has been done” when courts make a decision where the rules have been followed properly), or retribution (e.g., one who has stolen from another should “pay” for that injustice by spending time in prison). There are also other meanings.

As Mennonite Christians, we understand justice to mean “restorative justice.”<sup>7</sup> This understanding of justice is intimately connected to the biblical term “Shalom,” which refers to the wellbeing of the community.<sup>8</sup> When there is Shalom, things are the way they should be and relationships are right. When anyone in the community impoverishes, injures, or abuses

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<sup>7</sup> See *Changing Lenses: a New Focus for Crime and Justice*, by Howard Zehr and *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*, by Christopher Marshall.

<sup>8</sup> Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace*.

another, they sin. Things are not OK. Restorative justice refers to processes through which we work to restore relationships and wellbeing. Restorative justice is especially attentive to the poor, weak, and oppressed since they are typically the main victims when Shalom is absent.

There are a number of elements that are needed if right relationships are to be restored. We list some of them here, noting especially how they apply when we seek to restore Shalom when it has been broken by sexual abuse.<sup>9</sup>

- a. Truth-telling. The sin of sexual abuse must not remain hidden or minimized if relationships are to be righted within the community that is affected by it. This does not mean demonizing offenders, but it does mean naming it as sin which disrupts Shalom.
- b. Acknowledgement. Giving the victim space to tell their story and stating clearly that what was done to them was wrong.
- c. Compassion. Listening with loving care to those who have been wounded, taking seriously their accounts of their experiences and being willing to suffer with them. This has often been lacking in our dealings with sexual abuse in the past. It also means treating the one accused of abuse with care and fairness in the midst of the difficult process of confronting him with evidence of abuse.
- d. Protecting vulnerable ones from further injury. We should surround those who have been abused with support and seek to make sure that they and other potential victims are safe from any further abuse.
- e. Accountability: Holding abusers accountable for their actions, refusing to blame victims and refusing to accept excuses or minimize abusive behavior.
- f. Restitution. In order to make things right, efforts must be made to find ways of making restitution to the victim; restoring to them what has been taken, insofar as and in what ways are possible.
- g. Validation of the victim/survivor. Stating clearly that they were wronged, setting them free from shame and restoring them to the community.
- h. Repentance. For right relationships to be fully restored, abusers need to own up to their guilt. They need to confess, take responsibility for the abuse, make long-term changes in beliefs and behavior and make restitution. According to Ezekiel 18:30-32, "...repentance involves getting a 'new heart.'"<sup>10</sup>
- i. Forgiveness. This, like other elements listed here, cannot be forced, demanded, or rushed. In fact, if the victim forgives too quickly, forgiveness can seem to make everything right before there is a chance to understand the serious harm done and what repentance and restoration really entail. Yet the vision of Shalom, the Christian gospel, holds out the hope that forgiveness can lead to further well-being.

Survivors may choose forgiveness as a gift to themselves so they can move on and live their lives with joy and peace. Ultimately, forgiveness is a process she or he "...experiences by the grace of God, so that the abuse does not dominate her or his life anymore. It is a process of letting go and moving on in healthy ways."<sup>11</sup>

For the offender, receiving forgiveness can mean freedom from debilitating guilt and accepting his need for accountability. Seeking forgiveness means acknowledging

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<sup>9</sup> Points a-g are adapted from Fortune, Marie, *Is Nothing Sacred?* Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> *Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver*, MCC, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2011, 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

the seriousness of his sin and releasing any anger or bitterness toward those who reported the abuse and are holding him accountable. It also means doing the hard psychological, emotional and spiritual work of making sure he will not abuse again.

For all, including the whole community impacted by the abuse, forgiveness can mean naming both the grievous sin with its impact on others, and the unmerited grace that cannot be earned but only received.

- j. Restoration of Shalom: Reconciliation. The ultimate hope of restorative justice is to establish or reestablish right relations in the community. In situations of sexual violence, reestablishing personal relationships between victims and their offenders may not be possible or wise. At the same time, the larger community can promote healing and safety for those who have been harmed, protect those who are vulnerable and insist on learning, accountability and support for those who have violated others. In this way, all can move toward the vision of God's Shalom for all.

#### 4. Definitions

**Sexual abuse** refers to sexualized behavior that occurs in a relationship where one party has more power than the other and meaningful consent is difficult, if not impossible. Sexual abuse takes advantage of another in order to use, control, or intimidate them for one's own purposes. It is violence which has been sexualized.<sup>12</sup> It can include actual physical contact of a sexual nature, such as hugs, kisses, touching, assault and intercourse. Sexual abuse can also involve more covert acts such as using sexual innuendo or pornography in the relationship, emotional and spiritual manipulation, or inappropriate disclosures of a personal nature regarding sexual matters.

**Sexual harassment** is any unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual or gender-specific nature that interferes with a person's ability to work, get an education, or engage in ministry. It often takes two forms:

- Quid pro quo harassment occurs when someone is pressured to trade sexual favors in return for a job, promotion or grade.
- Environmental harassment refers to unwelcome sexual behavior that creates a hostile environment. It can include sexually suggestive remarks, jokes, or gestures, displaying degrading pictures or objects, unwelcome propositions and unwanted physical contact such as touching, hugging, pinching, patting, or other sexual demands.

**Sexual immorality:** While all sexual abuse is immoral and sinful, not all sexual immorality is abusive. Sexually immoral behavior can occur when individuals of relatively equal power voluntarily engage in intimate, sexual acts outside of a committed, monogamous relationship, and/or violate their marriage covenant by engaging in such acts with someone other than their spouse.

**Professional power and responsibility:** It is important for all professionals to recognize the power they hold by virtue of their training and position in the community. This includes pastors, teachers, counselors, administrators or anyone in a position of trust or leadership. Even when they may not feel powerful, it is important for leaders to recognize that others see them as

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<sup>12</sup>Some use the term "sexualized violence" to address the fact that great violence has been done to the person.

strong and authoritative and often defer to them. Understanding this dynamic helps guard against misusing power or overstepping appropriate boundaries. Because they have greater power, leaders always bear primary responsibility to protect the boundaries of the relationship. It is also their responsibility to act in the best interests of the person with lesser power, rather than to use the person or exploit any of their vulnerabilities.

## **Appendix C: Resources**

### **Sermons**

- [Untold Stories \(2 Samuel 13:1-21\)](#). Meghan Larissa Good, Albany Mennonite Church

### **Books and pamphlets**

- [Body and Soul, Healthy Sexuality and the People of God](#). Faith & Life Resources, 2010.
- Cooper-White, Pamela, *The Cry of Tamar, Violence against Women and the Church's Response*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Fortress Press, 2012.
- Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence, The Sin Revisited*. The Pilgrim Press, 2005.
- Gaede, Beth Ann, editor. *When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct*. The Alban Institute, 2006.
- Heggen, Carolyn Holderread. *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. Herald Press, 1993. Reprinted Wipf & Stock, 2006.
- Jung, Patricia Beattie and Darryl W. Stephens, eds. *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- McClintock, Karen A. *Preventing sexual abuse in congregations: A resource for leaders*. The Alban Institute, 2004.
- Melton, Joy Thornburg. *Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church*. Discipleship Resources, 2009.
- Melton, Joy Thornburg. *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the risk of abuse in the church for children and youth*. Discipleship Resources, 2008.
- *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Jan. 2015.
- Smith, Andrea. *Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. South End Press, 2005.
- *Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Mennonite Central Committee, 2011: <http://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/abuse-prevention>.
- West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Yoder, Carolyn. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened*, Good Books, 2005.

### **Websites**

- Clergy Sexual Misconduct Awareness and Prevention, Baylor University: <http://www.baylor.edu/clergysexualmisconduct>
- Dove's Nest, Faith Communities Keeping Children and Youth Safe: <http://DovesNest.net/>
- Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE): <http://netgrace.org/>



- The Hope of Survivors: <http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/>
- Safe Church Project, Samaritan Counseling Center: <http://scclanc.org/clergy-congregation-care/safe-church/>
- Our Stories Untold: <http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com>
- Survivors Network of Persons Abused by Priests: <http://www.snapnetwork.org>.
- Andrea Smith blog: <https://andrea366.wordpress.com>.
- United Methodist Sexual Ethics: <http://umsexualethics.org>.

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