



Developing Resolutions for Mennonite Church USA

Guidelines approved by Executive Board, November 12, 2016

Benefits of church statements

When church statements are developed through careful process under the guidance of the Spirit, they can bring many benefits to the church and beyond.

- **Facilitate Discernment** – The process of formulating and considering a proposed resolution can help the church improve its ability to discern. Attention should be given to following a process for discernment and collectively listening to the movement of the Spirit while we are together.
- **Educate** – Resolutions may provide information about issues facing the church and can help our congregations and members better understand viewpoints and experiences beyond their current awareness. They also leave a written record as a testimony for posterity.
- **Build unity** – While it is not necessary for us to arrive at unanimous approval in order to pass a resolution, careful work toward common understandings and language can build unity in the church. Resolutions are not binding on conferences and congregations of Mennonite Church USA unless identified as having that intent from the beginning of the process.
- **Provide a denominational understanding while acknowledging dissenting voices** – Resolutions offer church members as well as those beyond our church a better understanding of our faith commitments. When we are not united in our viewpoints, resolutions can name both our areas of agreement and areas of differing views, in hopes of fostering better understanding and ongoing discernment.
- **Provide a foundation for member advocacy** – Resolutions can serve as statements of witness to government and society.

Types of resolutions

The term “resolution” means any action taken by vote of the delegate body. In our assemblies there are different kinds of actions approved by a vote of the delegate body. These include:

1. **Simple Resolutions**—These may be to approve minutes of the previous assembly or to express thanks to the hosting regional conference.
2. **Organizational Resolutions**—These actions are taken to approve bylaws or deal with other legal matters.
3. **Church Statements**—These statements, which receive broad support across the church and give direction for Christian faithfulness often on a current issue, should be available for study and discussion in home communities and/or conferences before delegates arrive at the biennial assembly. The focus of this proposal is on church statements.

General Understandings Regarding Church Statements

Church statements should be developed to further God's mission as defined by our statements of vision and purpose as well as our Purposeful Plan.

***Vision: Healing and Hope:** God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.*

***Purpose of Mennonite Church USA:** Joining in God's activity in the world, WE develop and nurture missional Mennonite congregations of many cultures.*

Our calling is to join the reconciling work of God. That effort must transcend our own understandings, culture, history and personality. As we work with church statements, we must ask:

1. Does the proposed resolution enable us to join God's activities in the world?
2. Does the proposed resolution enable us to live and act in ways that allow God's healing and hope to flow through us to the world?
3. Does the proposed resolution advance our *Vision: Healing and Hope*, our Purpose Statement and the Purposeful Plan that guides us toward God's preferred future for us?

If we cannot answer "yes" to these questions, the proposed statement is not likely to be central to the work of our church. If that is the case, it should not be viewed as an essential part of our churchwide agenda.

We desire that every church statement grow out of Spirit-led discernment around scripture and experience. They may also serve as a basis for further study and discernment on how to apply them in a local setting by congregations on a missional journey.

The development of resolutions, especially church statements, must seek to follow our ecclesiology. We believe the church exists at the congregational, area conference and national conference levels. While each person is responsible for developing and maintaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our understandings of the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are refined and tested by the community of believers on the three levels of our church. Therefore, while any individual may submit a proposal for a resolution/church statement, we require that it gain the approval of a congregation, area conference, or recognized constituent group in order to be considered for discussion by the whole church.

A Process for Discernment. Spiritual discernment is led by the Holy Spirit as we gather around scripture and share out of our life experiences or understandings to reach a point that "seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us." Proposed church statements should be discussed in contexts that allow for the following components of a helpful discernment process. Such discernment may require more time than is available at one Assembly.

- **Careful study** – Best discernment will occur if study documents are developed, distributed, and studied *before* resolutions are brought to the Delegate Assembly.
- **Create safe spaces for all voices to be heard** – To achieve the biblical discernment we seek, we will collectively find ways to open ourselves to hear differing viewpoints and to listen together to the Holy Spirit.

- **Seek to understand the basis for our differing viewpoints** – Rather than arguing positions, we will search for common ground through hearing how we have come to our various perspectives.
- **Involve significant delegate discussion in table groups and otherwise** – We will commit significant time for deep hearing of each other’s understandings, both before and during delegate sessions.
- **Set a high threshold for adoption** – If a simple majority vote does not seem appropriate, the Resolutions Committee may suggest a percentage needed to adopt a particular resolution, and their suggestion will be followed unless disapproved by at least two-thirds of the delegates.

Discussion at Delegate Assembly. The time we have at Delegate Assemblies should be structured to (1) allow time for worship, (2) focus on our vision and purpose and the Purposeful Plan, (3) build community within which discernment can truly happen and (4) provide a setting in which we are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Table group discernment has been an important process in Mennonite Church USA. We expect that each assembly will provide time for delegates to work together to develop consensus on questions facing the church. We also expect to provide time at each assembly for open discussion out of which movements of the Spirit may emerge. Such times may identify a question for which further study is required, perhaps leading to a churchwide study process that may continue for one or more biennia.

In addition to church statements emerging in this way, the following procedure outlines a process for discernment of resolutions that do not emerge out of communal discernment at the Delegate Assembly.

Specific Guidelines for the Development of Church Statements

Resolutions Committee: The Executive Board will appoint a standing Resolutions Committee of five or more persons, and establish terms as appropriate. Two of the members shall be nominated by the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) Gifts Discernment Committee and approved by the Executive Board. (The nominees need not be members of CLC.) No more than 50 percent of the members of the Resolutions Committee shall be a member of the board or staff of the Executive Board or its five program agencies. Vacancies on the committee shall be filled by the Executive Board as appropriate.

The Resolutions Committee shall have the authority to:

- a. Interact with drafters/sponsors of resolutions to improve them as needed before submitting them to the CLC
- b. Commend resolutions to the CLC for discernment of their appropriateness as resolutions to be considered by the Delegate Assembly
- c. Propose the drafting of new resolutions as needed in the life of the church

Process for submission of a resolution: Any conference, congregation or constituency group may propose a resolution for action by the Delegate Assembly, with the following stipulations:

- a. Any resolution shall be submitted in writing to (and received by) the Resolutions Committee at least six months prior to the commencement of a Delegate Assembly.

Resolutions can be sent to Ervin Stutzman as the Executive Director at Ervins@mennoniteusa.org.

- b. Any resolution shall be accompanied by a written statement that includes:
 - i. the purpose and/or reason for such proposed resolution;
 - ii. the intended consequences of the adoption of such resolution;
 - iii. anticipated reasons for supporting and for rejecting such proposal; and
 - iv. the name and contact information of the conference, congregation or person making such proposal.
- c. Any resolution proposed less than six months prior to a Delegate Assembly will require the additional requirement of the signature of ten or more delegates from each of at least three different area conferences, and must be approved by the Executive Board for submission to the Delegate Assembly.
- d. At any time prior to the conclusion of a Delegate Assembly, the Executive Board and the Resolutions Committee may each propose one or more resolutions for action by the Delegate Assembly.

Consideration by the Resolutions Committee: The Resolutions Committee will review the proposed resolution and the material submitted with it and

- a. Determine whether the resolution is best defined as a Church Statement or some other type; and then proceed accordingly, as outlined below.
- b. Determine whether the resolution will further the purposes for which resolutions are adopted, as stated above, and is in keeping with the bylaws and polity of the church.
- c. Determine whether a proposed resolution has sufficient churchwide support, impact and interest such that the CLC should spend time discerning whether the proposed Church Statement should be submitted to the Delegate Assembly. Resolutions will not be submitted to the CLC that are determined to not meet, in the committee's judgment, the purposes for which resolutions are adopted.
- d. With respect to any resolution defined as a Church Statement and which the Resolutions Committee has deemed worthy of further consideration, submit it to the CLC for further consideration. The CLC may consider the number of resolutions that can reasonably be processed at a Delegate Assembly, given the time for this activity.

Consideration by the CLC: The CLC will be invited to:

- a. engage in corporate discernment at any part of the biennium regarding a proposed Church Statement's suitability for consideration by the delegate body, as defined in the "General Understandings Regarding Church Statements" found earlier in this document,
- b. recommend up to three resolutions each biennium for adoption (and perhaps another for discussion) by the Delegate Assembly and to recommend an appropriate percentage needed to adopt each resolution, with the understanding that such suggestion will be followed unless disapproved by at least two-thirds of the delegates,
- c. recommend resolutions to be made available for study by the church, even though they may not be recommended for a particular delegate assembly
- d. recommend the degree to which the proposed resolution is intended to be binding on conferences and congregations of Mennonite Church USA, and
- e. state any other considerations for the Resolutions Committee to take into account (such as the development of a study guide or other resources) before a recommended statement is distributed to conferences and congregations for study, discernment and prayer prior to the Delegate Assembly.

Further, the CLC may discern that any proposed resolution requires more time for discernment, and recommend such resolution for later disposition, with the exception that the Resolutions Committee or the CLC may not prevent a resolution submitted by the Executive Board from being submitted to a Delegate Assembly.

Following recommendations from the CLC, the Resolutions Committee may:

- a. Edit, amend, modify and restate any proposed resolution (except those proposed by the Executive Board), generally through interaction with the individual or group who submitted it.
- b. Distribute with other Delegate Assembly material the resolutions which the Resolution Committee has determined should be submitted to the Delegate Assembly.
- c. Process any recommendations submitted to it by the CLC and also make any necessary recommendations to the Executive Board.

Other responsibilities of the Resolutions Committee:

- a. If and when the Resolutions Committee receives a proposed resolution after the six month limit has passed, the Executive Board can veto, by its own process, any recommendation made by the Resolutions Committee to submit such a resolution to the Delegate Assembly.
- b. Any resolution presented after the biennial assembly is convened, except for a resolution brought by the Executive Board itself, will require a two-thirds vote of the Assembly to place it on the floor for discussion.
- c. Distribute with other Delegate Assembly material the resolutions that the Resolution Committee has determined should be submitted to the Delegate Assembly.
- d. Provide a summary report to the Delegate Assembly, at the commencement of the Delegate Assembly and again at the ending of the Delegate Assembly, of those resolutions submitted to the Resolutions Committee that were not submitted to the Delegate Assembly for consideration.

A Study Process for Resolutions

- a. Proposed resolutions approved by the CLC may be posted on the Mennonite Church USA website or printed for distribution.
- b. Proposed resolutions may be promoted by the writers/sponsors via blogs or opinion pieces as appropriate.
- c. The constituency may provide feedback to proposed resolutions via comments on the websites, letters to the editor of *The Mennonite*, or by official mail to CLC, Executive Board, or the Resolutions Committee.

Conclusion

As each of us seeks to walk with Christ in the world, we must make many decisions, both as individuals and as groups. Many of these decisions require careful discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We trust that this document will enable the members of Mennonite Church USA to be more faithful in our corporate pursuit of God's mission in the world.