

2014 Survey of Credentialed Leaders in Mennonite Church USA

Final Report

Conrad L. Kanagy

This report summarizes results from a survey sent to approximately 2,000 credentialed leaders of Mennonite Church USA in August 2014. The purpose of the survey was to solicit feedback about a variety of benefits ranging from broader affiliation with Mennonite Church USA (as listed in the [Purposeful Plan](#) in lines 791–805) to denominational and agency services; beliefs about homosexuality and same-sex relations; and alternative organizational arrangements for the denomination. This report provides a description of the major findings of the survey, some cross-tabulations of relationships among variables, and analysis of open-ended responses.

The response rate for the survey was 66.2%, with 1,323 leaders responding. Of these, 799 (60.4%) were in local congregational assignments, 310 (23.4%) were in other assignments, and 214 (16.2%) were retired. Leaders with congregational assignments were invited to complete the entire survey; those with other assignments and those who were retired completed the parts of the survey most relevant to their status. I will indicate throughout the report whether a particular analysis includes all leaders or those with congregational assignments only.

In 2006, I directed a study of credentialed Mennonite Church USA leaders as part of the broader Church Member Profile 2006. That study of 319 active and active-without-charge ministers (a 65% response rate from a randomly selected sample of 500 leaders) included questions that provide some historical context for the current survey—findings and context that I will periodically reference where relevant.

Summary of Major Findings

Demographic Overview

The demographic distribution of respondents in the 2014 survey is noted in the following tables:

Table 1. Age distribution for 2014 Mennonite Church USA Credentialed Leaders Survey (N=1234 and includes all leaders).

<u>Age</u>	<u>Percent</u>
18–35	9.1
36–45	13.2
46–55	21.6
56–65	31.0
66+	25.1

36 The mean age in the 2014 survey is 56.6, as compared to 54.6 in 2006. The proportion of younger
 37 leaders in the current survey is slightly higher than in 2006—22.3% of leaders are 18–45 years of age in
 38 2014, as compared to 18.9% in 2006. At the same time in the current survey, 56.1% of leaders are 56
 39 years of age or older, as compared to 43.7% in 2006. These findings show that the average age of
 40 pastors in the denomination continues to increase.

41 **Table 2. Sex distribution for 2014 Mennonite Church USA Credentialed Leaders Survey (N=1203 and**
 42 **includes all leaders).**

43 Sex	Percent
44 Female	25.5
45 Male	74.5

46 The proportion of female leaders in the current study has increased from 17.0% in the 2006 profile to
 47 25.5% today, indicating a growing proportion of female pastors in the denomination.

48 **Table 3. Distribution by highest level of education for 2014 Mennonite Church USA Credentialed**
 49 **Leaders Survey (N=1203 and includes all leaders).**

50 Highest educational level	Percent
51 Not a high school graduate	1.0
52 High school graduate	3.9
53 Trade or technical school	0.9
54 Some college	9.1
55 Four-year degree	6.5
56 Some graduate school	10.1
57 Master’s or similar	54.7
58 Doctorate or similar	13.9

59 Eighty-five percent of denominational pastors have at least a four-year degree. More than two-thirds
 60 (68.6%) have a master’s degree or higher, as compared to 60.8% of leaders with that same educational
 61 level in 2006, pointing to an upward trend in higher education among Mennonite leaders.

62 **Table 4. Distribution by area of residence for 2014 Mennonite Church USA Credentialed Leaders**
 63 **Survey (N=1201 and includes all leaders).**

64 Residence	Percent
65 Farm	4.8
66 Open country	13.2
67 Small town (under 10,000)	27.1
68 Small city (10,000–50,000)	23.1
69 Medium city (50,000–250,000)	16.7
70 Large city (over 250,000)	15.1

71 Credentialed leaders are less likely to live on a farm or in the country today (18.0%) than in 2006
 72 (27.3%). They are more likely to come from medium to large cities (50,000 or more residents) in the
 73 current study (31.8%) than in the previous survey (24.4%), revealing increased urbanization among
 74 credentialed leaders.

75 **Table 5. Distribution of responses by area conference (N=799 and includes leaders with local**
 76 **congregational assignments only).**

77	Area conference	Percent
78	Lancaster	17.5
79	Indiana-Michigan	11.2
80	Ohio	10.1
81	Virginia	9.4
82	Franconia	7.3
83	Western District	6.9
84	Plains	6.1
85	Central District	5.5
86	Atlantic Coast	4.0
87	Illinois	3.9
88	Pacific Northwest	3.6
89	Pacific Southwest	3.1
90	Mountain States	2.8
91	Allegheny	2.3
92	South Central	2.3
93	Eastern District	1.4
94	Southeast	1.2
95	Franklin	1.2
96	New York	1.1
97	North Central	0.9
98	Gulf States	0.8

99 The above table illustrates the percentage distribution of respondents by area conference. In general,
 100 the responses of leaders to the survey reflect the representation of area conferences in the
 101 denomination, with larger conferences having a higher percentage of leaders responding and smaller
 102 conferences a lower percentage. (Note that these percentages are not the response rates of leaders in
 103 each area conference.)

104 **Hopefulness**

105 Respondents in the survey were given several opportunities to respond to open-ended questions. The
 106 initial question of the survey asked, “What is the most hopeful way, if any, that you have seen God at
 107 work in your congregation or other ministry setting within the last two years?”

108 In general, I was struck by the breadth and depth of “hopeful” responses by leaders, written in the midst
 109 of difficult challenges locally and at the denominational level. Descriptors that appeared frequently are
 110 listed below:

111 **Table 32. Key words of hopefulness.**

112	Word	Number of times
113	God	308
114	Unity	222
115	Community	200
116	New	185

117	Spirit	111
118	Hospitality	111
119	Christ	87
120	Jesus	81
121	Leader	77
122	Worship	76
123	Love	71
124	Children	61
125	Heal	60
126	Youth	53
127	Service	53
128	Spiritual	43
129	Prayer	38

130 Examples of hopeful comments from respondents included:

- 131 • “I am filled with hope with the way my congregation reaches out and proclaims Jesus’ Good
132 News to children in our church and local community (through Wednesday evening activities,
133 Sunday Morning Faith Formation, and Summer Bible School). I believe that through ministering
134 to these children, we will continue to find new opportunities to spread God’s hospitality, healing
135 and hope in the broader community.”
- 136 • “Our youth group had only one person at the beginning of last year. Many youth from the
137 community were invited to join and invited others. We now have about 10 to 15 people in our
138 youth group—many of whom are not from families who go to church.”
- 139 • “We have seen people from a variety of backgrounds come to faith in Christ and begin to follow
140 Jesus as disciples. Our congregation is made up of people from a variety of nationalities and
141 languages but find our unity in Christ Jesus. We have seen youth with no previous commitment
142 to Christ and some involved in gangs and drugs come to the Lord.”
- 143 • “Our congregation reaches out to many who have been outside traditional churches; often they
144 have been deeply wounded in churches. At the least, they have found the church irrelevant,
145 judgmental and narrow-minded. I find hope and joy in seeing these persons connecting to God
146 and each other. Changed lives are powerful!”
- 147 • “Growth in open communication patterns and increased trust as a result.”
- 148 • “For a small congregation, we have experienced a great deal (from my perspective) of adversity.
149 By adversity, I am referring to situations such as chronic joblessness, family conflict, illness and
150 other debilitating circumstances encountered by those who are part of this community of faith.
151 Yet in the midst of turmoil and difficulty, I see people not only persevering, but actually thriving
152 in the midst of life situations which could just as easily dismantle their faith. This fact alone is a
153 source of hope for the future.”
- 154 • “People have begun to understand that the church is not a building, program or institution, but
155 rather that it is followers of Christ together seeking to live for Jesus daily. This has led us to
156 begin to rethink how we engage the world, what we exist for and what God is calling us to do.
157 We are growing in our discipleship and in our willingness to engage in God’s mission.”

158 Despite turmoil and change in area conferences and the denomination, pastors express much hope
159 and evidence of God’s work in their local congregations and communities.

160

Benefits of Broader Affiliation for Congregations

161 The 2014 survey focused on several issues of importance to the denomination, including the benefits of
162 belonging to the broader faith community, denominational and agency services, attitudes about LGBTQ
163 membership and leadership, and perspectives on possible organizational alternatives. Leaders were
164 asked to respond to seven specific areas where broader affiliation can benefit a congregation—noting
165 the importance of each—as well as any increases or decreases they have observed in that particular
166 area over the past five years at both area conference and denominational levels.

167 **Table 6. Responses to seven areas where broader affiliation benefits congregations: Average rating**
168 **(leaders with local congregational assignments only).**

169 Component	Average*
170 Support for calling, training and sustaining congregational leaders	4.34
171 Outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues	4.19
172 Avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief	4.12
173 A sense of identity and belonging that is larger than the local context	4.07
174 Educational resources and other means of discipleship	4.00
175 Broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of mission	3.98
176 Ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations	3.90

177 *Scores ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in terms of importance placed on this component

178 Leaders rated most highly the importance they place on calling, training and sustaining congregational
179 leaders, followed by outside help when facing congregational conflicts or personnel issues, and
180 collaboration on mission and relief projects. A sense of a larger identity, educational resources, broader
181 discernment in pursuit of mission, and ways to cultivate healthy relationships received lower levels of
182 affirmation.

183 **Table 7. Responses to benefits of broader affiliation: Perceptions of increases and decreases over past**
184 **five years in area conferences (pastors with congregational assignments only).**

185 Component	% Increase	% Decrease
186 Support for calling, training and sustaining congregational leaders	30.3	14.9
187 Outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues	28.5	14.2
188 Avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief	25.0	10.2
189 A sense of identity and belonging that is larger than the local context	34.1	24.4
190 Educational resources and other means of discipleship	20.8	17.3
191 Broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of mission	47.3	21.1
192 Ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations	32.3	16.0

193 Among the various benefits of broader affiliation, pastors sensed the greatest increase in support at the
194 level of their area conference for “broader discernment of tough issues.” This was also the same benefit
195 that pastors identified as having increased most in the denomination. This benefit is followed by a
196 cluster of three others with perceptions of increase in “a sense of identity and belonging that is larger
197 than the local context,” “ways to cultivate healthy interdependence,” and “support for calling, training
198 and sustaining congregational leaders.” Leaders sense the lowest levels of increase in the remaining
199 benefits: outside help in conflicts, ways to cooperate in mission, and educational resources.

200 In terms of perceptions of declining support over the past five years in their area conferences, leaders
 201 were most likely to point to a sense of identity and belonging and broader discernment regarding tough
 202 issues—benefits where others had sensed the greatest increases. The differing views of leaders relative
 203 to specific benefits likely reflect in part their different area conference experiences. For all seven of the
 204 benefits, leaders are more likely to perceive increases in support rather than decreases within their area
 205 conferences.

206 **Table 8. Responses to benefits of broader affiliation: Perceptions of increases and decreases over past**
 207 **five years in denomination (pastors with congregational assignments only).**

208 Component	% Increase	% Decrease
209 Support for calling, training and sustaining congregational leaders	15.2	20.5
210 Outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues	7.6	17.9
211 Avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief	12.5	12.2
212 A sense of identity and belonging that is larger than the local context	15.6	31.0
213 Educational resources and other means of discipleship	15.9	20.2
214 Broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of mission	33.0	27.9
215 Ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations	12.9	22.2

216 Among the various benefits of broader affiliation, pastors have clearly sensed the greatest increase in
 217 support at the level of the denomination for “broader discernment of tough issues.” They have sensed
 218 the least increase in support for “outside help” during difficult congregational issues. In terms of
 219 declines in benefits of broader affiliation, leaders saw the greatest decrease in support in the area of
 220 “sense of identity and belonging” followed closely by “broader discernment” on tough issues. The latter
 221 is interesting because it was also the component where leaders sensed the greatest increase in support
 222 from the denomination. Overall among the seven benefits, the decreases outweigh the increases for five
 223 of the seven. This contrasts with perceptions above of the area conferences, where increases rather
 224 than decreases were perceived for all benefits.

225 **Table 9. Responses to benefits of broader affiliation: Perceptions of increases by denomination and**
 226 **area conference (leaders with local congregational assignments only).**

227 Component	Denom (%)	Conf (%)
228 Support for calling, training and sustaining congregational leaders	15.2	30.3
229 Outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues	7.6	28.5
230 Avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief	12.5	25.0
231 A sense of identity and belonging that is larger than the local context	15.6	34.1
232 Educational resources and other means of discipleship	15.9	20.8
233 Broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of mission	33.0	47.3
234 Ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations	12.9	32.3

235 From the perspective of gains experienced by pastors relative to the benefits of broader affiliation, area
 236 conferences are by far the winners, with increases at least double those of the denomination in five of
 237 the benefits (support for calling, outside help, cooperation on mission, a sense of identity and belonging,
 238 and ways to cultivate healthy interdependence). The benefit with the closest mutual increase for both
 239 area conferences and the denomination was that of educational resources. Though the gain was not
 240 double for broader discernment, it was still substantially higher for area conferences than for the
 241 denomination.

242 **Denominational benefits to congregations**

243 Of all the services that respondents were asked to identify as benefits to their congregation over the
244 past year, the pastoral salary guidelines were recognized most frequently (83.9%), followed by
245 participation in churchwide conventions (73.5%). These are clearly the two most frequently cited
246 services. Sixty-two percent identified attendance at MEA-related schools, and 51% noted the use of
247 pastor calling resources provided by their conference minister. Those services least cited were website
248 and graphic design (36.4%), Year of the Bible/12 Scripture Project (31.7%), and documents from the
249 web-based resource center (30.8%).

250 **Beliefs about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer (LGBTQ) Membership**

251 Among all credentialed leaders, 31.9% believe that LGBTQ individuals should be members of
252 congregations without conditions. Twenty-one percent (21.3) believe that only individuals who remain
253 celibate or are in committed monogamous relationships should be members. Thirty-nine (38.5) percent
254 believe that of LGBTQ individuals, only those who remain celibate should be members, and 8.2% believe
255 that LGBTQ members should not be members under any conditions (see Table 10).

256 Among those with congregational assignments, 27.5% believe that LGBTQ persons should be members
257 of congregations without conditions. Nearly 20% believe that only individuals who remain celibate or
258 are in committed monogamous relationships should be members. Just over 42% believe that only
259 LGBTQ individuals who remain celibate should be members, while 10.7% believe that LGBTQ individuals
260 should not be members under any conditions.

261 The view of respondents who are local pastors is more restrictive than that of those with outside
262 assignments—among the latter, only 28.6% believe that only LGBTQ individuals who remain celibate
263 should be members, and 4.1% believe that LGBTQ individuals should not be members under any
264 conditions. Among these credentialed leaders, 24.2% believe that only LGBTQ individuals who remain
265 celibate or are in committed monogamous relationships should be members, but 43.1% believe no
266 conditions should apply for membership. Thus, while just over one-half (53%) of local pastors would
267 restrict membership among LGBTQ persons to those who remain celibate or would not permit them to
268 be members under any conditions, less than one-third (32.7%) of credentialed leaders with other
269 assignments would make such restrictions.

270 To put this data in historical context, 73.9% of active and active-without-charge leaders in the Church
271 Member Profile 2006 stated that homosexual relations are always wrong, and only 32.0% said they
272 would accept a “practicing homosexual” as a member in their congregation.

273 **Beliefs about LGBTQ leadership**

274 Among all credentialed leaders, 19.5% believe that LGBTQ individuals should have opportunities to
275 serve in leadership roles in the church without any conditions. Twenty-six percent of all leaders believe
276 that those in committed monogamous relationships or who are celibate may serve in leadership roles.
277 Thirty-six percent of all leaders believe that of LGBTQ individuals, only those who are celibate may be
278 leaders, and 18.5% of all leaders believe that LGBTQ persons should not lead (see Table 11).

279 Among pastors with congregational assignments, 62% believe that congregational leadership roles
280 should be restricted to LGBTQ persons who remain celibate or that LGBTQ persons should not serve as

281 leaders under any conditions. Twenty-three percent believe that only LGBTQ folks who are celibate or in
282 committed monogamous relationships should be able to lead, and 15.4% believe all LGBTQ persons
283 should have opportunities for leadership in congregations without conditions.

284 Again, the view of local pastors is more restrictive than that of those with outside assignments, with only
285 38.9% of the latter believing that celibacy should be the criteria for leadership or that LGBTQ persons
286 should not lead under any conditions. Among these credentialed leaders, 33.3% believe that only LGBTQ
287 persons who are celibate or in committed monogamous relationships should have opportunities to lead,
288 and 27.8% believe that LGBTQ individuals should be able to serve in leadership roles without conditions.

289 In 2006, 13.8% of credentialed leaders stated that they would accept a “practicing homosexual” as an
290 ordained minister in their congregation; this figure compares with 45.5% in the current survey. Sixty-six
291 percent of leaders in 2006 said they would not accept a “practicing homosexual” in any role—as a
292 member, lay leader or ordained minister. Today, only 46.7% would not accept a LGBTQ person who is
293 not celibate as a member. In terms of views on both LGBTQ membership and leadership, Mennonite
294 Church USA leaders have shifted dramatically.

295 **Beliefs about when or if pastors should officiate same-sex weddings**

296 Among pastors with congregational assignments, 54% believe pastors should never officiate same-sex
297 weddings, as compared to 31.7% of leaders in other assignments who feel the same. Among
298 congregational pastors who believe that officiating same-sex weddings is permissible under certain
299 conditions, the responses were quite varied among the remaining four categories:

- 300 • 17.2% if the pastor feels convicted to do so,
- 301 • 30.3% when the congregation approves,
- 302 • 12.7% when the area conference approves, and
- 303 • 13.9% when the denomination approves.

304 **Personal convictions about organizational possibilities depending on LGBTQ inclusiveness**

305 Among all credentialed leaders, 15.9% are willing to support LGBTQ inclusion even if doing so results in
306 membership losses for the denomination. Forty-three percent of all leaders want to support the historic
307 teaching position of the church on sexuality even if losses occur. And 41.4% of all leaders desire to find a
308 way to live in unity with the diversity that exists in the church (see Table 12).

309 Substantial differences emerged between local pastors and other credentialed leaders on the question
310 of personal convictions related to the organizational decisions being made by Mennonite Church USA
311 related to LGBTQ concerns. Among local pastors, 50.7% want to be part of a church that upholds the
312 Membership Guidelines even if this results in losses to the denomination. This compares with only
313 27.3% of other credentialed leaders who hold this position, and 33.9% of retired leaders. In affirming the
314 unity of the church in the midst of diversity, retired (47.0%) and other credentialed leaders (49.5%) were
315 very close, while fewer local congregational leaders (36.9%) affirmed finding a way to live in unity in the
316 midst of diversity.

317 **Possible preferred future organizational alternatives for Mennonite Church USA**

318 Responses to the question of a preferred future for the organization of Mennonite Church USA among
319 credentialed leaders were quite diverse, with few substantial differences between local pastors and

320 those with other assignments. Among all leaders, about one-fourth (24.6%) prefer to see the
321 strengthening of authority of area conferences, 23.4% are satisfied with the current structure, and
322 25.2% are not sure of their preference. Few (1.5%) wish to see the denomination dissolve, but 14.6%
323 would strengthen congregational autonomy, while another 10.7% would like to see stronger leadership
324 at the denominational level (see Table 13).

325 Among those with congregational assignments, nearly one-fourth (23.1%) prefer a reorganization that
326 would strengthen the authority of area conferences, about another quarter (23.4%) are satisfied with
327 the current denominational structure, and just over another one-quarter (26.8%) say they are not sure
328 what they prefer. The remaining respondents are split among the other three categories, with 12.9%
329 desiring greater authority for the Executive Board, 11.6% wishing for greater autonomy for
330 congregations, and 2.2% wishing to see the current structure dissolve.

331 Among leaders with assignments outside the congregation and those who are retired, responses were
332 remarkably close to those of pastors with congregational leadership roles.

333 **Exploration of Key Relationships: LGBTQ Membership and Leadership**

334 **Differences by age**

335 Among all credentialed leaders, there is a relationship between age and attitudes about church
336 membership for LGBTQ individuals. Among 18–35-year-olds, 65.8% support membership for LGBTQ
337 persons, compared to 45.2% of 36–45-year-olds, 51.2% of 46–55-year-olds, 55.2% of 56–65-year-olds,
338 and 52.5% of those 66 years of age or older. The major distinction is between those 35 and younger and
339 everyone else, although interestingly, the least support for LGBTQ membership is found among those
340 between 36 and 45 years of age.

341 Among all credentialed leaders, there is a relationship between age and attitudes about leadership
342 opportunities for LGBTQ individuals. Among 18–35 year olds, 55.0% support such leadership
343 opportunities, compared to 34.2% of 36–45 year olds, 44.5.% of 46–55 year olds, 48.1% of 56–65 year
344 olds, and 45.9% of those 66 years of age or older. The major distinction once again is between those 35
345 and younger and everyone else, but once more the least support for LGBTQ congregational leadership is
346 found among those between 36 and 45 years of age.

347 Table 14 shows the results of the relationship between age and beliefs about LGBTQ church
348 membership for pastors with local congregational assignments. The youngest leaders are most
349 embracing of LGBTQ members, with 63.8% supporting membership without conditions or for individuals
350 who remain celibate or are in a committed monogamous relationship. This compares with 41.7% of 36–
351 45 year olds who feel the same, 44.2% of 46–55 year olds, 47.5% of 56–65 year olds, and 40.6% of those
352 66 years of age and older. In other words, there is little difference among age groups with the exception
353 of the youngest leaders, among whom nearly two-thirds support LGBTQ membership.

354 Table 15 illustrates the findings for the relationship between age and attitudes about LGBTQ leadership
355 for pastors with local assignments only. Again, the youngest leaders were much more likely than others
356 to affirm leadership opportunities for LGBTQ individuals.

357 **Differences by residence**

358 Among all credentialed leaders, area of residence does have a relationship to attitudes about LGBTQ
359 membership and leadership opportunities. Among those in rural communities (from farms to small
360 towns—fewer than 10,000 residents), 38.3% support LGBTQ membership. Among those in small to large
361 cities (10,000 or more residents), 66.0% support LGBTQ membership. Among those in rural communities
362 (fewer than 10,000 residents), 29.4% believe that LGBTQ individuals should be able to be congregational
363 leaders, and among urban dwellers (10,000 or more residents), 59.2% believe the same.

364 Among pastors with local congregational assignments only, area of residence has a similar effect on
365 attitudes about LGBTQ membership and leadership. Those living on farms, in open country, or in small
366 towns (10,000 residents or less) are much less likely to support LGBTQ membership and leadership than
367 are those living in small, medium or large cities (10,000 or more residents) (see Tables 16 and 17).

368 **Differences by sex**

369 Sex of respondents is related to views of LGBTQ membership and leadership. Among leaders with local
370 congregational assignments, 50.6% percent of women and 21.0% of men believe that LGBTQ persons
371 should be congregational members without conditions. Around 31% of women and 16.5% of men
372 believe that only LGBTQ persons who are celibate or are in committed monogamous relationships
373 should be members. Just under 17% of women and 49.5% of men believe that only LGBTQ individuals
374 who remain celibate should be members, and 1.9% of women and 13.0% of men believe that LGBTQ
375 folks should not be members under any conditions.

376
377 In addition, 28.1% of female pastors and 11.8% of male pastors believe that LGBTQ persons should be
378 able to hold leadership positions without conditions (see Tables 18 and 19). Nearly 41% of women and
379 18.0% of men believe that only LGBTQ individuals who are celibate or in committed monogamous
380 relationships should have opportunities to lead, and 24.4% of women and 43.8% of men believe that
381 only LGBTQ persons who remain celibate should be able to lead. Those who felt that LGBTQ persons
382 should not lead under any conditions were 6.9% of women and 26.4% of men.

383 **Differences by area conference**

384 Among pastors with local congregational assignments, analysis of attitudes about LGBTQ membership
385 and leadership reveal deep differences by area conference—with Franklin, Gulf States, Lancaster, New
386 York, North Central, Ohio, South Central and Southeast conferences having at least two-thirds of their
387 leaders opposed to LGBTQ membership. On the other end of the spectrum, Central District, Illinois,
388 Mountain States, Pacific Northwest and Western District conferences have less than one-third of leaders
389 who oppose LGBTQ membership. The remaining area conferences are somewhere in between. For
390 nearly all area conferences there is less support for LGBTQ leadership than there is for membership (see
391 Tables 20 through 23).

392 In a separate analysis, I organized area conferences into three groups depending upon their views of
393 LGBTQ congregational membership. Group 1 represented those eight area conferences in which less
394 than one-third of leaders supported LGBTQ membership (Franklin, Gulf States, Lancaster, New York,
395 North Central, Ohio, South Central and Southeast). This group represents 31.6% of credentialed leaders
396 in the survey. Group 2 represented seven area conferences in which one-third to two-thirds of leaders
397 supported LGBTQ membership (Allegheny, Atlantic Coast, Eastern District, Franconia, Indiana-Michigan,

398 Pacific Southwest and Virginia). This group accounted for 39% of all credentialed leaders in the study.
399 Group 3 was composed of area conferences in which more than two-thirds of leaders supported LGBTQ
400 membership (Central District, Central Plains, Illinois, Mountain States, Pacific Northwest and Western
401 District). This group represented 29.4% of credentialed leaders in the survey. This analysis included all
402 credentialed leaders in the survey.

403 These three groups differ significantly from one another in age, sex, area of residence and educational
404 level.

- 405 • In Group 1, 13.8% of leaders are female, as compared to 26.7% of leaders in Group 2 and 35.4%
406 of leaders in Group 3. In other words, as the percentage of female leaders increases within area
407 conferences, support for LGBTQ membership increases in area conferences.
- 408 • In Group 1, 25.4% of leaders are 45 years of age or younger, as compared to Group 2 (19.5%)
409 and Group 3 (22.3%). In Group 1, 50.2% of leaders are 56 years of age or older, as compared to
410 57.5% of leaders in Group 2 and 56% of leaders in Group 3. In this analysis, age of leaders is not
411 related to attitude about LGBTQ membership in the direction we might expect (younger leaders
412 being more supportive of LGBTQ membership), since among the most conservative area
413 conferences' leaders are also the youngest.
- 414 • **Residence.** In Group 1, 65.6% of leaders are in rural communities, compared to only 37.7% of
415 leaders in Group 2 and 33.8% of leaders in Group 3. Among leaders in Group 3, 43.7% live in
416 medium to large cities (50,000 or more residents), as compared to 31.9% of those in Group 2
417 and 20.1% of those in Group 1.
- 418 • **Education.** In Group 1, 48.5% of leaders have a master's degree or higher in terms of education,
419 as compared to 73.0% of leaders in Group 2 and 83.9% of leaders in Group 3.

420
421 In other words, leaders in Group 1 are more likely to be male, younger, rural and have lower levels of
422 education. Leaders in Groups 2 and 3 include more females, are older, are more urban and have higher
423 levels of education. Interestingly, except for age, these relationships are all linear, meaning that the
424 more likely one is to belong to an area conference that supports LGBTQ membership, the more likely
425 one is to be urban, female and highly educated. And all four of these relationships (three groups by four
426 demographic characteristics) are statistically significant.

427 The question then becomes, do these differences across groups translate into clear differences in terms
428 of preferences regarding the future of the denomination (Question 10)? Not surprisingly, the answer is a
429 resounding "yes."

- 430 • Leaders in Group 1 are most likely to desire a strengthening of denominational authority (20.6%)
431 or to be satisfied with the current organizational structure (20.0%). Those in Group 2 are most
432 likely to affirm the current structure (26.6%), followed by 22.8% who wish to see area
433 conferences have more authority. Among those in Group 3, leaders are most likely to affirm
434 strengthening the authority of area conferences (35.9%).

435 Of those who wish to see the denomination reorganized with greater authority, 20.6% are from
436 Group 1, 8.8% from Group 2, and 2.9% from Group 3. In other words, one is most likely to affirm
437 strengthening the denomination's authority if he/she is from Group 1, and least likely to do so if
438 from Group 3. In terms of strengthening the authority of area conferences, 17.2% of those in
439 Group 1 affirm this, as compared to 22.8% from Group 2 and 35.9% from Group 3.

440 There is relatively little difference among the three groups in terms of affirming the status quo
441 of the denominational structure. However, those in Group 2 were most likely to do so (26.6%),
442 followed by leaders in Group 3 (21.2%) and then Group 1 (20.0%).

443 In sum, 40.6% of leaders in Group 1 affirm the current structure as satisfactory or suggest
444 strengthening denominational authority, compared to 35.4% who say the same in Group 2, and
445 24.1% in Group 3. Among those in Group 3, 54.7% would strengthen the authority of area
446 conferences or congregations, compared to 40.9% of those in Group 2 and 24.5% of those in
447 Group 1. In other words, Group 1 is much more likely to desire maintaining the current model or
448 strengthening denominational authority, while those in Groups 2 and 3 desire more
449 decentralized structures, with Group 3 being the strongest advocates for such. These
450 relationships are all statistically significant.

451 When asked about the kind of denomination they wished to be part of (Question 7), the patterns again
452 were clear, depending on one's area conference.

453 • Among those in Group 1, 70.3% said they would prefer to be part of a church that upholds the
454 teaching position on sexuality (the vision of marriage expressed in the Mennonite Church USA
455 Membership Guidelines, which prohibit same-sex relationships), even if it results in the loss of
456 members—this compares to 38.1% of those in Group 2 and 18.5% of those in Group 3.

457 Support for LGBTQ members regardless of losses is most likely to come from those in Group 3
458 (28.3%, compared to 18.2% in Group 2 and 2.3% in Group 1).

459 Support for unity in diversity is expressed most in Group 3 (53.2%), followed by Group 2 (43.8%)
460 and then Group 1 (27.4%). In Group 1 there is a greater willingness to accept membership losses
461 than is true for either of the other groups, regardless of the reason for such losses. These
462 relationships are all statistically significant.

463 **Exploration of Key Relationships: Organizational Decisions**

464 **Differences by age**

465 Among those with local congregational assignments, there are interesting differences by age in terms of
466 perspectives on the future of the denomination. Among those 18–35, 52.3% affirm unity in diversity,
467 compared to 35.0% of 36–45-year-olds, 39.1% of those 46–55 years old, 40.6% of those 55–65 years old,
468 and 44.2% of those 66 years of age and older. But there was relatively little difference by age in terms of
469 those who preferred staying in a church that embraced LGBTQ persons even if it meant losses—the
470 percentages ranged from 13.5 to 17.5. But major differences existed by age among those who would
471 support the historic teaching position even if it meant losses to denominational membership. Among
472 18–35-year-olds, only 34.2% took this position, as compared to 51.9% of 36–45-year-olds, 45.2% of
473 those 46–55, 41.9% of those 56–65, and 39.9% of those 66 years of age and older. Interestingly, this
474 response is not linear by age (note the similarity between youngest and oldest).

475 **Differences by area of residence**

476 Among rural dwellers who have local congregational assignments, 8.0% affirm a church that fully
477 includes LGBTQ persons even if such inclusion means losses to the denomination—this compares with
478 22.5% of those living in small to large cities (10,000 or more residents). Among those in rural
479 communities, 56.3% believe the church should uphold the historic teaching position, even if this leads to

480 losses in membership; this compares with 31.3% of those in urban areas who hold the same position.
481 Thirty-six percent (35.7) of those in the countryside are willing to live with unity in diversity, compared
482 to 46.3% of those in cities (10,000 or more residents).

483 **Differences by area conference**

484 Tables 24 through 26 show one’s views of possible organizational decisions by area conference for all
485 three credentialed groups in the survey—those with congregational assignments, those with other
486 assignments, and those who are retired. The number of respondents for those with other assignments
487 and retired is relatively small and needs to be kept in mind when assessing the differences among the
488 three groups.

489 **Differences by view of LGBTQ membership**

490 When faced with the question about organizational decisions for the church, responses among pastors
491 with local congregational assignments were strongly related to their perspective on LGBTQ membership.
492 Of those against LGBTQ membership (“under no conditions,” or requiring celibacy), 89.2% support
493 upholding the historic teaching position, even if doing so results in membership losses. Only 10.8%
494 support the alternative of unity in the midst of diversity on the issue of sexuality. Among those who
495 affirm LGBTQ congregational membership (LGBTQ membership without condition, or membership for
496 LGBTQ persons who are either celibate or in committed monogamous relationships), 66.8% support
497 unity in the midst of diversity, while another 27.2% want to be part of a church that includes LGBTQ
498 individuals even if membership losses occur (see Table 27).

499 **Exploration of Key Relationships: Preferred Future Alternatives**

500 **Differences by area conference**

501 Among pastors with congregational assignments, substantial differences exist among area conferences
502 in their perspectives on preferred future alternatives for the denomination. Conferences that are more
503 likely to support the historic teaching position on sexuality are more likely to affirm stronger
504 denominational authority or to affirm the current arrangement. Those with more progressive views of
505 same-sex relations are more likely to support strengthening the authority of area conferences. (Tables
506 28–30 show the results for all three groups of credentialed leaders in the survey.)

507 **Differences by view of LGBTQ membership**

508 Respondents were given the opportunity to choose among six organizational alternatives for the
509 denomination. Of pastors in congregational assignments, those who support membership for LGBTQ
510 persons are most likely—of all the organizational alternatives—to say that the denomination should be
511 reorganized with greater authority given to area conferences (38.1%). This compares, for this
512 alternative, with just 9.1% of those who support the traditional teaching position on sexuality. Among
513 those who support the church’s teaching position on sexuality, respondents are most likely to say they
514 are not sure what to do (30.7%), followed closely by the alternative of the status quo (supporting the
515 current denominational organization), and giving greater authority to the denomination (23.3%).

516 In other words, of those who support the historic teaching position on sexuality, more than one-half
517 (53.1%) affirm the current structure or call for the denomination to have increased authority. This
518 finding compares with just 19.2% of those who support greater inclusiveness in the denomination. In

519 fact, among those who support membership inclusion for LGBTQ persons, 58.5% affirm strengthening
520 the authority of either the area conference or the congregation, as compared to just 12.9% of those who
521 support the historic teaching position. The preferred alternatives are quite different depending on one's
522 perspective of LGBTQ congregational membership. These findings are mirrored in the analysis of
523 attitudes about LGBTQ congregational leadership and preferred organizational alternatives (see Table
524 31).

525 **Open-Ended Analysis**

526 **Appreciation for Mennonite Church USA**

527 Besides the very first question of the survey about hopefulness (reported earlier in this report), other
528 open-ended questions gave respondents opportunities to reflect beyond the quantitative questions of
529 the survey. In one such question, respondents were asked, "What, if anything, do you most appreciate
530 about your congregation's affiliation with Mennonite Church USA?"

531 Overwhelmingly, responses included words that conveyed the importance of connections, community,
532 identity, support and belonging. In fact, it was not uncommon to find multiples of these words or ideas
533 used in the same comment. I was intrigued with how infrequently some words were used that one
534 might have expected to see, such as missional (8 times), agencies (15 times), and diversity (23 times).
535 And when the latter was used, it was not necessarily in the context of racial or ethnic diversity. I have
536 included below key words that appeared often in the open-ended responses to this question as well as
537 some direct quotations from respondents to illustrate how the words were used in context:

538 **Resources (130 times):** "I am very appreciative that our small denomination has so many resources that
539 help us grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. ... Our Anabaptist/Mennonite view on things helps us to clarify
540 what our mission is in the world."

541 **Anabaptist (122 times):** "Help to keep Anabaptist values incorporated in our thinking and processing."

542 **Mission (98 times):** "Walking with like-minded people who have the same vision and mission founded
543 on common biblical interpretation and theology is the most valuable element of affiliating with
544 Mennonite Church USA."

545 **Connection (95 times):** "Connection to Anabaptist congregations across the U.S."

546 **Peace (75 times):** "I appreciate our connection to a Christo-centric peace church tradition. In various
547 ecumenical circles I have been part of over the last five years, I have appreciated that it is 'cool' to be a
548 Mennonite and that we have many unique things to offer the broader church."

549 **Community (59 times):** "The sense of belonging to a larger family and identification with an Anabaptist
550 community."

551 **Broader (59 times):** "Being connected to a broader faith community, all striving to faithfully follow the
552 calling of Jesus Christ."

553 **Belonging (53 times):** "The sense of belonging to the wider church, and being a part of a body that
554 includes congregations from varied cultures and perspectives, and though congregations are different in
555 many ways, we share an affiliation and the desire to be Christ-centered."

556 **Convention (49 times):** “Mennonite Church USA provides the larger context by which congregations can
557 identify who they are and provide the center of their teaching. This is not a doctrinal or creedal
558 relationship, but the larger church does provide Christian Ed materials, music materials, Mennonite
559 Voluntary Service possibilities, justice and peace initiatives, youth convention experiences, etc., that are
560 important to our congregation. Mennonite Church executives are able to act on our behalf in joining
561 with other denominations to address issues of war, oppression, racial divide, etc.”

562 **Leadership (37 times):** “I appreciate belonging to a larger body of Christ that has churches throughout
563 the United States and keeps us from becoming only focused on our own communities and our own
564 views, etc. I like being able to work together in a variety of ways and benefit from all the resources and
565 leadership the larger Mennonite Church offers. Just as a congregation offers ‘community’ to a group of
566 gathered believers who worship, pray, learn and play together, in a similar way Mennonite Church USA
567 provides our churches and conferences with a much larger and more diverse ‘community.’”

568 **Theology (32 times):** “Affiliation gives a sense that I/we are part of something bigger than just ourselves.
569 Mennonite Church USA helps us articulate our unique Anabaptist theology—both to ourselves and to
570 the broader American society.”

571 **Confession of Faith (31 times):** “The fact that together we can represent a clear witness to the world
572 that is Christ-centered and based upon the Scriptures as discerned and declared through our *Confession*
573 *of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. The Mennonite values we hold out to the world hold the potential
574 to bring huge transformation to individuals, communities and nations.”

575 **Education (31 times):** “I appreciate the educational/music resources that are available to our
576 congregation. I also think the churchwide conferences are worthwhile, informative and help us to hear a
577 broader base of voices.”

578 **Concerns about Mennonite Church USA**

579 Respondents were also offered a follow-up open-ended question, “What, if anything, most concerns you
580 about your congregation’s affiliation with Mennonite Church USA?”

581 Unlike working with the two earlier questions about hopefulness and appreciation for the
582 denomination, it was challenging to find common themes among the concerns expressed about the
583 denomination. The diversity of concerns seemed to reflect the diversity of perspectives on sexuality and
584 organizational arrangements seen in the quantitative data. That is, when respondents are asked to
585 identify hope or appreciation, their responses tend to overlap, and they have much in common with one
586 another. But when they are asked to identify their concerns and anxieties, these are much more difficult
587 to generalize.

588 In reading through the list of concerns, one sees most clearly just how different members of Mennonite
589 Church USA are from one another—by sex, educational level, area of residence, age and area
590 conference. The differences are sociological, cultural and theological.

591 With differences so deep, it is exceptionally difficult to have productive conversations or dialogue about
592 controversial issues, since the success of dialogue depends upon having enough commonalities to allow
593 for understanding. By and large, respondents fail to understand or try to understand the particular
594 “standpoint” from which the other sees the world. Examples of key words related to concerns included:

595 **Table 32. Key words of concern about the denomination.**

596	Word	Number of times
597	Concern	229
598	Sex	157
599	Conference	136
600	Sin.....	117
601	Christ.....	67
602	Leadership.....	67
603	Homosexual	60
604	Scripture.....	51
605	Affiliation.....	47
606	Biblical	45
607	Mission	38
608	LGBTQ	30
609	Bible	28
610	Same-sex.....	28
611	Identity.....	22
612	Mountain States.....	16
613	Divisive	12
614	Dialogue	10
615	Division	9
616	Disconnect.....	9
617	Merger	8
618	Inclusive	5
619	Pink Menno.....	5
620	Sexual orientation.....	3
621	Disunity	2
622	Diversity	2

623 **Relevant Scriptures**

624 Respondents were given an opportunity to identify the Scriptures that they understood to be most
 625 relevant to their views of homosexuality. Credentialed leaders readily responded with a variety of texts,
 626 though there was substantial overlap of identified Scriptures. An impressive amount of Scripture was
 627 put forth by respondents; the following table indicates the number of times particular books of the Bible
 628 were identified:

629 **Table 33: Key Scriptures about same-sex attraction.**

630	Book	Number of times
631	Romans	409
632	Matthew.....	270
633	Corinthians (I/II)	241
634	Genesis	228
635	John	178
636	Acts.....	173
637	Leviticus	99
638	Luke.....	82

639 Galatians 82
640 Mark..... 70
641 Timothy (I/II) 64
642 Ephesians 57
643 Jesus 47
644 Micah 22

645 In a further analysis of the Scriptures that respondents identified to support their position on same-sex
646 relationships, I randomly selected 12 respondents—six opposed to LGBTQ membership and six who
647 support it, and listed their biblical references in Table 34. Among those who would accept LGBTQ
648 individuals as members, there is a greater breadth of Scriptures, with fewer cited by multiple
649 respondents. Among those opposed to LGBTQ membership, there are fewer Scriptures cited, and more
650 of these Scriptures are listed by multiple respondents. Among those supporting LGBTQ membership,
651 there are fewer Old Testament citations relative to New Testament citations than is true for those
652 opposed to LGBTQ membership.

653 **Table 34. Key Scriptures by view of attitudes toward LGBTQ membership (sample of 12 respondents).**

654	<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Support LGBTQ</u>	<u>Opposed to LGBTQ</u>
655	Genesis 1.....	XX	
656	Genesis 2.....	X	X
657	Genesis 19.....		X
658	Leviticus 18.....		XXX
659	Leviticus 19.....	X	
660	Leviticus 20.....		X
661	Isaiah 3.....		X
662	Isaiah 56.....	X	
663	Matthew 5.....	X	
664	Matthew 7.....	X	
665	Matthew 18.....	X	
666	Matthew 19.....		X
667	Matthew 22.....	X	
668	Mark 10.....		X
669	Luke 10.....	X	
670	John 3.....	X	
671	John 7.....	X	
672	Acts 10.....	XX	
673	Acts 8.....	X	
674	Acts 15.....	X	
675	Romans 1.....	X	XXXX
676	Romans 8.....	X	
677	Romans 12.....	XX	X
678	Romans 14.....	XX	
679	Romans 15.....	XXX	
680	I Corinthians 6.....		XXX
681	I Corinthians 8.....	X	

682 I Corinthians 13 X
683 II Corinthians 3 X
684 Galatians 4 X
685 Ephesians 4 X
686 Ephesians 5 X
687 Colossians 1..... X
688 I Timothy 1 XX

689 **What does God want to teach?**

690 Respondents were given the opportunity to reflect on what they thought God wanted to teach
691 Mennonite Church USA in light of the differences in views of same-sex relationships. The tone of the
692 responses was less emotional than was true for the question about concerns that people had. These
693 responses were more compassionate and reflected somewhat greater understanding perhaps, though
694 again one gets the sense of there being several fairly distinct groups. Key themes were easier to identify
695 once again and included the following words and phrases:

696 **Love (201 times):** “I think that God wants to teach Mennonite Church USA about love, how to love, and
697 how to live in love, especially when we disagree with each other. How God wants to do this, I cannot
698 grasp.”

699 **Sin (182 times):** “To stand on God’s word. Do not change it because you want to show love to everyone.
700 The Lord loves everyone, but His ways do not change. Pray for the sinner, that they will see the truth. Do
701 not conform to the world. Follow the Lord and His ways. The gate is narrow, and not all will enter in;
702 however, He will not lose any whose name is written in the book of life.”

703 **Spirit (117 times):** “To be open to the Holy Spirit, and to place ourselves in God’s hands. To trust the
704 Holy Spirit, and to open ourselves to its influence, even if it scares us. To take steps forward out of faith,
705 as a community.”

706 **Jesus (102 times):** “I believe that one lesson is the question: Are we going to follow Jesus at all costs, or
707 choose to follow our culture (‘the World’)?”

708 **Unity (103 times):** “I believe that God wants to teach us how to find unity in Christ amidst diversity in
709 thought. It is because of Christ’s faithfulness that all have opportunity to be saved. We as a
710 denomination, as conferences and as congregations must seek to be channels of God’s healing and hope
711 to all people, inviting everyone into transformed living centered around Jesus.”

712 **Faithful (67 times):** “I believe in the traditional understanding of Genesis 2:23-25. Marriage is reserved
713 for a man and a woman. However, I will also affirm the teaching on singleness. I respect those who
714 struggle with same-sex attractions and choose to remain single out of their faithfulness to God. This is
715 what we need to teach in Mennonite Church USA—that the purpose of God is holiness. Through this
716 lens, we can evaluate our own sinfulness and repent from our lust, greed and other sins.”

717 **Culture (65 times):** “I believe that God wants us to stand up for our convictions while bringing healing to
718 a depraved world and culture. I truly believe that this is a time of testing for those who will remain
719 faithful to the Scriptures just as our forefathers did even in the midst of persecution.”

720 **Bible (63 times):** “I believe that God wants to teach what it means to love—those who are like us, those
721 who are different from us, those who are us! So many people say that the Bible is the ‘answer book,’ yet
722 it is full of questions. I also believe God wants us to learn to take stock of our own lives rather than
723 judging others. I do not know what the right answer is to the LGBTQ question. I do see the pain that
724 both sides of this issue have to deal with. I want to minister to that pain and find healing for individuals.
725 I also believe that we need to learn what it means to not just say we are Christians but really work at
726 being Christ-followers in our day-to-day lives. We HAVE TO talk about healthy sexuality, boundaries,
727 what is appropriate and inappropriate in relationships. We need to talk about these things more than
728 once or twice; it should be an ongoing part of church life and teaching.”

729 **Compassion (27 times):** “Stand firmly on the plain teachings of all the Scriptures. Reach out in
730 compassion and love to those struggling with gender-identification issues. Welcome but not affirm
731 those in this situation if they are practicing illicit behaviors. I have had personal pastoral counseling
732 experience along this line. Condemnatory attitudes get nowhere.”

733 **Diversity (22 times):** “Ultimately, I believe God is teaching us this: God created, delights in and blesses
734 the staggeringly beautiful diversity of sexualities represented by God’s beloved children. And in the
735 meantime, as we live in the midst of this messy middle, I believe God is begging us: ‘Fear not. Don’t be
736 afraid.’ God’s love is stronger than our fear.”

737 **Holiness (20 times):** “Following Jesus and sharing both Jesus’ love and his call to holiness is not easy. But
738 we must not abandon either one.”

739 **Broken (19 times):** “Homosexuality is only one of many sexual sins and evidence of the brokenness of
740 humans. It should not be isolated and elevated above other sins as if it was worse than other sexual sins,
741 nor should it be considered to be less sinful than adultery or pre-marital sex. I don’t assume we are
742 suggesting that adultery is now permissible and a good thing as long as two people who really love each
743 other commit to that adulterous relationship. I doubt if any pastors are giving their blessing to a spouse
744 cheating on their spouse, which is in the same list of sexual sins as same-sex relationships.”

745 **Welcoming (11 times):** “God wants every Mennonite Church USA congregation to be a safe and
746 welcoming place for LGBT folks. The example of Jesus shows that we can be a safe haven even while
747 calling persons to stop a behavior. What is essential is not radical inclusion (approving even what we
748 understand to be sin) but radical hospitality, surrounding persons who are drawn to Jesus with love and
749 encouragement as we invite and challenge them to grow in following Jesus.”

750 **Transformation (9 times):** “That all people all along the theological and ethical spectrum have an equal
751 standing when considering the work that God in Christ through the Spirit has done to redeem each of us
752 (this is a main point of the beginning 11 chapters of Romans and the basis for what follows in 12-15).
753 Thus, rather than spending our time judging the “unforgivable” sins of others and making blanket
754 condemnations of whole groups while at the same time resisting their critique of our sins, we instead
755 find our communion/shared ground in Jesus’ faithfulness, admitting the brokenness and failures of
756 every one of us and confessing our dependence on Christ and one another. From there I believe God
757 asks us to focus instead on removing the many logs from our own eyes while graciously accepting
758 mutual support, counsel and discipline as we seek to let Jesus do the transformation.”

759 **Patience (8 times):** “... many are not at the same place they were 10 years ago. We need to allow
760 ourselves and others to be on a journey. Not everyone will be at the place we are now, nor may we be
761 at this exact place in another 10 years.”

762 **Persecution (7 times):** “Our Mennonite DNA is to run from religious persecution, especially when we
763 feel that we are being persecuted for our beliefs within the church. As a peace church our witness is thin
764 because of the many divisions that have happened within congregations, conferences, and
765 denominationally. My hope is that we can be a witness to the world that Mennonite Church USA can
766 find peaceful ways to value differences on many issues like women in leadership, abstaining from war
767 and military service, LGBTQ ... and hold to the centrality of Christ.”

768 **A final word**

769 Respondents were given the opportunity to share final thoughts about the denomination. As is to be
770 expected, these varied in tone and content. But the comments included the following themes:

- 771 • Strong affirmation of denominational leadership
- 772 • Questions about decisions made by denominational leaders
- 773 • Grief for the pain felt at many levels
- 774 • Anxiety about the disunity of the denomination
- 775 • Promises of prayers
- 776 • Concerns about the direction of the denomination
- 777 • Commitment to the Lordship of Christ
- 778 • Gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the survey
- 779 • Admonitions to be faithful
- 780 • Calls for greater inclusiveness

781 **Perspectives of People of Color**

782 Separate from this survey, additional interviews were conducted with representatives of six
783 Racial/Ethnic constituency groups on the Intercultural Relations Reference Council: African American
784 Mennonite Association; African, Belizean, Caribbean Mennonite Mission Association; Asian Mennonite
785 Ministries; *Iglesia Menonita Hispana*; Indonesian Mennonite Association and Native Mennonite
786 Ministries. The questions related to sexuality, affiliation and denominational discernment.

787 In general, their responses regarding affiliation and the future of the denomination paralleled the
788 responses of Group 1 in the earlier analysis of area conferences (those area conferences where less than
789 one-third of leaders supported membership for LGBTQ members).

790 **Conclusion**

791 The current survey was intended to provide feedback for denominational leaders about benefits to
792 broader denominational affiliation, perceptions of denominational and agency services, beliefs about
793 homosexuality and same-sex relations, and views of alternative organizational arrangements for the
794 denomination. While the results reflect the tenuousness and fragility of Mennonite Church USA as well
795 as the fissures within the denomination, they also reveal congregations actively pursuing God’s
796 purposes, experiencing God’s presence, and influencing the communities around them. Despite

797 disruption and uncertainty at area conference and denominational levels, the ministry and mission of
798 the local church continue.

799 Soon after writing *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Herald Press, 2007), a
800 question emerged for me that I have been unable to shake in years since: “What if the Holy Spirit is
801 dismantling the church as we know it?” This question reflected in part the disruption and uncertainty
802 that I identified in the findings of the Church Member Profile 2006 related to Mennonite Church USA:

- 803 • Declines in denominational membership
- 804 • Decreases in evangelistic activity
- 805 • Rapidly upward socioeconomic mobility
- 806 • Increased political engagement
- 807 • Dramatic changes in definitions of morality
- 808 • A sense of marginalization within the denomination felt by people of color
- 809 • Relative lack of experience with the Holy Spirit
- 810 • Lower birth rates, exiting young people, and a rapidly aging denomination

811 But I noted in the conclusion to *Road Signs* that: “Faithful journeying toward the reign of God means
812 addressing the disruption that we feel and the chaos we fear. ... It will also mean opening ourselves to
813 the movement of God’s Spirit in anxiety-producing ways.”

814 In light of the current survey, I pray that:

- 815 • the results will give us a greater understanding of the differences that partially account for the
816 tensions within the denomination, area conferences and congregations;
- 817 • all of us as leaders and members would have the Holy Spirit’s wisdom to faithfully address the
818 changes that need to be made; and that
- 819 • we will work *with* the Spirit rather than against the Spirit in the dismantling work of this season.

820 ###