



Frequently Asked Questions about [KC2015 Delegate Assembly Resolutions](#): Part Two

Oct. 26, 2015

1. The [first resolution on Israel-Palestine](#) was tabled. Another resolution, "[A statement of support for our Palestinian and Israeli partners in peacemaking](#)," received unanimous support on Saturday. What were some of the concerns raised by the delegates about the original resolution and delegate comments in response to the second resolution?

- *Many delegates felt too rushed as they considered the first resolution. Some wanted more information or time to consider the resolution. Many delegates were unfamiliar with the [FAQs prepared in conjunction with the resolution](#).*
- *Many felt the tone toward Israel was too harsh in the first resolution, particularly given the record of U.S. mistreatment of Indigenous peoples and the role of American military power around the globe.*
- *Many delegates felt the first resolution was one-sided and did not address Palestinian wrong-doing in the same way it addressed Israeli wrong-doing. Delegates appreciated that the Saturday resolution explicitly offered support for both Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers.*
- *Many delegates expressed strong support for addressing this issue and urged [continued study and engagement](#).*

2. What will be the process for revising the [resolution on Israel-Palestine](#) for 2017?

After consultation with our parliamentarians, we are pursuing the following process, in keeping with the delegates' desire that we revise the resolution for consideration at our 2017 Delegate Assembly:

- *Name a three-person writing team.*
- *Name a reference group of six to eight people from a range of perspectives to offer counsel and feedback in the process.*
- *Have the writing team meet with the reference group to talk about key elements in a new resolution.*
- *Have the writing team test their work with the reference group with continuing revisions.*
- *Make an early draft of the emerging resolution available to delegates, area conferences and the broader church, with encouragement to study it and an invitation to give feedback.*
- *Use the feedback to finalize text that would be submitted to the [Resolutions Committee](#) for presentation at the Orlando 2017 Delegate Assembly.*

3. How do these two resolutions — the [Resolution on the Status of the Membership Guidelines](#) and the [Resolution on Forbearance in the Midst of Differences](#) — fit together? Delegates expressed concerns that these two resolutions "pull in different directions."

At the Delegate Assembly when these two resolutions were being considered, the [FAQs in the delegate packet](#) stated, "If both of the resolutions pass, the [Executive Board](#) will see it as a mandate to hold together the traditional stance of our church with an approach that grants freedom to congregations and area conferences to work things out in their own context, with mutual accountability with the [Constituency Leaders Council](#) (CLC)." We recognize that this may be confusing for some, particularly to

those looking for a more definitive answer. The Executive Board invited the CLC to begin addressing the implications of the two resolutions in their October 2015 meeting, particularly in light of their designation as “elders” for the church. They took the first step by clarifying their role as “elders” and will continue the discussion at their March meeting.

4. What, if anything, has changed for the Executive Board and its responses to organizations, area conferences, congregations and individuals who are considered “at variance”?

The Executive Board intends to work with the CLC to determine the best way to approach the ongoing status of those who are “at variance.” This term was coined by an area conference in response to actions by a credentialed minister, and the Executive Board extended its use to designate area conferences at variance if/when their leadership makes decisions that do not support the [Membership Guidelines](#). Unless the CLC advises the board differently, we will continue to use this designation for persons or groups who do not hold to the beliefs or standards outlined in the Membership Guidelines, as long as they are in place. The Executive Board intends to wait for further counsel from the CLC before making any formal changes, such as recognition of credentials, of persons or groups currently labeled “at variance.”

5. What, if anything, has changed for area conferences and the implications of making decisions that might be seen as at variance with the current denominational documents? What are the practical implications of being “at variance”?

Area conferences have approached this matter very differently from each other. Some who would be designated as being “at variance” have been emboldened by the adoption of the forbearance resolution. They are proceeding to adopt or enact policies at variance with the [Membership Guidelines](#). Others are making preparations to leave Mennonite Church USA because they don’t want to be part of a denomination that allows other congregations or area conferences to be at variance, at least without stricter sanctions.

6. How will the role of the CLC change, if at all, because of these two resolutions passing? Is the CLC structured and ready to step up to this new task? Will it hinder the ability of CLC participants to have honest, frank conversations if there are decisions that result from these conversations? Will this indeed give CLC an increased amount of authority?

As part of the agenda for their October 2015 meeting, CLC members carefully considered the implications of their designated role as a body of “elders” for the broader church. Part of their deliberation was based on a biblical and theological study on eldership by Robert J. (Jack) Suderman, former general secretary of Mennonite Church Canada. They do not intend to engage in any peer reviews until after their March 2016 meeting. So it remains to be seen just how the CLC will adapt to this new reality.

7. Will congregations or area conferences who are planning to leave Mennonite Church USA have a way to stay connected to the denomination in some alternative form?

Up to this point, we have not made any provisions for formal connections with congregations or area conferences who leave Mennonite Church USA. Of course, there are many informal means, such as attendance at our [conventions](#) or participation in other meetings that are open to the public. And groups who leave may benefit from some of the services provided by our churchwide program agencies, such as [The Corinthian Plan](#). If the Executive Board decides to develop a more formal means of connection with groups who leave, it would likely require a change in our [bylaws](#).

8. Will congregations or area conferences who are planning to leave Mennonite Church USA or whose pastoral credentials are held by other “networks” still have seats on the [Constituency Leaders Council or the Executive Board](#) and/or be able to send delegates to the Delegate Assembly?

Yes, they may participate in these settings as long as they are simply discussing their affiliation and are legally a part of Mennonite Church USA as defined in the [bylaws](#). However, we anticipate that once a group has taken a formal action to leave Mennonite Church USA, its members will no longer participate except as part of the logistics of transition or in a ritual of leave-taking.

9. How is the Executive Board taking steps to intentionally listen to the voices and concerns of LGBTQ individuals themselves?

In its September 2015 meeting, the Executive Board briefly considered a petition signed by several hundred individuals (some of them convention delegates) that the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC) be invited to serve as a new [constituency group](#) at the CLC. The EB sent the request to the CLC for feedback and invited CLC members to suggest ways to connect directly with LGBTQ individuals over the next biennium. The responses from CLC members (given at the October 2015 meeting) are being distilled for further response by the CLC via email and will be submitted to the Executive Board.

10. What steps is the Executive Board taking to be in conversation with area conferences and congregations who are considering leaving the denomination?

The formal membership of congregations in Mennonite Church USA comes through their connection with area conferences, not directly with the denomination. Thus, the Executive Board stays in touch with area conference leaders via gatherings of conference ministers as well as the CLC. We stay in touch with congregations as they communicate directly with us or request specific information regarding their affiliation.

In preparation for the October 2015 CLC meeting, we invited every area conference to report on the ways in which the current environment (particularly post-convention) was affecting their affiliation with Mennonite Church USA. We received some sobering answers; several area conferences are facing a significant loss of congregations, and both Franklin Mennonite Conference and Lancaster Mennonite Conference have developed proposals to leave as a group. Representatives of these two area conferences, as well as the North Central Conference of the Mennonite Church, had significant opportunities to speak with others at the CLC meeting about their processes of decision-making, which will allow individual congregations to choose a different affiliation in order to remain a part of Mennonite Church USA.