



Timeline for [Membership Guidelines](#) of Mennonite Church USA

1976	The Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests formed to provide a safe and supportive space among gay and lesbian people.
1978-79	Mennonite Medical Association , an inter-Mennonite organization of physicians and dentists, sponsored a Symposium on Human Sexuality, which met in September 1978 and April 1979, to study a variety of sexuality issues. Homosexuality was the major stimulus for the symposium and most of the presentations addressed the issues surrounding same-sex orientation.
1980	In May, a follow-up seminar on human sexuality was held at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center .
1981	General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church (MC) – two major Mennonite denominations – appointed a Human Sexuality Study Committee. This committee met three times a year from Jan. 1982 to Jan. 1987. It developed a study guide entitled, “Human Sexuality in the Christian Life,” which was submitted to the congregations of both denominations for study over the period from 1984 to 1987.
1986-1987	The GC Mennonite Church at Saskatoon, Canada, in 1986 and the MC General Assembly at Purdue in 1987 adopted similar statements reaffirming the goodness of sexuality and its place of honor and joy in the human family. Both called their members to confession and to covenant. Both groups reiterated their understanding that the Bible teaches that genital intercourse is reserved for heterosexual marriage and teaches the sanctity of the marriage covenant. The need to continue the study and dialogue on sexuality issues was also emphasized.
1989	The MC and GC general boards formed an Integration Exploration Committee tasked with bringing a recommendation for integration to the joint assembly in Wichita, Kansas, in 1995.
1990-1992	The GC’s Commission on Education (COE) and the MC’s Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries (MBCM) formed the Joint Listening Committee for Homosexual Concerns “to care for gay and lesbian persons and their families ... by listening to their alienation and pain in the church and society; to encourage and facilitate dialogue between persons of various perspectives concerning homosexuality and to foster continued theological discernment in the church on this issue; and to make recommendations to MBCM and COE regarding policy, program and church life...”

1992	<p>The Joint Listening Committee for Homosexual Concerns report was presented to and passed by the MBCM and COE in August. It recommended that the MC and GC "intensify its [sic] efforts to help congregations study homosexuality in order to discern how homosexuals can relate to the church's life and ministry." The committee recommended specific actions for the denomination, seminaries, pastors and other congregational leaders.</p>
1995	<p>Delegates at the 1995 Joint Assembly passed the recommendation to integrate the GC and MC into one denomination; The Integration Exploration Committee began work on the merger.</p>
1998	<p>Members of the MC created an ad hoc "Welcome Committee" to advocate for the full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life of the church. The committee was active during the transformation/ merger process. Leaders included Willis Breckbill and Ruth Conrad Liechty.</p>
1999	<p>The U.S. Transformation Team took over responsibility for the denominational merger. A resolution to adopt the "Guidelines for Membership" (with only Sections I and II) was presented to the delegates in St. Louis, Missouri. The membership of several LGBTQ-inclusive congregations was a sticking point for some. Although 79% of GC delegates voted to accept the guidelines, the majority (55%) of MC delegates voted against them, and the resolution failed to pass.</p> <p>At least five MC area conferences intimated or stated outright that they would not go along with integration process if denominational membership guidelines allowed for including congregations that accept non-celibate homosexuals as members. It was decided to add a third section to the proposed "Guidelines for Membership."</p>
2000	<p>The ad hoc Welcome Committee (Ted Bender, Doug Brunk, Lois Kenagy, Ruth Conrad Liechty and John Stoner) published "A Welcoming Open Letter on 'Homosexuality'" in the Mennonite Weekly Review, which called for the church to be welcoming and inclusive of people from the gay and lesbian community. The letter garnered more than 600 signatures.</p>
2001	<p>The "Membership Guidelines for the Formation of Mennonite Church USA" were presented to the delegates in Nashville, Tennessee, and passed (GC 928-yes, 107-no; MC 223-yes, 28-no).</p> <p>The guidelines included Section III: "Clarification on some issues related to homosexuality and membership." Section III recognized the church statements from Saskatoon (1986) and Purdue (1987) "...to be the teaching position of the MC USA" and specifically forbade any credentialed leader in MC USA from performing a "same-sex covenant ceremony."</p> <p>With this addition, the merger between General Conference and Mennonite Church was signed, forming MC USA.</p> <p>Despite the approval of the Membership Guidelines, Franklin, Lancaster, New York, North Central, and South Central Mennonite conferences initially chose to become only provisional members of MC USA. Atlantic Coast, Eastern District and Virginia Mennonite Conference experienced significant membership losses.</p>

2002	<p>The merger forming MC USA became official on February 1, and the new bylaws went into effect, making Sections I and II of the Membership Guidelines obsolete. The only part that remained relevant, because it was not incorporated into the bylaws explicitly, was Section III “Clarification on some issues related to homosexuality and membership.”</p>
2007	<p>The Constituency Leaders Council began a scheduled review of the Membership Guidelines of MC USA. No action on the guidelines was taken.</p> <p>A group of pastors and leaders formed the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors network.</p>
2009	<p>The Inclusive Mennonite Pastors network released an open letter to MC USA, advocating for full inclusion of LGBTQ people that garnered more than 800 signatures.</p> <p>At the Columbus convention, the Pink Menno campaign formed, with a vision “to achieve healing and hope for the Mennonite Church through the inclusion and welcome of LGBTQ individuals and their supporters.”</p>
2012	<p>The Executive Board did an “administrative update” on the Membership Guidelines. This action was significant because it changed the role of the Membership Guidelines from a short-term formational document to foundational polity.</p>
2013	<p>The updated Membership Guidelines were presented – with no discussion or vote – to the Delegate Assembly in Phoenix, Arizona.</p>
2014	<p>Mountain States Mennonite Conference credentialed an openly LGBTQ pastor. The conference was not disciplined. Some other conferences and congregations began moving toward full inclusion of LGBTQ people.</p> <p>North Central, Franklin and Lancaster conferences began the process of withdrawal from MC USA. Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference and Ohio Conference lost numerous congregations.</p>
2015	<p>At MC USA’s Delegate Assembly in Kansas City, Missouri, delegates passed two resolutions which resulted in a lack of clarity for the denomination and its members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Forbearance in the Midst of Differences” named the ongoing lack of consensus “...on whether it is appropriate to bless Christians in same-sex covenanted unions” and invited us to offer “...grace, love and forbearance towards conferences, congregations and pastors in our body who, in different ways, seek to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ on matters related to same-sex covenanted unions.” 2. “Resolution on the Status of the Membership Guidelines” upheld Section III of the Membership Guidelines and referenced a new Executive Board policy to not recognize the credentials of LGBTQ persons in same-sex marriages unless the delegate body “...would change its stated polity.” It also called for a four-year moratorium on delegate action on the guidelines.

2016	North Central Conference voted to withdraw from MC USA over polity issues and LGBTQ inclusion.
2017	Lancaster Mennonite Conference and Franklin Mennonite Conference left the denomination over polity issues and LGBTQ inclusion.
2018	Southeast Mennonite Conference left MC USA over polity issues and LGBTQ inclusion.
2019	A 21-person volunteer Membership Guidelines Advisory Group, commissioned by the Executive Board, gathered in November for a one-time working session “for continuing the church’s conversation on its Membership Guidelines.”
2020	<p>MC USA Executive Board released the Report from the Advisory Group on the Membership Guidelines of MC USA.</p> <p>In an online meeting on October 16-17, 80% of Constituency Leaders Council representatives expressed agreement with an Executive Board recommendation to present the delegate body of MC USA with a resolution to retire the Membership Guidelines.</p> <p>The Inclusive Mennonite Pastors Leadership team submitted a resolution calling for “Repentance and Transformation” that addressed the harm to and exclusion of LGBTQ people in the church as a result of the Membership Guidelines and offered recommendations for an inclusive way forward.</p>
2021	<p>MC USA Executive Board voted unanimously (10-yes, 0-no, 0- abstaining) at its virtual spring meeting to send its proposed resolution to retire the Membership Guidelines to the Delegate Assembly for deliberation.</p> <p>South Central Mennonite Conference voted on a resolution to end its affiliation with MC USA over polity issues and LGBTQ inclusion. The assembly was divided, and the measure did not pass.</p>
2022	Delegates at the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, May 27-30, will vote on whether to retire the Membership Guidelines and whether to address the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors’ “Repentance and Transformation” resolution.

Sources:

[Mennonite Church USA website](#)

The Mennonite (Articles found here: www.anabaptistworld.org)

Gameo.org: <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Sexuality>

[Report from Advisory Group on Mennonite Church USA Membership Guidelines](#)

ReligiousTolerance.org: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_men1a.htm?vm=r

LGBTQ Religious Archives: <https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/>