



# Guidelines for Developing Organizational Resolutions and Church Statements in Mennonite Church USA

## *Part 1: The Role of Resolutions in Mennonite Church USA*

### **Introduction & Purpose**

As an Anabaptist faith community, we have a historic and rich tradition of expressing our convictions and beliefs through statements and resolutions. Since the late 1600s, our resolutions and statements have served as a written testament of our understanding of how we join with the reconciling work of God and bear witness to our convictions on critical issues such as peacemaking, poverty, capital punishment, slavery, economic disparity, war, racism, and equity.

As a faith community, we recognize that these resolutions and statements help define who we are and that our calling is to join in God's transformative, liberating, and reconciling work. This call invites us to transcend our understanding, culture, history, and bias. To support us with this undertaking, we understand that church statements and resolutions should be developed to further God's mission as defined by our [Vision: Healing and Hope statement](#), [Organizational Purpose](#), and [Renewed Commitments](#). This document identifies and defines various resolutions (including church statements), illustrates the benefits of church statements, reviews how to submit a resolution or church statement, and details guidelines for proposed resolutions.

### **Types of resolutions processed by the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA**

The term "resolution" means any action taken by the vote of the delegate body. In our assemblies, there are three 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 intended to create, modify, or append policies, procedures, or legal documents of Mennonite Church USA.
3. **Church Statements**—These statements are intended to facilitate ongoing discernment for Christian faithfulness at the congregational, conference, and national levels and are not binding on congregations or area conferences. Such statements should be available for study and discussion in home communities and conferences before delegates arrive at the assembly.

### Benefits of church statements

When church statements are developed through a 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. Churchwide statements are not binding on conferences and congregations of Mennonite Church USA.
- **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 to pass a resolution, careful work toward common understandings and language can build unity in the church.
- **Provide a denominational understanding while acknowledging dissenting voices** – Resolutions offer church members and 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.

Our calling is to join the reconciling work of God. We seek to join God’s activities in the world as ambassadors of Christ. That effort must transcend our individual understandings, culture, history, and bias as we seek to live and act in ways that allow God’s healing and hope to flow through us to the world.

The proposed statement should:

1. Advance our [Vision: Healing and Hope](#), our stated purpose, and the [Renewed Commitments](#) that guide us toward God’s preferred future for us.
2. Give us greater clarity in how we serve those inside and outside of Mennonite Church USA.
3. Align with our stated bylaws and organizational polity or, for some organizational resolutions, modify the Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA to provide greater clarity.

We desire that every church statement grows 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 conference and congregations on a missional journey.

As we seek to walk with Christ in the world, we must make many decisions 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.

# *Part 2: Process for Submission of Organizational Resolutions and Church Statements for Consideration at the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA*

The development of organizational resolutions and church statements should follow our ecclesiology and the Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA. 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 to be considered for discussion by the whole church. This process applies to organizational and church statement resolutions not generated by the Executive Board.

## **Who can submit an organizational resolution or church statement?**

Any conference, congregation, or constituency group may propose a resolution for action by the Delegate Assembly.

## **How do I submit an organizational resolution or church statement?**

1. Properly formatted organizational resolutions or church statements shall be submitted in writing to the Resolutions Committee at least 240 days before the commencement of a Delegate Assembly.
2. Resolutions should be sent to the Resolutions Committee via the Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA using [resolutions@mennoniteusa.org](mailto:resolutions@mennoniteusa.org).

## **How do I format my proposed organizational resolution or church statement?**

1. Documents should be submitted with line numbers in \*.doc\* or \*.docx\* format.
2. All submissions must include the following information: ([Download template here.](#))
  1. **Cover page** with:
    - a. The preferred title of the organizational resolution or church statement.
    - b. The name and address of the sponsoring conference, congregation, or constituency group.
    - c. The name of the primary contact person(s) submitting the resolution, their email addresses, phone numbers, congregation, and conference.
  2. **Introduction:** The introduction should address:
    - a. The purpose of the resolution and the reason we need to discern this before the delegate body.
    - b. **Key question:** What does the proposal address in Mennonite Church USA? Is it presented as an organizational resolution or a church statement?

- c. If it is an **organizational resolution**:
    - i. What policies, procedures, or legal documents of Mennonite Church USA does the resolution create or append?
  - d. If it is a **church statement**:
    - i. How will discerning this statement enable us to join God's activities in the world as ambassadors of Christ?
    - ii. How will discerning this statement enable us to live and act in ways that allow God's healing and hope to flow through us to the world?
    - iii. How will discerning this statement advance our Vision: Healing and Hope, our stated purpose, and the Renewed Commitments that guide us toward God's preferred future for us?
3. **Resolution:** The resolution statement is a concise statement of the specific action(s) to be taken and who is responsible for executing those actions. Our denomination consists of the following entities: the Executive Board & staff; churchwide program agencies & entities; the area conference; and local congregations. Church statements are not binding on conferences and congregations of Mennonite Church USA.
  4. **Churchwide Impact Statement:** The impact statement should address the current policies or programs related to the resolution. The Resolutions Committee will help facilitate conversation between resolutions sponsors and Executive Board staff to answer unknown questions.
    - a. **Key questions:**
      - i. What does the resolution address in Mennonite Church USA, or what issue is the resolution trying to invite further discernment?
      - ii. What Mennonite Church USA current bylaws, policies, documents, or programs are related to the subject of the resolution, and what is the impact of the resolution on each one?
      - iii. What are the proposed changes, and which entities of Mennonite Church USA are responsible for executing the actions?
    - b. **Budget Estimate:** The budget estimate lists the financial costs of implementing the resolution and plans for how the action will be financially supported.
  5. **Resource Page:** The resource page is a list of resources and educational material to aid study and discernment of the resolution.

### **What if my congregation, conference, or constituency group misses the 240-day deadline?**

The purpose of the 240-day window is to provide delegates and other constituencies time to process and review proposed actions. There are times when there is a prophetic move of the Spirit and great unity amongst the delegates. One evidence of this move is broad-based, diverse support for such an action. The Executive Board and the Resolutions Committee may consider accepting such resolutions after the 240-day deadline under the following criteria:

1. Organizational resolutions, churchwide statements, and proposed amendments must still be submitted to the Resolutions Committee. The Resolutions Committee will give careful consideration to the size and diversity of the group bringing the proposed action.
2. Organizational and bylaw changes must be submitted per Article XI of Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA.
3. The Executive Board may reject any churchwide statement, organizational resolution, or proposed amendment submitted after the 240-day deadline.

# *Part 3: Executive Board Policies For Resolutions*

## **Role and Responsibility of the Resolutions Committee**

### **The Resolutions Committee shall have the authority to:**

- A. Interact with drafters/sponsors of resolutions to improve resolutions as needed while ensuring resolutions meet the guidelines for submission.
- B. Reject resolutions that do not meet the guidelines for submission if the drafters/sponsors are unable or unwilling to align them with said guidelines.
- C. Receive feedback from the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) on proposed resolutions Delegate Assembly considers them.
- D. Propose the drafting of new resolutions as needed in the life of the church.
- E. Accept the resolution as presented with no changes.
- F. Accept the resolution after amending it to comply with established guidelines, polity, and bylaws.
- G. Refer the resolution to a later biennial Delegate Assembly if more time and discernment are needed.
- H. Suggest to the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA changes to improve the “Guidelines for Developing Organizational Resolutions and Church Statements in Mennonite Church USA.”

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

- A. Determine whether the proposal is best defined as a Simple Resolution, an Organizational Resolution, or Church Statement, and then proceed accordingly, as outlined below.
- B. Determine whether the proposal 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 enough churchwide support, clarity, and interest such that the CLC should spend time discerning the potential impact of the proposed resolution. Resolutions will not be submitted to the CLC or the Delegate Assembly if determined not to meet, in the committee’s judgment, the purposes for which resolutions are adopted.
- 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 which were not submitted to the Delegate Assembly for consideration.

## **Role and Responsibility of CLC**

CLC is a convocation for conferences and recognized constituent groups: to worship and pray together, encourage faithfulness, share ideas and resources, process concerns, and provide discernment and give counsel to Mennonite Church USA Executive Board and each other on issues of life and faith in Mennonite Church USA. CLC makes no decisions for any group other than itself but can produce statements and resolutions on its own behalf.

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

- A. Engage in corporate discernment at any part of the Delegate Assembly cycle regarding a proposed resolution's churchwide impact, as defined by Part I: The Role of Resolutions in Mennonite Church USA.
- B. 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 church statement or organizational resolution is distributed to conferences and congregations for study and discernment before the Delegate Assembly.
- C. Give counsel regarding how to engage the broader church in the processing of proposed resolutions.
- D. Submit its own resolutions and statements as appropriate and following the Constituency Leadership Council (CLC) Organizational Structure document and these guidelines for developing resolutions.

### **Role and Responsibility of the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board**

The Executive Board shall be organized to give leadership and to act on behalf of the denomination when the Delegate Assembly is not in session. Executive Board members, with accountability to their appointing/electing bodies, are not expected to be representatives of specific constituencies but are to act in the best interests of Mennonite Church USA as a whole.

The Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA shall:

- A. Develop and approve the guidelines for developing resolutions in Mennonite Church USA.
- B. Appoint a standing Resolutions Committee of five or more persons and establish terms as appropriate. Two members shall be nominated by the CLC Gifts Discernment Committee and approved by the Executive Board. (The nominees need not be members of CLC.) No more than 50% of the members of the Resolutions Committee shall be members of the board or staff of the Executive Board or its program agencies. The Executive Board shall fill vacancies on the committee as appropriate.
- C. Have the power to veto any proposed resolution submitted after the 240-day window.
- D. Receive regular reports from the Resolutions Committee.
- E. Receive counsel from the CLC.
- F. Present at its discretion to the Delegate Assembly major issues of policy for the national conference for the Delegate Assembly to discern and provide counsel.

# Appendix

## *Discerning Together: A Spiritual Process*

The Holy Spirit leads spiritual discernment 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.” Acts 15:28. 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 Delegate Assembly.

### **Discussion before the Delegate Assembly**

### **Guiding Principles for Discernment**

- **Careful study** – Best discernment will occur if study documents are developed, distributed, and studied *before* resolutions are brought to the Delegate Assembly.
- **Create brave 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 listen to the Holy Spirit within a community.
- **Seek to understand the basis for our differing viewpoints** – Rather than arguing positions, we will search for common ground by 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 before and during delegate sessions.

### **Churchwide Processing of Resolutions**

1. **Mennonite Church USA Executive Board Staff.** After the Resolutions Committee and the Executive Board have decided that a proposed resolution will be submitted to the Delegate Assembly, the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board staff will:
  - a. Ensure the proposed resolution is posted on the Mennonite Church USA website or printed for distribution.
  - b. Work with the writers/sponsors to educate the constituency about the proposed resolution via blogs or opinion pieces as appropriate.
  - c. Provide the constituency with a method to send feedback related to proposed resolutions via email or postal mail to the Executive Director, CLC, Executive Board, the Resolutions Committee, and the resolution writers.
2. **Mennonite Church USA Program Agencies.**
  - a. Work with Mennonite Church USA Executive Board staff to provide support to Mennonite Church USA conferences and congregations in preparation for the Delegate Assembly.
  - b. Provide resources to Mennonite Church USA members as appropriate related to proposed resolutions.



3. **Mennonite Church USA Area Conferences and Constituency Groups.**
  - a. Commit to participating in the denomination’s life and mission through delegate representation and financial support.
  - b. Appoint delegates to the Delegate Assembly and to the CLC to provide a link of communication for matters of mutual concern and effective churchwide decision-making.
  - c. Conference and Constituency Group leaders are encouraged to develop a process to help their congregations discuss and discern issues of faith and life in the broader church.
4. **Mennonite Church USA Congregations.**
  - a. Commit to participate in the denomination’s life and mission through delegate representation and financial support.
  - b. The congregation shall directly relate to the Delegate Assembly through delegates and the area conference with which it affiliates.
  - c. Each congregation is expected to send delegate(s) to every session of the Delegate Assembly and shall actively seek to further the interests of the church during and between sessions.

## Discussion During the Delegate Assembly

The time we have at Delegate Assemblies should be structured to (1) allow time for worship, (2) focus on our [Vision](#), [Purpose](#) and the [Renewed Commitments](#), (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 a 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. At these times, delegates may identify a question for which further study is required, perhaps leading to a churchwide study process that may continue for one or more Delegate Assembly cycles.

The discernment outcomes from the Delegate Assembly may take the following forms:

1. **Consensus and Gradients of Agreement.** The gradients of agreement have a scale with numbers (1-7) and short descriptions. When discerning proposed church statement resolutions, delegates will respond by stating their position along the gradient. One end of the scale is “whole-hearted endorsement” (7) of the action that was proposed, and the other end (1) is “serious disagreement.”



2. **Recommendations for further study.** Delegates may decide that there are some gaps in our knowledge around the resolution's content and that more time or information is needed before a resolution can be processed.
3. **Voting.** Binary yes and no votes are most appropriate for simple and organizational resolutions.

## **Resources for Conferences and Congregations**

[Expectations of Group Discussions](#)

[Tips for Engaging Youth Delegates in the Delegate Process](#)