

Our commitment as we relate to same-sex couples:

We Will Live in Grace and Truth [\[Ver en Español\]](#)

We in the church are called by Jesus Christ to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), and it is our joy to engage people with his transforming grace and truth.

Grace. Jesus gladly welcomed all who came to him in search of new life from above. To be a faithful communal witness of Christ’s practice of welcome and hospitality, we as congregations will walk patiently with those who choose to follow Jesus and yet find it difficult to live out God’s design for wholeness.¹ We as a church need not agree on what form that patient love will take as we walk with, for instance, covenanted same-sex couples in our fellowships. What matters is whether we encourage movement toward God’s intent for our lives.

Truth. In the Bible we discern the wisdom of God for our lives. This includes marriage between one man and one woman as God’s intended context for receiving and enjoying the gift of sexual union.² To be a faithful communal witness to the biblical vision of wholeness and shalom, we will teach this pattern as God’s good design for us. We will refrain from marrying same-sex couples and actively encourage fidelity in male-female marriage and celibacy in singleness.

May the shalom of Christ shine through us, his body, as we live in grace and truth.³



1. Jesus met sinners with such glad welcome that they invited him to their parties. He began conversations with them without reprimand or judgment, letting them change the subject when he brought up their past (John 4:7-26). He made clear he was a safe presence before speaking words about a need to leave a life of sin (John 8:2-11). Throughout the Bible we see God meeting persons where they are. When Israel asked for a king, rejecting God (1 Sam. 8:7, 12:17), God gave them one. Moses “allowed” divorce because of human hardness even though “from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8). When the Greco-Roman world, and evidently the church as well, could not imagine an end to slavery, the Spirit of God gave instructions for life within slavery (Eph. 6:5-9) while also sowing seeds for its abolition: urging masters to view slaves as brothers (Philem. 1:15-17) with common standing before God (1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11, Eph. 6:9). We as a church can join with God in showing patient grace, welcoming persons to take part in the life of the church before they fully conform to the call of Christian discipleship.

2. The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 present male-female unions as the divinely designed pattern, a pattern Jesus himself reaffirms (Matt. 19:4-6). Is this only a general pattern for which there may be exceptions? Moses did not see same-sex exceptions (Lev. 18:22, 20:13). Paul in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 echoes Moses as he uses a word formed from words in the Greek version of those Leviticus passages (*arsenokoitēs*, meaning “a male who lies down with a male” [*arseno*=male; *koitēs*=bedder, coitus]). He uses it in a list of sins; and the word is so rare that it had no opportunity, through use, to develop a meaning other than the general concept implied by the words that form it. Paul is

likewise clear in a sin list in Romans 1. He describes as “against nature” female-female and male-male sexual relations that are consensual (“passion for one another”); his mention of female same-sex relations shows that he was not thinking only of pederasty or promiscuity but of mutual same sex relations such as we see today.

3. Holding to a position while yet being gracious is hard: grace can play havoc on our position, and truth can make us feel cold and harsh. As we encounter such difficulties we tend to abandon either truth or grace. But let us, like Jesus, continue to show both.

FAQ

1. What are the writers’ hopes for the statement?

We see it as a way for church leaders to offer a clear statement of self-definition together as we respond to one of the most fraught issues of our time: “This is what we understand and will encourage as we relate to same-sex couples.”

It might also help some groups to not drift from a present belief that marriage is ‘one man and one woman for life’ (*Confession of Faith In a Mennonite Perspective*, 1995). As persons publicly affirm a statement like this, it gives an identifiable voice calling for the church to stay the course on marriage.

We also pray that it will encourage conservative congregations to grow in grace, welcoming same-sex couples with open arms and hearts into congregational life—similar to how we welcome persons whose lives are not in alignment with our church on other matters, hoping to patiently encourage them toward God’s intent for their lives.

2. How did the statement come about?

A dozen or so Mennonite pastors and leaders in Virginia were gathering regularly for prayer, Bible study, and missional encouragement. Someone outside the group gave us a draft of this statement. Virtually every sentence was reshaped by the group!

Those of us in the group were, of course, the first ones to sign it—though some of us did not sign, concerned that it does not define the limits on a gay couple’s participation in congregational life.

In early January 2018 we started giving the statement to other leaders in VMC with whom we had close relationships. In mid-March we emailed it to conference leaders and racial/ethnic group leaders across our denomination, choosing ones whom we felt might collaborate with it.

3. What would you say to conservatives who worry that the grace section is too gracious?

First of all, we would reassure them that the graciousness is not because we are waffling on same-sex marriage. The truth section makes that clear!

Then we could remind them that [Jesus also raised worries](#) as he welcomed tax-collectors (Matt. 9:9-13). The Pharisees should have used this test: “What ideal is Jesus nudging persons toward?” not “What behaviors does Jesus seem to accept while nudging?”

We could also explore why it can be good to build a relationship with those who “find it difficult to live out God’s design for wholeness” (in any area) before we confront them. Some beginning thoughts:

- We need to love people long enough that they trust us and let us help them.
- We need to listen long enough that we understand them and can speak what helps them.
- As much as possible we want persons to make choices out of their own conscience by the Spirit; we want more than the quick fix of them conforming to an external law we place on them—we want them transformed from the inside out as God’s law and truth is written on their hearts.

Any Anabaptist/Mennonite pastor, church leader beyond the congregational level, or leader in a church institution is invited to sign.

Add to the list your name, leader role, and broader church affiliation.

(This Google Doc will treat what you add as a “suggestion”—which we will accept.)

NOTE: It's easier to "suggest" when on a computer than on a mobile (iPhone/iPad or Android). Here's a Google help file, ["Suggest edits in Google Docs."](#)

On an Android, if you see "Comment only" when at document top, press the green circle at bottom right to leave comment mode and go into suggestion mode.

Organizational affiliation is for identification purposes only—it does not necessarily indicate position of the organization. If we might need to verify your signature, send an email with contact info to grace.truth.shalom@gmail.com.)

Agregue a la lista su nombre, su rol como líder y la afiliación de su iglesia a una denominación, a una red o entidad similar.

Signers:

Harold Miller, pastor, Trissels Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

James Akerson, pastor, Beldor Mennonite Church, Central District Minister, Virginia conference, MC USA

David Lehman, pastor, Williamsburg Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

Beryl Jantzi, Southern District Minister, Virginia conference, MC USA

Aaron Kauffman, president, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Virginia conference, MC USA

Luke Schrock-Hurst, Potomac District Minister, Virginia conference, MC USA

Carolyn Lyndaker, pastor, Crest Hill Community Church (Wardensville, WV), Virginia conference, MC USA

Milford Lyndaker, pastor, Crest Hill Community Church (Wardensville, WV), Virginia conference, MC USA

Sanford Yoder, pastor, Asheville Mennonite Church (Asheville, NC), Virginia conference, MC USA

Spencer Bradford, Pastor, Durham Mennonite Church (Durham, NC), Virginia conference, MC USA

Basil Marin, Pastor, New Song Anabaptist Fellowship (Harrisonburg, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Nevin Mast, Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church (Chesapeake, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

John Gnanamanickam, Associate Pastor, Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

Rev. Peter J. Eberly, Church Planter, Eastside Church (Harrisonburg, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Matthew R. Schwartz, Teaching Pastor, Eastside Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

Alfonso Alvarado, pastor, Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah (Harrisonburg, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Armando Sánchez, pastor, Iglesia Enciende una Luz (Harrisonburg, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Marvin Lorenzana, director, Mennonite Hispanic Initiative, Virginia conference, MC USA

Lizzette Hernández, Latino Church Leadership Trainer, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Virginia conference, MC USA

Howard Miller, pastor, Huntington Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

Philip Lehman, pastor, Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA

Luis Martinez, pastor, Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista (Harrisonburg, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Bishop L.W. Francisco III, Lead Pastor, Calvary Community Church (Hampton, VA), Virginia conference, MC USA

Pablo Hernández, coordinator, Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista, Virginia conference, MC USA

Linford Stutzman, Director BLESS program, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Virginia conference, MC USA

Randolph E. Smith, pastor, Mountain View Mennonite Church (Hickory NC), Virginia conference, MC USA

Vernon R Moyer, pastor, 3:16 Christian Community Church (Hickory NC), Virginia conference, MC USA

Justiniano Cruz, pastor, Iglesia del Evangelio Completo Alfa y Omega (Rockville, MD), Virginia conference, MC USA

Sang Jin Choi, pastor, Fourth Street Community Fellowship (Washington, D.C.), Virginia conference, MC USA

Eugene D. Kraybill, Chaplain, Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD), Virginia conference, MC USA

Christina Kraybill, Chaplain, Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD), Virginia conference, MC USA

Mark Kimmert, Associate Pastor, 3:16 Christian Community Church (Hickory, NC), Virginia conference, MC USA
Bill Eberly, pastor, Powhatan Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA
Carl Mericle, pastor, Providence Mennonite Church, and Eastern District Minister, Virginia conference, MC USA
Joe Arbaugh, Minister of Missions, Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA
Kurt Horst, Pastor, South Central Conference, MC USA
Tim Sweigart, moderator, South Central conference, MC USA
Don Livingston, moderator, New York conference, MC USA
Clarence Rempel, Regional Conference Minister, South Central conference, MC USA
Jim Hershberger, Special ministries pastor, Virginia conference, MC USA
Aaron Yoder, Lead Pastor, First Mennonite Church (Morton, IL) Illinois conference, MC USA
Gene Miller, Pastor, Yorks Corners Mennonite Church, New York conference, MC USA
Ronald J. Sider, Professor at Palmer Seminary, an ordained Mennonite minister
Brad Roth, Pastor, West Zion Mennonite Church, Moundridge, KS, Western District Conference, MC USA
Mark R. Wenger, Pastor, Franconia Mennonite Church, Telford, PA, Franconia conference, MC USA
Doris Diener, retired pastor, Franconia conference, MC USA
Larry Diener, pastor, Franconia Mennonite Church (Telford, PA), Franconia conference, MC USA
Lavonne Lehman, Chair, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Virginia conference, MC USA
Paul Kratz, Retired Overseer, Pastor, Mt Clinton Mennonite Church, Virginia conference, MC USA
Curt Stutzman, pastor, Weavers Mennonite Church, Virginia Conference
Stephen J. Campbell, pastor, Zion Mennonite Church, Birdsboro PA
Jason Rhodes Showalter, Global Ministries Director, Virginia Mennonite Missions