

Creating Safe Space

An adult class presented by the Menno Pride Committee

**Using a resource from the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT (BMC-LGBT) Interests: *Safe Zone Training*



Welcome, Overview, Introductions

Why do this work? Many reasons, including...

- For people we love who are LGBTQ
- Following the call from our denomination: MCUSA Resolution for Repentance and Transformation
- Resource created by the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBTQ Interests
- Building the Kingdom of God
- Self-Reflection: What reasons do you have for being here today?

A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation

Current policies of Mennonite Church USA do *violence*¹ to **LGBTQIA** people by failing to affirm their full, God-given identities and by restricting their full participation in the life, ministries and rituals of the broader church. The rejection of LGBTQIA people by MC USA has silenced and denied ministry callings, torn apart families, forced parents to choose between their church and their child, and caused many LGBTQIA people to leave the church. In some cases, rejection by their faith community is a factor in LGBTQIA people self-harming or even dying by suicide.²

The 2001 Membership Guidelines, especially Section III,³ are the basis for many of these wounds, and also for harm done to the ministry and witness of our denomination and congregations. The Guidelines were not created for the benefit of LGBTQIA people. The Guidelines' purpose was to facilitate denominational integration, and, in the process, the church willingly offered up LGBTQIA people, their families, their congregations, and pastors as scapegoats for the sake of a false peace and unity.

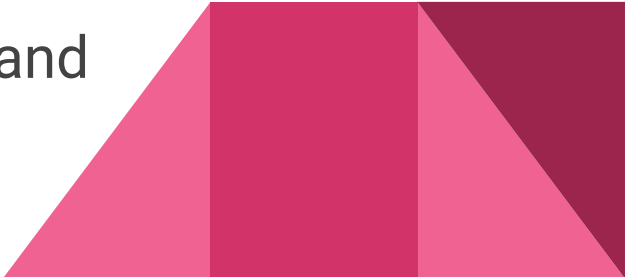
The legacy of the 2001 Membership Guidelines is in direct contradiction to the vision and calling of MC USA; they have given us conflict and loss, not "healing and hope."⁴

Excluding LGBTQIA people from the church is a rejection of God's joyous delight in the diversity of creation and a denial of the Divine image and breath animating all humankind.⁵ It is unfaithful to the calling and ministry of Jesus who, as "the visible image of the invisible God" and the one through whom "God reconciled everything to God's self" offers radical hospitality

We commit to:

- *Rescind* the Membership Guidelines, Section III.¹¹
- Include LGBTQIA people and/or representative allies in the creation of any resource, document, or policy produced or distributed by the denomination that specifically affects LGBTQIA people.
- Require that the Executive Board consult with LGBTQIA leaders¹² to create an LGBTQIA constituency group with representation on the Constituency Leaders Council and/or other denomination-wide leadership groups.
- Provide denominational resources for individuals, congregations, and conferences to engage with repentance and reconciliation in their own contexts. Such resources should explore historic harms, encourage *truth-telling*, and address areas of *intersectionality*.
- Follow the leadership of LGBTQIA Mennonites to provide support and resources for LGBTQIA leaders in the church. This should involve investment of denominational time and money.
- Formalize and publicize policies for MC USA's Executive Board, staff, and church-wide program agencies that prohibit the use of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status as criteria to restrict a person's full participation in the ministries, activities, roles, and committees at the denominational level.
- Embody a theology that honors LGBTQIA people and relationships with all future MC USA theological statements, including but not limited to future revisions of *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*. When MC USA partners with other denominations or faith groups, its input into the process will advocate for this theology.

Goals

- Understand Diversity, learn more about what it is like to be LGBTQ today
 - Think about what signals you send to LGBTQ folks and allies, plan actions and words that indicate safety
 - Practice good listening and responding skills
 - Start thinking about the culture of our institutions
 - Begin thinking about how homophobia/cissexism and heterosexual/cisgender privilege impact our lives (also think about internalized oppression as it affects lgbtq people)
 - What does it mean to be an ally?
 - Think about speaking to issues of equality and steps toward becoming a more welcoming
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Creating our own “Safe Zone”

- Where does the term “Safe Zone” come from?
 - Vulnerability of LGBTQ persons: “Dos” and “Do nots” for interacting to LGBTQ persons
 - What else would be helpful for you to do this learning? Let us know any thoughts you have by email
- Agreements/Assumptions for the work**
- We are all here with a desire to create spaces that are safer for lgbtq persons that is free of injustice, prejudice, and harassment
 - Always consider there may be an LGBTQ person in the room
 - Feel free to speak and ask questions even if you don’t have it all figured out
 - Help each other learn new things
 - Be respectful to each other and the differing experiences we have

Exercise 1: Terms 101

Note: Language is fluid.

Descriptions and understandings of words change across time and place.

Always allow people to choose the words they use to describe themselves.

Gender identity	A person's internal sense of being a man, woman, both, neither or another identity all together
Sexual orientation	How a person characterizes their sexual and emotional attractions to other people
Lesbian/Gay	Sexual orientations that describe a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender
Questioning	A person who is unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and is in process of discerning this about themselves
Asexual	A sexual orientation that describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others
Queer	An umbrella term used by some people to describe people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Due to its history as a derogatory term, the term is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQ+ community
Bisexual	A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender or opposite gender
Hetrosexual / Straight	A sexual orientation that describes people who are emotionally and sexually attracted to people of a different gender
Pansexual	A sexual orientation that describes people who experiences attraction to others regardless of their genders
Cisgender	People whose gender identity matches the sex and gender assigned at birth

Exercise 2: Increasing Understanding

Safe Zone Module 1

81.8%

of LGBTQ+ students in our survey reported feeling unsafe in school because of at least one of their actual or perceived personal characteristics.

32.2%

of LGBTQ+ students missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, 11.3% missed four or more days in the past month

31.2%

Of LGBTQ students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year based on their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender

Only one-tenth of LGBTQ+ students

(10.9%) reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when overhearing homophobic remarks at school,

and less than one tenth of LGBTQ+ students **(8.8%)** reported that school staff intervened most of the time or always when overhearing negative remarks about gender expression.

58.0% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff, and

72.0% of students reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.

68.0%

of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at school because of their SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression) characteristics

[Statistics from GLSEN 2021 School Climate Survey](#)

OTHER IMPORTANT STATISTICS

Up to 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+ while LGBTQ+ youth make up only 7-9.5% of the total youth population
[National Network for Youth](#)

45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.

LGBTQ youth who felt high social support from their family reported attempting suicide at **less than half the rate** of those who felt low or moderate social support.

Fewer than 1 in 3 transgender and nonbinary youth found their home to be gender-affirming.

LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported **lower rates of attempting suicide**.

LGBTQ youth who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ+ people reported **significantly lower rates of attempting suicide** than those who do not.
[The Trevor Project 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#)



Prayer!