

Greetings Salford Friends,

I'm Dean Wimmer, chair of the Salford Board, together with Randy Nyce, Vice Chair, and we bring you greetings today on behalf of the entire church board. During these weeks, now months of quarantine, the church board and staff have continued meeting, and have been busy with work in a number of areas. A few weeks ago you received an email with a link to a page on the church website with electronic copies of our recent minutes. I hope you've taken the time to review those minutes as an important way to stay informed of the work of the church.

One of our ongoing priorities is our search for a Lead Pastor. Although the circumstances with Covid-19 certainly present new and unique challenges, we on the pastoral search committee continue our important work. As we look forward to the next period of pastoral leadership at Salford, some of our conversation has been around the question of what it means for Salford to be a welcoming congregation.

Conversation at Salford Mennonite Church related to hospitality, welcome, and LGBTQ+ inclusion has been ongoing for over 10, years beginning with a congregational commitment to "Hospitality as Outreach" in 2009. This has included a multi-year process of education, teaching, and intentional conversation groups.

Following an extensive congregational listening process, in 2016 the Salford congregation adopted its current Welcoming Statement affirming "...that all individuals are created in God's image, in beauty and grace, no matter their age, gender, race, disability, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and are welcome as members in our congregation."

Some of you were part of that conversation and know the intentionality of that congregational discernment. It was not without pain, as some long-term members felt the need to withdraw their membership and break from fellowship. As a congregation that values relationships, this was particularly painful. At the same time, the congregation's affirmation opened the door for many who resonated with the congregation's welcoming statement.

Since 2016 there have been various developments in Mennonite Church USA, MCUSA conferences, and Salford Mennonite Church regarding the participation of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the church. For more information on happenings in the broader church, see the [2001 MCUSA Membership Guidelines](#) and the [January 2020 Membership Guidelines Advisory Committee report](#). During these years there has also been a lack of clarity around LGBTQ+ members' welcome to participate in ministry and marriage at Salford.

The topic of welcome and inclusion has been an active part of our board discussion, particularly for the past several months. While our primary focus at present is the hiring of a new lead pastor, we continue to be in regular conversation about LGBTQ+ inclusion. The Salford Church Board, Staff, and Pastoral Search committee would find it helpful to hear the personal convictions of members of the Salford community at this point in time.

As we enter into a Pastoral search process and as we prepare for MCUSA Convention 2021 where the future of the current Membership Guidelines for MCUSA will be a focus of discussion, a better

understanding of our personal convictions on LGBTQ+ participation at Salford will help guide discernment. A survey has been developed by Church Board and Staff to gauge our personal convictions on more fully defined LGBTQ+ welcome at Salford. This survey is not a decision-making document; it is a survey of the congregation's personal convictions to guide future discernment.

A core tenet of Mennonite belief is discernment in community—that the Holy Spirit guides and speaks to us both through Scripture and through the prayerful discernment of the community. This process of spiritual discernment does not have the goal of complete agreement within the community and is not always quick. But by discerning together where God is leading us, we seek to be clear on God's direction while remaining in loving fellowship with each other.

You are an important part of the Salford community of faith. We are thankful for your participation at Salford, your patience as we discern together where God is leading us, and your help in guiding this conversation by completing the attached survey.