

Summary of Assembly Welcome Statement Questions

1. Do we need a Welcome Statement, and if so, why? How do we think about its purpose?

- Yes! Could it also serve some kind of reflection/reflective purpose, i.e. sound more thoughtful, less “check off all the boxes”?
- Yes – Both for visitors and for ourselves. Informs folks who we are and clarifies our understanding for ourselves
- Yes. It still needs to be explicitly stated that we are a welcoming congregation
- Clearly on website—helped me know basic tenets of inclusion of the congregation
- Yes, as new people move into our community a short, concise statement is important to communicate our values. Is it a mission statement?
- Yes. Tells folks who we are!
- Yes. It says who we are.
- Absolutely. Many of us chose to attend Assembly because we read this Welcoming statement
- Yes, it serves as a goalpost to shoot for, a way for people to find like-minded or safe people to be in community. Needs to be much more present on the website and in person.
- It’s good, along with our covenant. Help to clarify who we are.
- I’m leaning yes – it can be useful for orienting visitors, but possibly it could be given a reflection piece as well. A risk of the welcome statement is that we check off the “welcoming” but in our minds. But what if we added a question/or invitation for self-reflection at the end of the statement to invite us into further work on being welcoming?
- Yes, its good to have our beliefs in writing
- Yes – values get lost if we are not reminded from time to time.
- Yes
- One important purpose of such a statement is so people seeking a new church will readily know of our stance when seeing the statement on our website.
- Definitely, yes. Because people still search us out exactly because of this welcoming statement. Also keeps us accountable.
- Yes – really important to signal to new people who we are and what we value. New attenders look for such statements.
- Yes. It is helpful to those looking at our website. Helps us show folks who we aspire to be.
- Yes – It says who we are
- Who is the audience? Helps us remember who we are. Let’s others know who we are.
- Yes, because new people often look for this statement (on website, etc) when deciding which church(es) to visit. Tells them about community & what it stands for.
- Yes

- A welcome statement is useful for people selecting a church to visit/join. It makes it clear what our values are and what one can expect.
- Yes, a welcome statement is a good thing. We could do a better job at making the congregation and the broader community aware of it.
- Good to review – So many changes – are we staying aware?
- Yes! We need something for the website – I hear a number of people who move to town & do their research ahead of time. Add the state to all bulletins and the Aline
- Yes we do. People have seen it on our website & have come because of that.
- Yes, needed on website OR in any place on public brochures, on directories, on the Order of Worship
- Yes. People looking for church want to see themselves.
- Yes. It serves as an indicator of the kind of church/community we have here, useful for someone from out of town who is looking for a like-minded place.
- Absolutely. It gives us something to be accountable to. It signals to those who are exploring Assembly what we stand for. Needs to be on the website.
- Yes! Have it very visible on our website as well so folks considering coming to visit can find it. It gives us something to aspire to and to hold ourselves accountable.
- This statement has aged well. We could add more categories but we risk the statement becoming unwieldy. I know of 2 families that came because this statement was on our website.
- Yes. Informative for us (things we say & do weekly). Locates us within the Christian streams when a church saying “welcome” can mean many things, not all especially welcoming.
- Yes. Important to let folks know what we as a group believe, and specifically who we include. Listing groups, especially minority or ostracized groups is important because “all” does not always truly mean all. When looking for a new church, folks are looking to see themselves listed.
- Yes. But it should not be performative. Such a statement is useless if it can be hidden behind.
- Yes – for those seeking church and to help us make congregational decisions.
- I have been challenged a number of times in the last year about being too intellectual. I think part of the reason I was drawn to Assembly in the first place was that we are, as a church, very cerebral. It seems to me that we are also being very cerebral in our approach to a welcome statement. I was in Indianapolis recently and noticed MANY churches with prominently displayed rainbow flags. I recognize that we are, as a denomination, and as liberals, uncomfortable with flags because of their association with unchecked nationalism. But you know what flags are really good at? Stating what we stand for in a visceral way. While I heartily commend the thoughtfulness we are putting into the concept of a welcome statement, I wonder if simply flying a rainbow flag would be a more robust and meaningful welcome statement than anything we might write up! Thanks so much for tackling this issue.
- We should consider: Who is the audience of our welcome statement? People who have been excluded in other churches? Seekers of all kinds? Are more conservative folk in the audience?

- It is unhelpful to make the statement ever-longer as we add more and more groups. Make the welcome statement broad.
- The purpose of the welcome statement is different than the purpose of a membership guidelines statement. Can we succinctly state qualifications of membership/eligibility for ministry/marriage?
- What goes in the welcome statement and what gets fleshed out in more detail on the website?
- Pros: Keeps us accountable, states who we want to be. Cons: Is this a way of stating our aspirational reality and then washing our hands of it or not doing the work? Purpose: We want people to know that we really do welcome them, especially those who use websites and written materials as a way to evaluate whether the community will be a safe/accepting space for them.
- Trouble with the word "regardless". Sounds too much like "Even if..."
- Maybe 2 welcoming statements. Bill Mateer said that in the past the welcoming statement was published in the church bulletin or service guide. For that purpose, something short like, "Assembly Mennonite Church seeks to follow Jesus' example by welcoming all who come our way." A longer version may be appropriate for self-definition.
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2. How does the 1999 statement read to you today? What do you like, not like, or what is missing?

- The word “regardless” is awful. It implies that the “normal” people welcome others in, “regardless” of their otherness.
- Take out “regardless”; use inclusive language like “we embrace ___ groups.”
- Has held up remarkably for this amount of time. Like that it’s concise and not over intellectualized.
- Change “gender” to “gender identity”
- Make sure that any rewrite is written in a way that is understandable and accessible even if we don’t have a college education. What does “a reconciling faith community” mean?
- Remove “who come our way” – seems too reactive. What do we mean by reconciling faith community? Change to just say “ability” (remove physical)
- It covers a lot of ground, but is a little like a list of non-normative things that we will allow. We should rather say something like “people of all ages, economic or social circumstances.”
- “Reconciling” meaning? Gender in ‘99 may have just been male/female. “All who come our way” feels passive, want to make this more active, possibly “inviting”
- It’s basically still good. Perhaps add “identity” to gender. Also, remove “regardless,” rather something like “in all of our diversity”
- It is amazing for being 23 years old – but does need change. Change “physical ability” to “ability”—include mental, cognitive, etc. Drop “all who come our way” leave “all” (sounds like flotsam and jetsam that float by). Get rid of “regardless”. Add gender identity.
- Little outdated
- The 1999 statement still seems pretty good to me. Some minor tweaks to consider: Take out “reconciling” language; take out “regardless of” language; take out “physical” and just talk about “ability”; add religions/faith background
- I think it has traveled well because it is a very simple, to the point statement. If it is changed it shouldn’t get more “wordy.”
- Change “regardless” to “embracing”. Regardless sounds offputting.
- “Regardless” has negative connotation—edit to a more positive, inclusive language. Also update/change language to include welcome for all gender identity/expression.
- Immigration status, other than Christian beliefs – seekers of love, justice, peace, inclusive, etc. the point being – how to maintain identity & yet be welcoming? Too long a list and in a year someone is left out.
- Get rid of “as a reconciling faith community” and “regardless”
- Maybe need to include something about those who aren’t/weren’t raised as Mennonite/Christian. For example, small handful of us who were/are Jewish.
- Should we display it somewhere in the building maybe? Why “reconciling”? Something to say we are also growing and learning, not stagnant.
- Statement needs refreshed. The phrase “regardless of” is problematic, as it connotes the categories of people listed are “different/other.”

- Still good, but it is important to revisit. Thank you for doing this. What about starting with “As an Anabaptist-Christian faith community,”
- It is specific, but not all inclusive. However, the list would be too long and lose its value
- I think it read very well for its age. Some minor changes could make it more reflective of who we are, but at its core I think it is quite good.
- Options to replace “regardless of” with “embracing the strengths of all our ...,” “representing the wide spectrums of ...,” or “in the diversity of...” Also, in acknowledgement of our diversity of mental ability, removing the “mental” from in front of “ability.” Editing “gender” to “gender identity and expression” and including “cultural backgrounds” and “faith backgrounds.”
- One suggestion was to display a pride flag. Group was negative.
- Question about “reconciling” term. Changing “regardless” to a term with positive connotations. Regardless suggests we ignore these aspects of people, but we do notice these things. Strike “physical” off “physical ability.” Add “faith tradition” in some capacity. Gender identity.
- “Reconciling” –what does that mean? Consider phrases like: As a faith community that seeks harmony, restoring what has been broken, healing the wounds. “Regardless” ---it’s not “in spite of”, it’s because you are different – we celebrate and enjoy you being your true self, we admire you—not just accept you. We look forward to learning from you. You enrich our community.
- Explicit welcome to trans people
- Ok, but may need addendum
- I don’t understand what reconciling is. Can we be more specific? Does it mean restoration, wholeness? The word “regardless” seems negative.
- Regardless of ---instead do we value and celebrate the diversity. Inclusion of doubt & seekers –room for past religious experience/faith/cultural background
- What does a “reconciling faith” community mean? Get rid of “come our way.” Cut out “physical.” Add gender identity.
- Dislike the word regardless –reads/sounds like “in spite of”
- Nothing about politics but should there be? Strike “physical” and just include “ability.” Problems with “regardless.” Implies we are inclusive despite/in spite of certain characteristics. Also, that we treat this without regard—that maybe we don’t pay as much attention to this as we should.
- The question of how inclusive are we? We talk about it at Assembly that we have the freedom to have questions. Does it matter if a person has other beliefs? What was said is that we need to have a core, but a flexible core.
- Folks in both 4-member groups were not sure about the appropriateness of “reconciling.” What was being “reconciled?” There was a suggestion also that being welcoming was not necessarily entirely passive. Do we not only welcome those who “come our way” but also engage and invite others?

3. What is important to include in a new statement (if we write one)? What initial thoughts do you have about what it should say and/or how it is drafted?

- Include “reconciling faith community” or not? Outdated?
- Celebration of all people – not “regardless”
- Maybe get rid of sexual orientation, but how to say that better? Unsure. Get rid of “regardless.” Where are the MYFers in this conversation? Ask them for input, language, etc.
- We value & celebrate diversity Welcome ability to serve & be integrated.
- “Gender” meant sex in earlier statement. Now maybe “gender identity”
- I do like Keller Park’s statement. Wide welcome plus specific way we live those out –(working against sexism, transphobia, racism, etc)
- We welcome your culture, your faith. We know there is tremendous beauty in other faith traditions and we want to learn from you.
- Committee is an option, not sure if it should be done by one person or not, could be more efficient that way (but would end up in committee of congregation regardless)
- Explored “reconciling” –maybe “restorative.” “Regardless” suggest something is missing. Good to use “gender identity,” not only “gender.” To “race” add “race & ethnicity.”
- Invitational and inclusive, with emphasis on all being equal/being “normal.”
- Ditch “regardless of” – indicates apathy. Instead signal celebration & respect & admiration. Include “culture.” Add acceptance of everyone for all aspects of cong life such as leadership, worship, etc. Somehow indicate that our diversity makes us stronger? Better? Richer? Cut into 2 or more sentences. Maybe put something about this into rights of the child.
- The words “gender identity.”
- How it is drafted ---Include young people especially
- Consider phrasing in terms of active commitments...this is how we do welcome
- If any LGBTQ people feel that the gender or sexual orientation language needs to be updated.
- Some reflection on indigenous issues—DDoD. I wonder how to deal with interfaith? Agree it should be more visible.
- Possible wording: “As a faith community gather by Jesus [reconciling] love, AMC seeks to follow Jesus’ example by welcoming all ages, economic circumstances, ethnicities, marital status, abilities, culture, races, or gender identities and invites all to participate fully in the life of the church.”
- I don’t see the need for a lot of change. Yes, a subcommittee should work on it and bring it to the congregation.
- “all who come our way” feels passive. Want to make this more active, possibly “inviting.” Adding religious background and mental ability. Perhaps “embracing” instead of “regardless”
- Include younger people in the process (MYF & college students) to account for the blind spots of us olds.
- Expand “gender” to “gender identity.” Like the idea of a working/writing group.
- Be sure that we are specific/clear that all are welcome to participate in all aspects of congregational life – leadership, worship leading, etc.

- I'm not eager to invest a lot of time on this. Having a subcommittee work on this seems reasonable.
- In one of my groups, we came up to switch "regardless of" to "embracing full participation of all ages," (but again, not wanting this to be an endless, long statement)
- Discuss that inclusion of these groups means full inclusion. Not just to sit in a pew, but "full participation" as in teaching, serving, etc. Also needs to inform our practices. A previous church had a similar welcome statement as above, however then hired a pastor who would not marry LGTBQ folks. That is no consistent with the value of the welcoming statement.
- Include "gender identity/expression" in addition to "gender"
- We need to include that they are welcome to participate in all areas of community life. We need to actively consider this for all decisions.
- As a community seeking to follow Jesus' example by welcoming all from all diverse aspects of life's journey: age, econ & social circ., ethnic back., gender IDENTITY + expression, marital status, ability, race, cultural context, sexual orientation, and faith background.
- Should our welcoming statement ask us to reflect on how well we are living out the statement and/or to commit us to more intentionality and action. Should we list out all the different ways we/our society discriminate against others? Pros: shows we are thinking about each other and respecting our differences. Cons: how do we include everybody without the list getting too long. Long lists often become overlooked or less valued and harder to live into.
- We welcome people with questions. We welcome people who are seeking. We welcome people who don't agree with our values (ex. military participation). We welcome people who don't agree with our beliefs. We welcome people of all faith traditions.
- How many specifics do we name? Immigration status? One person mentioned the current emphasis on Indigenous people, do we try to catch that theme?
- People who have food allergies and preferences. We spend significant time being certain that coming together at both the communion table and potluck table is safe for everyone, yet don't find that necessary to mention in our Welcoming Statement. Just a thought.....
- In one of the 4-member groups, a participant suggested "ability" as a category without modification by "physical" or "mental."
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