

Assembly Mennonite Church  
Congregational Meeting Record  
Nov 19, 2023 - 7pm

Forty-one (41) AMC participants met in person for an update from the pastoral search committee and to hear about the work of the Welcome Statement Committee. This meeting was not shared online via Zoom.

The meeting was facilitated by Marshall King.

### **Welcome Statement Committee**

Stephen Lowe from the Welcome Statement Committee presented a proposed process for updating AMC's Welcome Statement. ([Handout](#))

The Welcome Statement Committee consists of: Regina Shands Stoltzfus and Stephen Lowe (Co-Chairs), Jenna R. Martin, Kate Kennedy, Sara Morris (LG Representative), and Scott Coulter (Pastoral Representative)

The scope of the work of this committee is limited to a welcome statement. Any additional questions about on-going inclusion and justice work within the congregation and calls for discernment, clarification, and revision work of other AMC policies and practices will be passed on to the Leadership Group for further discernment.

### Goals of the Welcome Statement Committee

1. Craft a welcome statement that is representative of Assembly as a radically Welcoming and Affirming congregation.
2. Research and utilize language in our Welcome Statement that is reflective of best practices for Welcoming congregations.
3. Craft a welcome statement that clearly communicates Assembly's commitment to include people of diverse gender and sexual identities, diverse abilities, and diverse racial and ethnic identities as full participants in the congregation, including eligibility for membership, spiritual/pastoral/congregational leadership positions, marriage/ordinances, etc.
4. Call the congregation to continue to live into their identity as a radically welcoming and affirming community.

### Stages of the Welcome Committees' Work

The Committee plans to use a five-stage process for its work. These stages include: (1) Research and Dreaming, (2) Congregational Input and Storytelling, (3) Congregational Reflection, (4) Crafting, and (5) Congregational Approval. (More information on each stage can be found in the handout).

The committee has already been doing the work of the first stage: Research and Dreaming. This congregational meeting includes a beginning of the work of the second stage: Congregational Input and Storytelling. This stage will continue with surveys, small group discussions, and interviews - look for more invitations to participate in this stage at a later time. The Welcome Statement Committee plans to coordinate with the AMC 50th Anniversary Committee in collecting some stories from the congregation as part of this stage.

Ultimately, the end of this five-stage process will be when a draft Welcome Statement will be presented to the congregational meeting for a first reading, using the normal consensus process.

### **Small Group Discussion/Response**

Regina Shands Stoltzfus from the Welcome Statement Committee invited those present at the congregational meeting to discuss the following questions in small groups. Each group had a representative from the Welcome Statement Committee or Leadership Group as a listener/recorder.

*To help the committee continue its work at this stage, we would like to hear responses to two questions in this meeting:*

*(1) What do we want our welcome statement to do?*

*(2) What are your dreams of how adopting/embracing the new welcome statement could transform the congregation?*

## Summary of Discussion from Small Groups:<sup>1</sup>

What we want the statement to do:

- I want the statement to send a signal to people who have been left out of the historic “welcoming” language of church that they are really invited to fully participate as they are.
  - I want the statement to be clear that this is a welcome to “full participation”.
- I want the statement to be welcoming to all people.
- I want the statement to name specific groups of people.
- I want the statement not to have an exhaustively long list.
- I want the statement to include people with emotional/social disabilities.
- I’m concerned that the welcome statement might imply that we leave some people out.
- I want the statement to reflect our safe church practices.
  
- I want the statement to tell us who we are, and to tell others who we are.
- I want the statement to be faithful to who we want to be as a church.
- I want the statement to both reflect who we are and who we aspire to be.
- I want the statement to encapsulate what we’ve become, what we want to encourage, and how we want to grow. But I don’t want an aspirational statement that we don’t live up to.
  - Will the welcome statement be honest about how we have been better at welcoming some people than at welcoming others?
- I want the statement to say who WE are as a congregation.
- I want the statement to use celebratory language, positive language - not “regardless of” language.
  
- I want the statement to formally recognize our past prejudices, and to help us avoid repeating mistakes of the past.
- I want the statement to acknowledge that we have not already succeeded at welcome and that we have ongoing work to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by Scott Coulter from notes taken by Scott Coulter, Anna Yoder Schlabach, Jenna R. Martin, and Sara Morris

- The welcome statement will not be all-encompassing; we do not expect it to replace the covenant & practices or mission statement.
- I want the statement to invite us to live out welcome in practice.
- I want the statement to both invite us to transformation and to reflect who we actually are as a community.

#### Dreams for Transformation:

- I want the work of the welcome statement to be led by prayer and the Holy Spirit. I don't want us to make the mistake of thinking that the amazing things that happen at Assembly are because we're so good at writing statements.
- I want the statement process to help us learn how we need to continue to be transformed, to be healed.
- That the statement/process will prompt us to ask what we are not doing now that we want to be doing.
- That we will continue to grow toward radical hospitality.
- That we will reflect on our past prejudices, mistakes, failures.
- That we will model how to take responsibility for fixing past mistakes.
- We don't expect to be able to be everything to everyone.
- That we will have more diversity in our congregation.
- That people representing demographics we are substantially missing would feel more welcome. (This requires more than a statement).

#### Some other questions that arose:

- How might a welcome statement, that welcomes all identities, relate to our statement of practices, that asks for commitment to certain behaviors?
  - (What is the relationship between welcoming all identities and having certain expectations for behavior?)
- What help and support can I receive in talking with family members/loved ones who do not take an LGBTQ-welcoming stance about my participation in an LGBTQ-welcoming church?
- How can we read the welcome statement more frequently, make it more prominent? (Not just on the website).

- Is there reconciliation and repair that should take place alongside of, or before, adopting a welcome statement? How do we take responsibility for our past mistakes?
- How can we plan to revisit the welcomes statement again in the future?

(Note: to review earlier discussion at the March 2023 congregational meeting about the need and purpose for a revised welcome statement, see the [minutes](#), [handout](#), and [summary of responses](#) from that meeting).

Scott Coulter  
1/5/2024

*Note: These are not minutes, but a summary based on handouts and notes taken by small group participants in the meeting. - SKC*

Summary approved by LG on 1/9/24