

**Some Reflections and Implications
Of the Decision by Bethel Mennonite Church
To Become an Affirming and Welcoming Congregation
Comments (excerpts) made by the Chair at the Annual Congregational Meeting
Of Bethel Mennonite Church, June 12, 2016**

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At its Fall Planning Retreat Church Council decided to make hospitality the focus for the church for this year. We asked all the committees responsible for programs and practices at Bethel to examine their areas and develop new energy for practicing hospitality. The focus on hospitality, while not directly affecting many of the things we do at Bethel, became a touchstone for changing our language and for rethinking how we approach our church life so that we can be more open to diversity, more welcoming of newcomers, and better neighbours to the people who live around us.

The standing committees of the congregation and many of the subcommittees that function under them have written reports for you to catch up on the work that has been done. In addition, Council as a whole has dealt with a number of important matters this year.

Human Sexuality Conversation

Significantly the work of the Coordinating Committee for the Conversation about Human Sexuality has come with their final report, which is included in the report book. Council has endorsed the two recommendations of the Committee, namely:

1. That Bethel Mennonite Church support the adoption of the BFC7 recommendations at Assembly 2016.
2. **That Bethel declare itself a welcoming and affirming congregation.**

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Questions about what this means in our congregational life:

1. Does this mean pastors are free to marry same sex couples in our church? Yes, within the same parameters as for heterosexual unions. Bethel pastors may also decline if they feel they cannot on the basis of their personal views.
2. Can lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer persons (LGBTQ) stay, or become members in good standing at Bethel? Yes, with the same requirements as other members.
3. Does this mean that LGBTQ persons could take up leadership roles in the church, including the role of pastor? Yes, it does.
4. Will we be putting the question of inclusiveness to a vote? Church Council believes a vote is not the best way forward. There has been a long period of conversation about this question at Bethel and Council believes a consensus has emerged for the position outlined in the report. A strong expression of wishing to remain unified as a congregation has also been a part of the conversation. We acknowledge that we are a diverse people and are not all at the same place in the church's journey on this question. We are, however, united in a common desire to be faithful. Framing a question that could be voted on as a "yes" or "no" strikes us as being divisive.

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