

Missional Leadership Team and Church Life Team statement on discernment on credentialing

Dear churches of IMC,

While the public policy debate around same sex marriage is largely settled, the question of whether same sex relationships can be part of faithful Christian discipleship continues to be a matter of sharp disagreement in the church. Needless to say, MCUSA and IMC are part of this widespread disagreement across the Christian faith (**see Appendix**).

Few people in IMC would insist that everyone in the conference be of one mind. And few people in IMC want to interfere with who congregations choose for their leaders. Our most tangible problem is when we as IMC churches jointly credential individuals for ministry. Some churches want to affirm same sex marriage by performing same sex weddings as well as credentialing individuals in gay relationships. Other churches do not want to send a message that they see same sex marriage as faithful Christian discipleship.

Our challenge is not to convince each other of a particular viewpoint. Our challenge is how can we accommodate each other with concrete demonstrations of forbearance in the matter of credentialing. (This means everyone will be somewhat dissatisfied with the accommodations we arrive at.) Our forbearance should not simply amount to tolerating each other. No one wants to simply be tolerated. People want to be genuinely respected. Genuinely respecting our brothers and sisters - their convictions and their stories - must be the standard in our mutual forbearance toward each other. A first step can be engaging in congregational discussions using the Colossian Forum materials, followed by inter-congregational discussion and engagement.

This is the Christian world we live in today. Like the rest of the Christian world, individuals and churches in IMC will not all agree on the faithfulness of gay relationships. Again, our challenge is to agree on ways to demonstrate forbearance toward each other as we work together to extend God's kingdom.

Illinois Mennonite Conference MLT and CLT

(see Appendix below)

Appendix: Christians who have advocated for different views on same sex marriage

Examples of Mennonites on both sides of this question

(Of course, we could all construct our own very long lists):

Ted Grimsrud	Mark Nation	former professors at EMS; co-authors: <i>Reasoning Together</i>
Loren Johns	Willard Swartley	former professors at AMBS
Isaac Villegas	Alan Kreider	Small bits of their personal dialogue on same sex marriage found its way into Mennonite publications. (Villegas-a pastor, Kreider-a mission worker, author, historian)

Examples of Christian scholars/writers who answer the question differently:

Tony Compolo	Ron Sider	Both have been long time friends, colleagues, and advocates for Biblical justice.
David Neff	Mark Galli	In 2014 Neff, a long-time editor of Christianity Today, registered his support for Campolo's change to affirm same sex marriage. CT's then editor, Mark Galli, critiqued Neff's statements and reaffirmed CT's non-affirming view while respecting his friend and colleague.
David Gushee	George Guthrie	Former colleagues at Union University. In his critique of Gushee's 2014 book, <i>Changing Our Minds</i> , Guthrie calls Gushee's new affirmation of same sex marriage "heart breaking" while still respecting his friend and colleague.
Walter Wink	J.I. Packer	Simply 2 examples of respected theologians, recently deceased

Examples of gay Christians who follow Jesus and affirm same sex marriage, and other gay Christians who have decided that following Jesus means not being in a same sex marriage.

(Gay Christians with published writing. No significance in pairings):

Matthew Vines	Wesley Hill
Justin Lee	Gregory Coles
Mel White	Becket Cook
Matthew Paul Turner	Rachel Gilson
Frederick Davie	Rosaria Butterfield
Naomi Washington-Leapheart	Sam Allberry