December 16, 2018

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at BCMC,

This is a follow-up letter to share with you about the congregational meeting that took place on Sunday afternoon, Dec 16, to process a report of a sexual boundary violation by a BCMC member.

The meeting was led by the leadership team tending to this matter: John Waltner (chair, Church Board), Patty Shelly (incoming chair, Church Board), Jim Robb (chair, Deacons), Marlene Ewert (member at large and therapist), and Dawn Yoder Harms (pastor).

Following a time of centering and prayer, we shared about the report we had received: the incident involved a sexual boundary violation, not on church property, not involving anyone under the age of 18.

We shared about the way the report had been processed: After receiving the report on Nov 11, 2018, John Waltner and Dawn Yoder Harms promptly sought counsel from Western District Conference; gathered together the above listed leadership group; sought legal advice; learned about a history of complaints (outside BCMC) against the person receiving the allegation; met separately with the complainant and support person; notified the Deacon Commission and the Church Board of the allegation received (without revealing details or identities of people involved); met with person receiving the allegation and support persons and presented him with a limited access agreement (outlining conditions for his ongoing participation at BCMC); notified the congregation of the allegation received and invited people to a congregational meeting on Sunday, Dec 16, to discuss the report.

All along the way, the leadership team has been guided by MC USA's guidelines for responding to sexual abuse involving non-credentialed individuals.
http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/prevention-and-response-sexual-abuse-and-non-credentialed-individuals/

While we did share the name of the person receiving the allegation at the congregational meeting, we are choosing not to print his name in this letter, given our concern about the proliferation of this information via social media. If you wish to know who this person is, you may contact anyone on the above listed leadership team.

In the meantime, out of respect for both the complainant and the person receiving the allegation, we do ask you to refrain from sharing about this incident on social media or with persons from outside the congregation.

We acknowledge the pain that is opened as we experience another allegation of sexual boundary violation among us, and we are committed to providing ways to continue to process it together.

We trust that the God who, in Jesus, has come among us to share our struggles and guide our feet into the way of peace, is with us. And we trust that this difficult terrain is fertile ground for growth, as we continue to learn about abuse and trauma and what it means to be church as we deal with these difficult issues together.

In the spirit of Advent waiting,

John Waltner, Patty Shelly, Jim Robb, Marlene Ewert, and Dawn Yoder Harms

RESOURCES

If you find yourself needing emotional support as you continue to process this situation, the following people in our congregation are available for supportive conversation:

- Lillian Peters: 316-283-8529
- Orlyn Zehr: 316-283-6949

Counseling resources are also available at Prairie View: (808) 992-6292

If you are aware of abuse taking place within this congregation (or anywhere), here are safe places to report it:

- Heart to Heart Child Advocacy Center: (316) 804-4603
- Safe Hope: (316) 283-0350
- Department of Children and Families: (800) 922-5330
- North Newton Police Department: (316) 283-3191

If a report is made about abuse in our congregation, please also inform someone on the Pastoral Team (per our congregation's Guidelines for the Safety of Children and Youth).