To the Pacific District Conference Executive Board and Board of Faith and Life:

On January 23, 2019, Gary Wall, then the Pacific District Conference Minister, was charged with "Engaging and Agreeing to Engage in Prostitution" at a massage parlor in Fresno, California. A year and a half has passed since that event, and the church has remained largely silent. At a time when we had an opportunity to speak, to grieve the circumstances which led Gary to this situation, to evaluate ourselves and identify blind spots, to denounce the dehumanizing effects of human trafficking and acknowledge that we in the church are sometimes responsible for exploitation, the response has been inadequate.

We understand the difficulties of speaking out about an employee when there are conflicting stories. We recognize the challenge that potential lawsuits might pose if the district is accused of libel or defamation. You are in a difficult position and have been asked to navigate something none of you would have chosen. Even so, the silence from district leadership has left a difficult situation unaddressed and has relegated the church to the sidelines, rather than at the center, bringing reconciliation and restoration. In light of this situation, whether the allegations against Gary are true or not, this raises a question: do you have a policy for both responding to and preventing sexual misconduct and issues of abuse or exploitation by church leaders? The USMB has a document entitled "Resources for Churches Dealing With Sexual Misconduct" which provides guidance for communicating such issues, including the sharing of information about the investigative process. We recognize that this situation is unusual in that the District Minister does not oversee one congregation. It is likely that you as a board needed to make some decisions that differ from the guidelines, and we believe it is important that the church understand the efforts you have taken and are taking, as well as your reasoning for those actions. If the "Resources" guide was not adopted policy, we would like to know what policy you were following instead, and where there are gaps in policy we desire to partner with you in determining more effective ways forward in future situations.

Our goal is not to shame or punish Gary. We desire the health and wholeness of all people impacted by these events. We do not want Gary to be torn down, we want him built up, but we want to ensure we are building on a strong foundation. We desire health and support for the Wall family, including an honest evaluation of how we, the church, could have responded sooner to promote their well-being. As stated in the Resource for Churches Dealing with Sexual Misconduct, "Because healing, restoration and reconciliation are always the goals, pastoral care is to be provided for the Victim(s) and/or Accuser(s), the Offender, family members, and members of the congregation affected by Sexual Misconduct." We care about healing, restoration, and reconciliation for the victims as well. We are concerned about the victims of human trafficking who are connected to this case, women who have names and stories and bear the image of God, and yet have not been valued as image bearers but viewed as a commodity and often ignored. We seek to ensure that their voices are represented at the table as well and that the trauma they endure is taken seriously.

It may be tempting to think that this situation is the result of one "bad apple," but statistics tell us that is untrue. According to a 2016 survey by the Barna Group, 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use pornography on a regular basis and are currently struggling. 43% say they have struggled with pornography in the past. We have experienced other issues of sexual misconduct from leadership within our denomination, some very recently. We know this is a problem, and yet we as the church are turning a blind eye to the root causes. Our current systems and structures keep people trapped with no hope for help and must be evaluated in order to help hurting people heal.

In light of this, we are asking for three things: **transparency, accountability, and an opportunity for self-disclosure.**

Transparency – Eighteen months have passed since Gary was charged and very little has been publicly communicated from PDC leadership. While we believe the attempts to maintain privacy have been motivated by a desire to protect all parties, secrecy has created confusion rather than understanding. Transparency is essential to trust, and a lack of transparency breeds distrust of leadership. While we recognize that there will be things you cannot disclose for legal reasons, we encourage you to issue a public statement which offers as much information as possible about how the conference has investigated the issue, supported the Wall family, accounted for travel expenses, and evaluated your own policies in light of this incident. Moving forward, as we welcome a new pastor into this role, we want to know what policies and procedures are in place to track and approve travel expenses, and a clear outline of the proper reporting procedure for any member of the Board of Faith and Life who hears reports of illegal, immoral, or inappropriate activity by a pastor. We recommend revisiting and adopting the "Resource for Sexual Misconduct" already referenced.

Accountability – The "Resource" guide states, "Since mutual accountability is a value we seek to cultivate within the body of Christ, accountability structures and supportive relationships shall be provided for Offenders to facilitate healing, reconciliation and restoration." We have an opportunity to examine the structures in place for those in the highest levels of leadership in our denomination and to be proactive rather than reactive in the area of accountability. The role of Pacific District Minister is expansive, including a very large area and a number of various responsibilities. We desire to care for those who fill this role in a holistic way, to encourage their growth, set an expectation for exposure to diversity of thought and experience, and to provide a level of pastoral care which can be overlooked for those in high levels of leadership. We request that the Board of Faith and Life establish and implement expectations for accountability and growth. One idea for accomplishing this is establishing an accountability group for the district minister, made of people who the district minister trusts and has relationship with. These individuals may be chosen by the minister, in partnership with the BFL, and need not be monitored by the BFL, but the names of these members should be known and recorded by the BFL. This group should be made up of an equal number of male and female members and should meet regularly with the district minister in order to provide a level of pastoral care and support as the district minister seeks to pastor and support such a large district. Alternatively, you might follow the Guidelines for Sexual Misconduct suggestion for prevention outlined in point 5: "Implement a continuing education program for pastors that would include topics such as ministerial ethics, guidance in establishing personal boundaries in relationships, understand the issues of power and authority in ministry, and developing appropriate sexual conduct in one's life and relationships." We emphasize that such education should be provided by a diverse group of people. Surely there are other options that can provide a level of accountability, training, and exposure to the experiences of others that have not been mentioned. We encourage you to intentionally establish structures which foster these values.

Self-Disclosure Opportunities – To assume that there will never be another time when a pastor is in need of help and counseling but must balance that need with very real fears of losing everything is foolish. We have an opportunity here to learn and adapt, to recognize that our current structures do not allow people to ask for help in the way we hoped they would. We are glad that the board has agreed to provide counseling as part of the healthcare package for the incoming district minister and affirm the need for such services. There are organizations like Link Care who specialize in counseling pastors and

ministry leaders. Link Care offers 5 free counseling sessions a year to any pastor in Fresno. We ask that the PDC explore ways to match that, either with Link Care or other counselors, giving PDC lead pastors an opportunity for 10 sessions a year, and a place to disclose that they are struggling without fear of repercussions and with the goal of moving toward healing.

As the church, we desire God's justice, one that restores, and gives hope. We desire to help the Pacific District Conference move forward in ways that build trust and reconciliation. We the undersigned commit to prayer for you as you seek wisdom, for Gary, and for the victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Where we have expertise or experience, we gladly lend it and desire to be part of the process. We appeal to PDC leadership to openly address the concerns articulated above through timely and clear communication to the PDC churches and members.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Christa Wiens, North Fresno Church / Central Valley Justice Coalition

Aaron Wiens, North Fresno Church

Audrey Hindes, Pastor, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Lynn Jost, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Stephanie (Wall) Voth - Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Trent Voth - Willow Avenue Mennonite Church (Former Associate Pastor)

Cheryl Dueck-Smith, North Fresno Church

Peter Smith, North Fresno Church

Al Dueck, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church / North Fresno Church

Anne Dueck, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church/ North Fresno Church

Aaron Bryan, New Life Community, Dinuba

Tracy Bryan, New Life Community, Donuba

Jamie Mack, Pastor, North Fresno Church

Randy Mack, North Fresno Church

Stacie Winckler, North Fresno Church

Caitlin Friesen, Cornerstone Community Church / Former Pastor at North Fresno Church

Ben Friesen, Cornerstone Community Church / Former Pastor at North Fresno Church

Jill Brooks, North Fresno Church

Jason Brooks, North Fresno Church

Krystal Klaassen, North Fresno Church/ Mennonite Central Committee

Corey Klaassen, North Fresno Church

Rhonda Dueck, Associate Pastor, North Fresno Church

Kevin Dueck, North Fresno Church

Jason Kinzel, North Fresno Church

Kristina Kinzel, North Fresno Church

Jessica Pittman, North Fresno Church/ Founder of Central Valley Justice Coalition

Tim Neufeld, North Fresno Church

Tracy Neufeld, North Fresno Church

Jessica Ice, North Fresno Church

Silvia Lopez, Adonai

Lawrence Smith, Neighborhood Church Fresno

Sue Kliewer, North Fresno Church

Roy Kliewer, North Fresno Church

Mark Wiens, North Fresno Church

Cindy Wiens, North Fresno Church

Connie Nicholson, Pastor, North Fresno Church

Silas Langley, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Carla Bergen, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Clint Bergen, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Hannah Bergen Ziyadinova, Mennonite Brethren Church member since 2003

Jenyce Hiebert Danley, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Jason Isaac, North Fresno Church

Jane Isaac, North Fresno Church

Sharon Wiebe, Shafter MB

Larry Martens, North Fresno Church

Kathleen Martens, North Fresno Church

Sybil Kolbert, Bethany Mennonite Brethren

Jenny Akina, North Fresno Church

Emily Barcelos, North Fresno Church

Jared Barcelos, North Fresno Church

James Conder, North Fresno Church

Valerie Kadera, LMFT #93700, North Fresno Church

Lori Kleschold, North Fresno Church

Dave Kleschold, North Fresno Church

Nate Yoder, North Fresno Church/ Mennonite Central Committee

John Wiebe, Shafter MB

Katie Wiebe, Shafter MB

(The signees have indicated their affiliations, but have signed as individuals. This list is current as of August 28, 2020 and still open to additional signatures.)

Recommended Resources

USMB's Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Misconduct

http://usmb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/A-Resource-for-Churches-Dealing-with-Sexual-Misconduct-revised-9-17.docx

Faith Based and Sexual Assault Toolkit

Composed by the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence, this booklet helps faith communities develop understanding about sexual violence and includes practical guidelines for how churches can respond to and prevent abuse.

https://www.oaesv.org/site/assets/files/1319/oaesv-faith-based-sexual-assault-toolkit-final-combined-with-rpe-section.pdf

Faith Trust Institute

Faith Trust Institute provides a wide variety of training and resources for churches seeking to prevent and address sexual violence within their churches.

https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/What-Religious-Leaders-Can-Do.pdf

The MAP List: Mennonite Abuse Prevention

Envisioning such awareness, transparency, and accountability in our institutions and communities that no one sexually abuses, the Mennonite Abuse Prevention (MAP) List aims to make it easier to report and prevent sexual abuse through public documentation. A page on the website is dedicated to resources.

https://www.themaplist.org/

Net Grace

GRACE exists to equip the Church with a vision for authentic community, where responsibility, accountability, and compassion are second nature and caring for children and adult survivors of abuse are non-negotiable.

https://www.netgrace.org/

Our Stories Untold

A network of people who are concerned, specifically, about the spiritual dimensions of sexualized violence and the presence of sexualized violence in communities of faith.
http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/about/

Pornography: Lies, Truth, and Hope

A booklet from the Mennonite Central Committee that explores the dangers of pornography and helps find ways to prevent and overcome the harm it causes.

https://mcc.org/media/resources/1125

Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. We help build communities where the value of each person is honored; where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse; and where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

https://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch

We Are Speaking

In 2018, the Reformed Church in America put forward a statement, We Are Speaking, calling the church to end harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women and girls. They also collected resources for churches interested in taking action.

https://www.rca.org/equipping-congregations/womens-transformation-leadership/we-are-speaking/

We Will Speak Out Against Sexualized Violence

MCC aims to work with churches and church institutions to educate and equip people to prevent and respond to sexualized violence. Free resources are available in English and Spanish.

https://mcc.org/stories/we-will-speak-out-against-sexualized-violence

Central Valley Justice Coalition

The Central Valley Justice Coalition has worked in Fresno and the surrounding areas for ten years, partnering with the church and the community to prevent human trafficking. Learn more through their website and the classes they offer both independently and through Fresno Pacific University.

https://justiceco.org/