Litany of Lament and Confession
(Part of the March 26, 2017 Lenten worship service at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church)

Preamble

In the winter of 2014, we, at Stirling engaged in a worship and faith formation series on sexuality. At the conclusion of that series, which dealt with many aspects of sexuality, we were asked to respond to the question, “what next?” The response was a strong call to broaden our understanding of what it means to be an inclusive church where all persons, specifically those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, queer or questioning would feel welcome and affirmed. And so, from June 2015-June 2016 we engaged in a significant process of listening and learning together in order to hear the lived stories of people who identify as LGBTQ and to explore scripture.

In the midst of that process we experienced the guidance of God’s Spirit and we’re grateful that our year of listening and learning concluded with an affirming statement that named our reality as a congregation of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, our belief that all persons are created in the image of God, and our intention to welcome all to full participation in the life and ministry of our church through membership, baptism, marriage, congregational leadership, and pastoral ministry. We celebrate the good work that was done while also acknowledging that work towards full affirmation, healing, and reconciliation is ongoing.

As a church that holds Christ’s call to reconciliation, peace, and justice at its core, we know that simply making a statement does not undo the harm nor does it complete our work on the road toward being the reconciled body of Christ that does justice, loves kindness, and walks humbly with our God. And so today we are invited to take another step as we seek the kingdom vision of a whole and healed community. This step is one of lament, confession, and repentance. Emotionally, confession can be an uncomfortable space as we name wrongs that have been done, but we do so as people whose hope is in God who transforms and brings new life.

The decision to enter into this space of lament and confession today grows out of prompting from folks in the LGBTQ community, and from the leadership of our Congregational Ministries Team.

As we prepare for this time together let us enter into a space of silent prayer. During this time, read over the litany of confession found in your bulletin on your own, and as you do so, invite God to bring to mind those who have been, and continue to be, wounded by the church because they identify as LGBTQ, their family members and their friends.

(Congregation is invited to silently read the litany of lament and confession included as an insert in the bulletin.)
After the prayer, some members of the congregation – past and present representatives on the Congregational Ministries Team – will speak the words of the litany on our behalf, while all are invited to respond with the sung Kyrie in Hymnal a Worship Book 152.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we come to you as a broken and contrite people, a people who know that we are human and have the capacity to lose our way. We also come to you with the knowledge that in our humanity, we are deeply loved and held, guided and corrected as we journey as your people. As we bring to you our laments and confession, ground us in your love, which we know to be a just love. A just love that holds all of God’s beloved people with compassion and also calls us to account for the purposes of transformed and reconciled community. Lord, in your great and abundant mercy, hear our prayer.

**Kyrie Eleison**

**We lament the past**

Throughout the history of the global Christian church, and in our particular denomination of the Mennonite Church, many vital members of the body of Christ have been cut off, afflicted, and rejected because we have not recognized their sexual orientation or gender identity as a gift from God and have condemned it as sin.

We, as members of the Mennonite Church have passed judgement and taken it upon ourselves to decide who is worthy of God’s love and our love. We lament that in our efforts to be a faithful people of God, we have caused irreversible harm to those who have been rejected, and to their family and friends. We lament that we have not lived God’s just love.

**Congregational response: Kyrie Eleison**

**We confess**

With humble hearts we confess to God and to the LGBTQ community that we have caused enormous pain. As the church we have denied the image of God in those who have not fit our understanding of what it means to be created male and female. We have created rigid boundaries around a community that is called to be a place of hospitality, love and belonging.

We confess that we have not been a safe space for people who have so often been pushed to the margins of society. Through our silence or lack of action, we have not spoken for those being silenced nor acted on behalf of those facing discrimination. As individuals and as a congregation, we confess that we have been both active and complicit participants in the harm done to people who identify as LGBTQ.

**Congregational response: Kyrie Eleison**
We repent

We are deeply sorry. We are sorry for the pain we have inflicted, knowingly and unknowingly. We are sorry that exclusion and shame have been carried out in the name of Christ.

We are sorry that even though we sought to live in the way of Jesus we were afraid and did not see or simply turned away from the injustices being perpetrated.

And we acknowledge that our apology is only one step in the healing process and does not reverse the decades of rejection and harm imposed on our LGBTQ members, their family and friends.

Congregational response: Kyrie Eleison

We lament the present

We lament today that the pain and suffering experienced by LGBTQ people in the Mennonite church is ongoing. Our denomination continues to debate the inclusion of God’s beloved LGBTQ children in our midst as if they are an issue to be discussed or not already part of the Church of which we speak.

We lament that the body of Christ is not whole as many beautiful and vibrant people with a desire to love and serve God are still being actively excluded, held back from full participation, or left in a vague and challenging space of waiting.

We lament that in so many places the church continues to be an unsafe place for LGBTQ people to share of their lives – the beauty, life, and love, as well as the challenges and sorrows they face. And we lament that for so many LGBTQ people, condemnation and separation from the church community results in questioning whether or not they are beloved children of God.

Congregational response: Kyrie Eleison

Prayer: God we long for your just love to transform us and the church. We pray for your healing and new creation to take root in places of pain and brokenness. Lord, heal the wounds of shame and condemnation in the LGBTQ community – especially those caused by us, your church. Place within all those who have experienced hurt and betrayal the deep knowledge of your love and acceptance. May your Spirit open our eyes each day to the truths that you have for us, truths that embody your compassionate love and justice for all people so that we may more truly follow in your way. May your healing love continue to bring about transformation in this community. Amen.