



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

December 9, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ:

World Church leaders are committed to sharing accurate information and to upholding vital processes of consent-building and decision-making.

Some questions have arisen recently about the status of national conferences and policies related to Queer/LGBTQIA2S+ members and friends. As background, a couple of weeks ago, the president of Harmony (an independent not-for-profit Queer/LGBTQIA2S+ advocacy group of church members and friends), launched an online petition about national conferences and national policies. The petition and related communications contained inaccurate and misleading statements. This communication provides accurate information in case questions or concerns are raised in your areas of responsibility. We encourage you to share this information with others you think may benefit from it.

There have been eight (8) national or multi-national conferences resulting in five (5) national policies. National conferences have been held in Australia, Canada, the United States, Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany. The British Isles and Western Europe Mission Centres held multinational conferences that applied to nations within their mission centre geographic boundaries, including nations where there is no established church presence.

The Western Europe Mission Centre conference was held in November 2019. A policy was recommended that incorporated the three interim policies for the Netherlands, Norway, and Germany with additional provisions for other nations within the mission centre whether they have a church presence or not.

The Western Europe Mission Centre is especially complex because of the vast differences between national laws, including those that do not allow same-sex marriages or same-sex civil partnerships. The Western Europe Mission Centre

policy contains provisions for various legal contexts in case they are ever needed. As noted, many of the European nations listed in the petition have no church presence, much less a reason to convene a national conference.

In summary, there have been eight (8) national and mission centre (multi-national) conferences resulting in five (5) interim policies.

Following national conferences, recommended interim national policies are developed by the supervising apostle or team of apostles in cooperation with church leaders in the relevant nation(s). These policies are considered first by the entire Council of Twelve, which may involve additional refinement, after which they are forwarded to the Presidency for review and approval for implementation. This process has included multiple reviews by the Presidency as policies are being refined. Interim policies, once approved for implementation, are not “draft” policies. They are policies in full effect in the nations to which they pertain while allowing opportunity for updates in response to learnings or changing laws without having to return to national or mission centre conferences if the refinements are within the scope and intent of conference recommendations. Currently, several nations are projecting updates based on growing experience and feedback.

All policies relevant to Queer/LGBTQIA2S+ marriage and ordination matters have been distributed throughout the applicable fields, nations, and mission centers with the understanding that church leaders in those areas will make them available in their jurisdictions. The policies do not appear on the World Church website for two reasons:

1. The World Church website is for the worldwide church and is not intended to serve the needs of any single nation or subgroup of nations. More nation specific communications, including national policies, must be handled by the church in that nation through the communications and distribution means available.
2. Council of Twelve members serving in fields that are experiencing negative reactions and destabilization arising from national conferences in other nations have requested that individual national policies not be featured on the World Church website. We must be sensitive to concerns raised by church leaders who serve in nations where the impact of national conferences elsewhere causes potential harm to church members and the legal standing of the church.

We recognize the concern that national policies are difficult to access for some. National and mission center policies should, at a minimum, be available from

mission center presidents and field apostles. Many pastors may not have them or not recall that they do if they have not had occasion to use them. Interested parties always can request copies of national or mission center policies from the World Church Secretary. We have been working on an internet-based solution for nation specific information to be distributed for months while attempting to respect the legitimate concerns of field apostles in areas struggling with the provisions of national policies. We do not want to privilege Western nations that have had national conferences over those that have not.

As a theocratic democracy, the church has channels of communication and processes of representative conferencing that provide opportunities for people to pursue ideas, seek information, resolve concerns, and achieve changes. These processes include provisions for voices from various perspectives to be heard and for participants to work together to find ways forward that garner higher levels of support than would be achieved otherwise. World Church officers are assigned to various advocacy groups to serve as liaisons for coordination and communication.

By design, social media petitions seek to bypass these processes and generate swift, not necessarily fully informed, reactions. They do not allow for broader discussion, timely adjustment of misinformation, or any type of consent-building with stakeholders.

Concerns about the status of interim national policies were raised by some prior to the 2019 World Conference. Because of issues being considered about marriage, marriage-like relationships, committed partnerships, and priesthood morality in the lead-up to World Conference, we determined it was wise to wait and see what would emerge from World Conference that could impact interim national and multinational policies.

While there were no definitive outcomes at the 2019 World Conference regarding marriage and marriage-like relationships, discussions have continued to evolve with the Standing High Council, the Council of Twelve, and the World Church Leadership Council. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many aspects of church life, including the ability of multi-nations church councils to have sufficient time to confer on important, complex issues.

The national conference process is continuing to unfold. There are discussions underway that may lead to additional conferences. By nature of their responsibilities, apostles, teams of apostles, and the Council of Twelve must be included in any discussions about concerns and desired outcomes.

We invite individuals and groups, including Harmony, to send perspectives or recommendations for national policy refinements, including removing the term “interim,” to the supervising field apostle or team of apostles for the nations whose policies they wish to address with copies provided to Scott Murphy, director of Field Ministries.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your leadership and ministry! We hope your Advent season is filled with joy, hope, love, and peace as we continue our journey with Jesus, the peaceful One.

The First Presidency