



WDC FALL REFERENCE COUNCIL SUMMARY

November 15, 2014

Historical Background: Jim Schrag

- MC USA Membership Guidelines
- 2001 MC/GC merger, the 2007 review of structure
- Current Rainbow Mennonite Resolution
 - The resolution would “disown” the 2001 decision but would reaffirm the WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission decision several years ago. This decision referenced a review of pastoral credentials when a pastor performed a same sex union, and the review did not result in the censure of credentials.

Richard Gehring: Rainbow Mennonite Church Resolution

- Encouragement to read the entire document, not just the resolution itself
 - The resolution “upholds the right of the individual congregation to discern how homosexuality will be subject to Biblical interpretation, and
 - Pastors, with the affirmation of their congregations, consistent with Mennonite polity and without fear of censure, may officiate or refuse to officiate ceremonies that consecrate before God monogamous, life-long unions, regardless of the sexual orientation of those being united.”
- Described WDC resolutions process

Terry Shue, MC USA Director of Leadership Development

- Pay attention and discern where God is leading us.
- Acknowledged anxiety across MC USA
- Reviewed some recent findings from a survey credentialed pastors in MC USA.
- Thanked the leadership of WDC for communication with MC USA and working hard at process.

Patty Shelly, MC USA Moderator-elect

- Reviewed polity work of Executive Board
- The Executive Board is currently discussing whether the “Shared Understanding of Church Leadership,” which is an update to an earlier MC USA pastoral polity manual, requires delegate action to be approved.
- The section on same sex unions currently in the Membership Guidelines was moved to the updated polity manual, in response to a request by MC USA Conference Ministers.
- Thanks to WDC for waiting to act on the Rainbow Mennonite resolution.

Jim Schrag: overview of the WDC survey results

- Views of authority in the church
 - A large majority affirmed the authority of scripture over confessions of faith
 - About half agree that the Confession of Faith was designed as a “standard” for judging faithfulness. About a third disagreed, saying that the confession was not intended for this purpose.
 - A large majority agree that scripture is the “authoritative voice and standard” for discerning truth from error. But many asked about the present work of the Holy Spirit which may bring new understanding of scripture, or even new revelation about truth.
 - When asked about the guidance of scripture or confessions on matters of sexuality, only a third said that scripture or church statements were adequate to guide.

Overview of the WDC survey results

- Responses grouped under the theme of practice.
 - “church discipline rightly understood and practiced,” (from the Confession of Faith) received 2/3 support.
 - There is strong support for conferences having discretion to determine their own practice of values held in common with others in the denomination.
 - The disciplining of pastors who perform same-sex covenant ceremonies is opposed by over half of respondents while it is supported by a strong third. We are highly polarized around this issue.
 - When it comes to the “practice” part of “faith and practice,” there was majority support for the notion that issues relating to what congregations can do or should refrain from doing, is best left to either the congregation or the conference, not the denomination, depending on the issue at hand.

Overview of the WDC survey results

- Views of official church documents
 - Half (50%) support the Confession of Faith statement that “God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.” 40% oppose the statement.
 - Turning to the MC USA Membership Guidelines, over half believe the guidelines still provide good resources.
 - Almost 2/3 believes that WDC congregations should be free to determine their own belief and practice.
 - In seeming contradiction, half affirm that we should be “subject to” official statements of the denomination.
 - Consultation of congregations with WDC is supported by a large majority.

Overview of the WDC survey results

- Responses about unity and relationships
 - Over 80% agree that Western District Conference benefits from relationships with other conferences.
 - Two thirds say that unity does not depend upon uniformity.
 - Almost 2/3 believe that WDC unity can be preserved if congregations are allowed to choose different practices on same-sex relationships.

Overview of the WDC survey results

- Demographic findings
 - The older you are the more you agree with both the traditional definition of marriage and with the ban on same-sex covenants. The younger you are, the more you disagree with both statements.
 - The more rural you are, the more you agree with the traditional views, the more urban you are, the more you disagree with the traditional views.
 - Men are slightly more traditional in their views than women.

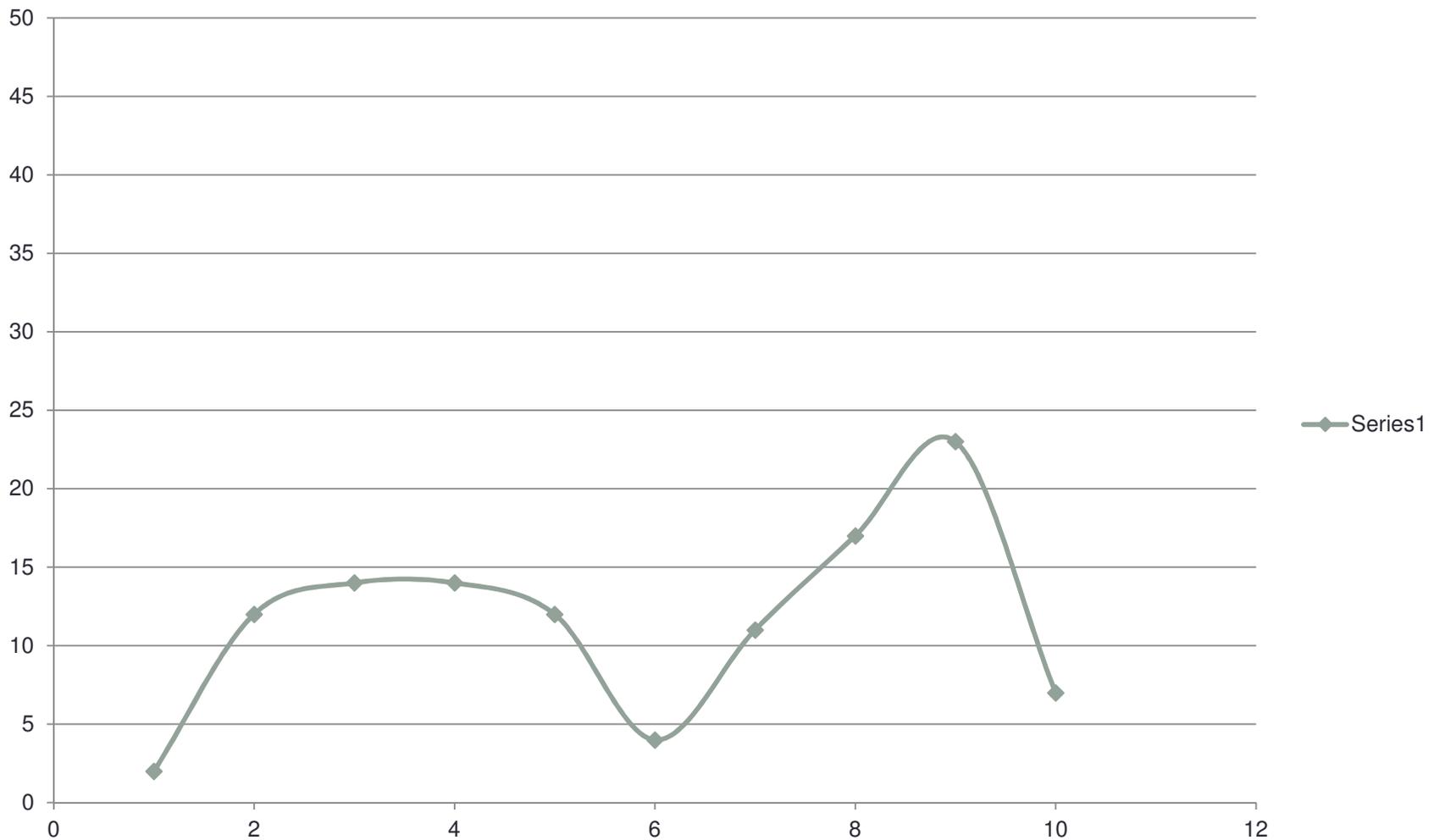
Gilberto Flores, Hispanic pastors' statement

- We disagree with the resolution, but we want to stay in WDC.
- We don't want to continue talking about this.
- We will not be judgmental or critical of churches who move to a more welcoming stance. At the same time, we ask others to respect our decisions.

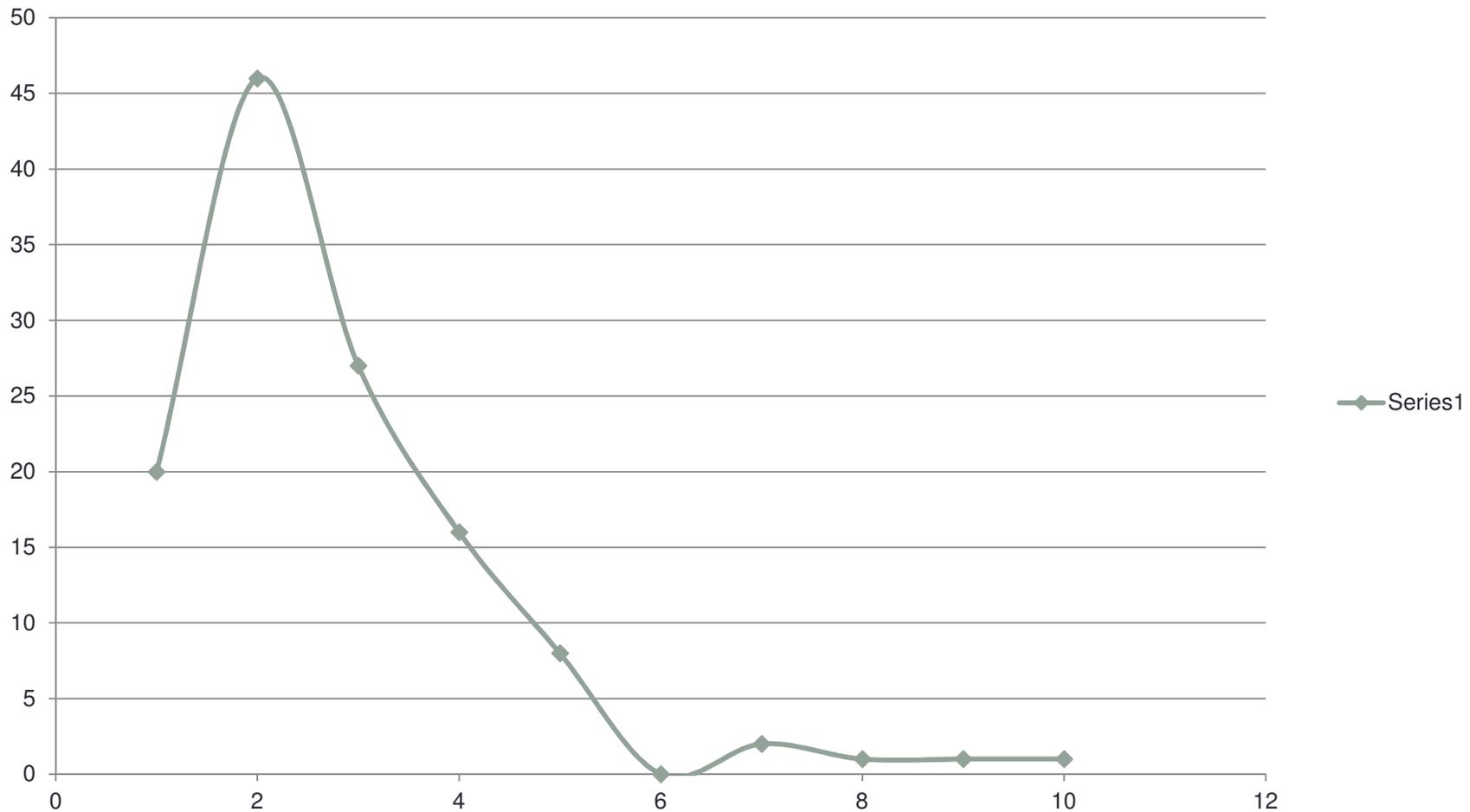
Three Statements of Congregationalism

- Each WDC congregation has the unrestricted privilege of local discernment regardless of previous understandings or decisions by the congregation or conference.
- The WDC delegate body may ask a congregation to practice consultation (to be defined by the leadership of WDC) when a congregation is making a decision that affects others.
- The WDC delegate body may name certain issues about which they do not recognize the privilege of congregations to make decisions on their own.

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