

Recommendation to release Turpin (Oklahoma) Mennonite Church from membership in Western District Conference

From the WDC Constitution: *"A congregation is released from Western District Conference when a two-thirds majority of all delegates vote favoring such action after a written notice of the proposed action has been printed in official conference publications and/or mailed to all member congregations not less than sixty days prior to voting sessions."*

Congregational history:

Turpin Mennonite Church, originally named Friedensfeld Mennonite Church, was formed by immigrant Mennonite families who began homesteading in Beaver County, OK, in 1903, along with others who arrived in the following years from Kansas communities such as Buhler, Inman and McPherson. Due to their common German Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage, they gathered for Sunday school and then added the reading of a sermon on alternate Sundays. In 1907, they organized as a congregation with assistance from Western District Conference traveling minister H.R. Voth, and were received into the Western District Conference. The first pastor, Jacob Dirks, was installed in 1908. The first church building was consecrated in 1909, and a second church building was purchased and moved to the present site in 1940. The current church building was designed and built by members in 1966. That same year the name of the congregation was changed to Turpin Mennonite Church. Over the years, the congregation has continued to strengthen their faith in corporate worship and fellowship, while reaching out to serve the spiritual and material needs of their local community and support other mission projects.

Background on recent process:

Turpin Mennonite Church and WDC have had conversation over recent years regarding affiliation with WDC and Mennonite Church USA.

2016: On January 14, the WDC Conference Minister met with members of Turpin Mennonite Church for discussion, in which they indicated plans to write a letter expressing their opposition to the Rainbow Resolution passed by WDC delegates in 2015. On March 20, the Conference Minister visited Turpin Mennonite Church for worship and brought greetings and updates from WDC. Pastor Terry Rediger shared with the Conference Minister the letter that the congregation had prepared to send. On March 30 Turpin Mennonite Church sent a letter to the WDC Executive Board and Conference Minister (copied to WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission, MC USA Executive Director and Board, and WDC congregations) stating: *This letter is being sent to you on behalf of the majority of members of Turpin Mennonite Church. Its purpose is to express the deep disappointment and dissatisfaction over the passing of the Rainbow Resolution at Western District Conference annual meeting on October 30-31, 2015. Our Deacons have hosted two congregational meetings, one in December 2015 and one with the conference minister in January 2016 to discuss concerns with this resolution. A majority of our members believe that same sex relationships and marriages are sin and not in line with God's will according to the Bible. Some of the concerns expressed at these congregational meetings include: WDC being at variance with MCUSA and the Mennonite Confession of Faith; Resolution passage is creating stressful relationships in our congregation; Feeling guilt by association with a conference that allows pastors to officiate same sex marriages. This letter is our first response to WDC on the passage of the Rainbow Resolution. We don't know what the future holds for our congregation and WDC, but we pray for God's wisdom and patience."*

On April 18 the WDC Moderator and Conference Minister sent a letter to Turpin Mennonite Church, acknowledging receipt of their letter of March 30, and noting that the Executive Board would review the letter at its next meeting on May 7. On June 22 the WDC Moderator sent a letter of response to Turpin Mennonite Church on behalf of the Executive Board, expressing gratitude for the clarity with which Turpin Mennonite Church had expressed their concern. The letter also noted that the Rainbow Resolution seeks to encompass the diversity of viewpoints in WDC and expects that congregations will respond differently to the questions of human sexuality, and that the Executive Board hopes that we will be able to continue in loving fellowship with one another no matter what decision individual congregations make.

In September, Turpin Mennonite Church conducted a congregational survey regarding their relationship with WDC. Based on the results of the survey, the Deacons and Church Council decided to have a congregational vote on October 2 on a proposal to leave WDC. After the vote, Pastor Rediger informed the Conference Minister by email that the vote did not pass, and the Conference Minister and Moderator replied with emails expressing thanks for this communication, and openness to walk with the congregation as it discerns next steps.

2017: In August the Turpin Mennonite Church moderator contacted the WDC Ministerial Leadership Commission requesting financial assistance to support a visioning process with a consultant, as encouraged by pastor Rediger. The Ministerial Leadership Commission approved a grant to assist with the visioning process. In September Pastor Rediger informed the WDC Conference Minister that Turpin Mennonite Church leadership had decided not to proceed with a visioning process.

2018: On January 28 the Conference Minister visited Turpin Mennonite Church for worship and to bring greetings from WDC. Later that year, Turpin Mennonite Church leaders and the Conference Minister began consulting together regarding pastoral transition, following pastor Rediger's decision to retire in 2019 after serving nine years at Turpin.

2019: The WDC Conference Minister sent a message of thanks and blessing to be shared at Pastor Rediger's farewell Sunday on June 2. Turpin Mennonite Church then appointed local leaders Mike and Karen Isaacs, ordained in the Church of God (Anderson), to serve as Interim Pastors. A pastoral search process began with assistance by the WDC Conference Minister.

2020: In August, Turpin Mennonite Church was featured in an article in the WDC *Garden* newsletter as part of a series of articles about congregations in WDC.

2022: On February 16 the Turpin Mennonite Church Council wrote to WDC stating, *"This letter comes to inform you that the Turpin Mennonite Church congregation met on January 30, 2022, and voted to withdraw from our affiliation with Mennonite Church USA and Western District Conference and become independent as Turpin Mennonite Church. This comes after several years of discussion and prayer as we have watched the evolving changes in MC USA. We believe the conference has left the Biblical foundations outlined in our constitution, so you have left us already."*

At its next meeting, on March 24, the WDC Executive Board reviewed the letter from Turpin Mennonite Church. The WDC Moderator sent a response expressing appreciation for the relationship with Turpin Mennonite Church, sadness at the congregation's decision to withdraw from WDC, and welcoming the congregation and its members to participate in the future in WDC projects and activities. The letter noted that, in response to Turpin Mennonite Church's

decision, the Executive Board would bring a recommendation at the 2022 WDC Annual Delegate Assembly to release Turpin Mennonite Church from membership in WDC.

On May 20 WDC sent an official notice to WDC congregations announcing that this recommendation would be brought for delegate action at the Annual Delegate Assembly on July 30, 2022.

May God bless and guide Turpin Mennonite Church and Western District Conference as each seeks a faithful way forward.