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Saturday, December 11, 2021

To our members and supporters -

The purpose of this open letter is to respond publicly and transparently to a statement distributed by the Community of Christ First Presidency to the World Church Leadership Council (WCLC) on Thursday, December 9, concerning Harmony's recent petition. This statement attempts to correct portions of the petition by framing them as misleading and blatantly false. As a membership organization, we value clarity and accountability above all else as we advocate for Queer/LGBTQIA2S+ (Queer) voices in Community of Christ. In this letter, we wish to provide important context missing from the First Presidency's response; however, more than anything else we seek to commit our unwavering support to the cause that is safeguarding Queer members and friends of Community of Christ.

The History / Why It Matters

In 2010, [Doctrine and Covenants 164:7a-d](#) authorized national and multinational conferences in order to address the ordination of Queer persons as well as church-sanctioned marriages for Queer persons where legal. Since then, several nations and fields have approved recommended policy changes and World Church leaders have drafted interim policies on their behalf. Harmony Board Members have monitored this process and worked tirelessly to address concerns related to the lack of transparency associated with handling these inspired documents. Unfortunately, these efforts did not result in any progress on the matter.

Harmony's petition is the culmination of more than five years of less-than-productive communications with various church leaders, including a member of the First Presidency, the Director of Human Resources, the World Church Secretary, and several apostles and mission center presidents. It is by no means our first effort to reach out, and it is supported by dozens of emails promising progress which has not materialized.

As a Queer advocacy non-profit organization serving Queer and Queer-adjacent individuals in Community of Christ, we are often the first point of contact for disaffected Queer Christians. Frequently, they come to us seeking advice for how to remain safe while navigating our denomination's policies concerning their orientation and/or identity. We have done our best to support these individuals with the most up-to-date information available to us. When questions arose, we would seek answers only to find none.

We were left without accurate information, a clear understanding of the policies, or any transparency concerning how to navigate the new structure of the church created by the policies themselves.

Community of Christ's organizational structure is comprised of four primary levels:

- *Congregation*
- *Mission Center*
- *Apostolic Field*
- *World Church*

How does one navigate a level of the church that does not exist within the church's administrative and missional structure aside from the one time it was convened as a national conference?

Harmony has spent the last five years seeking answers to questions like this one without success. As the First Presidency authorized such conferences, the onus is on the First Presidency and other World Church officials to establish and make available appropriate procedures and guidelines when questions like this arise.

During this five year period, we sought clarification on the following:

- *The policies' authors and who was at the table when they were drafted;*
- *Why immigration requirements were included in the policies;*
- *Status reports concerning the two-year commitment to review each policy;*
- *How to navigate the national and multinational policies as a global church;*

- *The purpose of the policies' interim status;*
- *The process by which to review, revise, and amend a national or multinational policy;*
- *Parliamentary concerns;*
- *Scriptural and/or theological implications for the fragmented experience of Queer persons around the world;*
- *How to obtain the promised updated copies; and*
- *How we could best support the process.*

Harmony addressed these concerns and questions to appropriate parties as defined by the First Presidency. During this time, the First Presidency expressed to various church leaders that the matter of Queer related policy would be re-prioritized and Harmony would be included in the review and revision process. Unfortunately, these intentions have never resulted in any meetings, exchange of documents, or any other willingness to engage on the matter of Queer policy.

In the United States, as far as Harmony has been able to ascertain, the current interim policy remains in its original form first drafted in 2014. This predates the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage which occurred in 2015. We are now five (5) years behind schedule with reviewing, revising, and re-distributing.

The Petition

Our petition was released at the time of Harmony President Parker Johnson's ordination service on Tuesday, November 23, 2021. The intent of the petition was to raise awareness and bring this topic to the attention of the First Presidency after five years of failed attempts to do so through proper channels.

Without access to accountable parties willing to discuss the policies, members of Harmony's Board of Directors gathered the interim policies through their networks and based the information in the petition on the language found within the policies and from church members in those areas willing to share what they knew.

On Wednesday, December 1, Harmony obtained some clarification on the matter of Queer policies in Community of Christ, and our petition was immediately updated concerning two areas:

Clarification 1

The petition originally indicated that 42 nations had held national conferences. In actuality, eight (8) national and/or multinational conferences resulted in recommended policy changes in 42 nations. This was immediately updated on the petition. This in no way changes the intent of the petition.

Clarification 2

The Western Europe Mission Center Conference established a multinational policy over an area including countries where no official church presence is in place. Our reading of this policy shows no distinction between countries where the church officially operates and those where it does not. The First Presidency has communicated to us that it is deeply concerned that this information could be viewed as if 42 of the 60 nations Community of Christ operates in are affirming. This is not the case, and a parenthetical was added to the petition in order to include this information. The First Presidency has indicated that there have been eight (8) national and multinational conferences resulting in five (5) interim policies. In this case, the multinational policy has a large reach impacting 38 nations. Still, the total remains at 42 which again, in no way changes the intent of the petition.

Every effort has been made to provide accurate details to our petition. Accessing such information has been difficult to say the least. Regardless, we regret any part we may have played in distributing inaccurate information. We endeavored to raise awareness of the issue with the information available to us. Needless to say, the petition now reflects the new information provided to Harmony in recent days.

To date, 563 signatures have been received. If you would like to remove your name from the petition for any reason, [you may do so by following these steps](#).

The First Presidency has communicated to the WCLC that the term “interim” was never intended to mean draft and asserts that these policies are final. However, email exchanges over the last five years at the World Church level (including members of the Council of Twelve, the World Church Secretary, Mission Center Presidents, and the First Presidency) include frequent acknowledgements of the need to formalize these policies and the delays in doing so. This further affirms the need for clarity on the matter.

Our Purpose

Our vision cannot be realized without the success of the church. As such, we wish to restate Harmony's intention to support the process and assist in any way possible. This support includes - but is not limited to - providing research, best practices, updated language, funding, subject matter experts, and education.

On Thursday, in Harmony's official letter to the First Presidency, we took the opportunity to reiterate our request to schedule a meeting with the First Presidency in order to open the lines of communication and discuss a path forward. We are hopeful this meeting can take place no later than the end of Q1 2022.

Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact Harmony's Board of Directors at info@harmony.lgbt.

Respectfully,

Your Harmony Board of Directors