

On public writing and polarization

By [Joanna Harader](#)

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I recently helped write [a letter to leaders](#) of my denomination, Mennonite Church USA. This letter asks that the denomination make space for congregations and pastors who welcome and bless LGBTQ people. Over 150 credentialed (and formerly credentialed) Mennonite pastors have signed it. I shouldn't be surprised that there have been letters in response to our letter. And now there is a sense among some that all of this letter-writing is polarizing.

And I'm a little confused because, in this context, "polarizing" seems to mean "to state your opinion in a public forum." But I always thought it meant "to force people in opposite directions."

If our letter said, "Every church in the denomination must hire a gay pastor and open their sanctuary for gay weddings," that would be polarizing.

If our letter said, "Our interpretation of scripture is the only valid interpretation and anyone who disagrees with this interpretation should be disciplined by the conference leadership," that would be polarizing.

Even if our letter said, "You have to change the denominational guidelines or we will leave," that would be polarizing.

What it says is that some of us believe that to faithfully follow Jesus our ministry must include a welcome and affirmation of LGBTQ Christians. We know you don't all agree with us, but please let us stay and be church with you.

If this letter is indeed polarizing, it is only because there are people within the denomination who are at the opposite pole—the pole that says, "We will not be church with people who understand the Bible's teachings on sexuality in a way that differs from our understanding."

And apparently there are people at that pole. So it is difficult to see a way forward. Honestly, I do not know how (or if) all of us in MCUSA can hold together as a

denomination.

But I will go out on a limb and say this: The way forward is *not* to dismiss every publicly stated opinion as “polarizing.” The way forward is *not* to simply repeat the word [“unity”](#) while the denomination crumbles, like a five-year-old with her fingers in her ears and her eyes closed singing la la la la la.

We have to talk with each other honestly and listen openly. Yes, we should be kind. Always. But being kind doesn’t mean pretending to agree when we don’t, and it doesn’t mean simply whispering about our disagreements within our own little circles.

And I’ll step just a bit further out onto that limb and say that the way forward is *not* to try to make everyone happy. Being church isn’t about being happy; it’s not even about being right; it’s about being faithful. I do believe that most of us are trying to be faithful. So may the Holy Spirit guide our feet, and our mouths, and our letter-writing.

*Originally posted at [Spacious Faith](#)*