

Stutsmanville Chapel Withdrawal

Stutsmanville Chapel in Harbor Springs, MI, began as a plant in 1957 from the Petoskey Mennonite congregation under the direction of the Indiana Michigan Mennonite Mission Board. The mission board purchased an abandoned church building. The congregation began with a summer Bible school, then Sunday School, and finally worship services. From the beginning Stutsmanville Chapel sought to overcome barriers to connections with people in their community. Under the able leadership of Ed Warner, ordained as pastor in 1971, they became a community church in the best sense of the word.

However, overcoming barriers also meant Stutsmanville held lightly to some of the Mennonite distinctives. The congregation became less active in the conference and moved away from commitment to the peace position. Such differences led to a recommendation from Executive Committee for Stutsmanville to withdraw. That recommendation was not acted upon, even though participation and financial support stopped.

They hosted a regional meeting in 2012. Ed Warner retired soon after. Conference helped with processing some possible internal candidates. When that did not work out as anticipated, the congregation called a new pastor, Daniel Vandock, without any conference involvement.

In a letter dated July 22, 2014, the conference received this communication from the pastor and elders:

Stutsmanville chapel will be removed from IN-MI Conference on August 1st of 2014. The IN-MI Conference will remove Stutsmanville Chapel from its membership, website, and any other promotional information presented on Conference material.

We will be removed because of leaderships unwillingness to take quick action on the sexual orientation issue which has been present for a number of years. We will be in prayer for the IN-MI Conference to take a biblical stance on the issue.

At its August 25, 2014 meeting, the Michigan Credentialing Subcommittee acknowledged their withdrawal.. We took this action with regret, and we also want to bless the congregation as they seek to reach out to their community.

Submitted by Dan Miller, conference pastor, and Doug Kaufman, conference pastor for leadership transitions