

# **Open Letter from USMB National Board of Faith and Life (BFL)**

## **Proposed Revision of Confession of Faith, Article 13**

**June, 2013**

### **Background to this letter:**

For several years, the USMB National BFL has heard consistent calls to lead a conversation about our commitment to and practices related to Article 13 of our Confession of Faith (currently called “Love and Nonresistance”). The centerpiece of that conversation was a Study Conference in Phoenix, January 24-26, 2013. The national BFL is now processing the results of that conference.

In March, 2013 an open letter was broadly distributed, outlining what had lead up to the Study Conference and how BFL was processing the outcomes of it (that letter can be accessed here: <http://www.usmb.org/open-letter>).

Since then the following has transpired. Representatives of the US National BFL have met with District BFLs and with groups of professors in our USMB Schools. A preliminary draft of a revised Article 13 was tested. We collected feedback on its content, its wording, and our plans for revising and processing that draft. The National BFL has now assessed that feedback, has created a new draft, and is ready for one more opportunity for review and comment (see latest draft below).

This is a draft only: That means we invite pastors, those who participated in the Study Conference, those who participated in the conversations subsequent to it, and any other interested MB’s to examine this draft and provide feedback on it. This feedback will be considered by the BFL. The goal is to keep improving the draft, until we are ready to recommend ratification at the National Convention, 2014.

### **The goals of this draft of a revised Article 13**

In multiple conversations, we heard the following concerns expressed:

- Our confessional article should not make reference to “nonresistance,” since this word does not adequately express what we mean (or what the Bible advocates).
- It should be careful not to make statements about “violence” and “nonviolence” that raise larger issues this article does not intend to address (e.g. whether God’s judgment is a form of “violence” or not, etc.)
- It should broaden the range of issues that a call to be peacemakers explicitly addresses (e.g. not merely questions of war, but rather holistic peacemaking in families, churches, neighborhoods, etc.)
- It should acknowledge diversity within our denomination. Some of us are convinced that Jesus’ call to peacemaking implies total non-violence and in particular non-participation in the military. Some of us are not convinced of this. Our goal is to follow Jesus, to be Biblical, to be peacemakers, but not to claim consensus on exactly what this means on issues where we in fact hold diverse convictions.
- It should call us and our churches to make a priority of peacemaking.
- It should say what we can agree on, and encourage continued dialog on the issues on which we may disagree.

### **Proposed Article 13, Draft**

With all that said, below is what we are proposing our new Article 13 would say. If you wish you can compare it to the current version, accessed here:  
<http://www.usmb.org/confession-of-faith---detailed-version#Article 13>

## **Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation**

### **God's Community of Peace**

We believe that God in Christ reconciles people to Himself and to one another, making peace through the cross. The church is the fellowship of redeemed people living by love. The bond between followers of Jesus transcends all racial, social, and national barriers.

### **Christian Peacemaking**

We pursue peace and reconciliation in all relationships by following Christ's example and his command to love God, neighbors and even enemies. We commit to being peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in families, churches, communities, in our nation, and throughout the world. As peacemakers, it is our duty to alleviate suffering, reduce strife and promote justice, so that in an unjust and violent world, others may see in us a demonstration of Christ's love. Because Jesus is Lord, his example and teaching take priority over nationalism and the demands of human authorities.

Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:17-28, 38-48; Romans 12:9-21; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:15-20; Ephesians 2:14-18; 1 Peter 2:19-23

### **Footnote:**

Historically, many Mennonite Brethren, as in other Peace Churches, have refused military participation, and chosen alternative service.

## **What we would like from you!**

- Please share this with others as seems appropriate.
- Please provide us with feedback: Do you affirm the goals of the revision? Does this version help reach those goals?
- Please send your comments prior to August 15, 2013. That will allow us to consider your comments at the next BFL meeting, at which time we will finalize the recommended statement for consideration by the delegates of the national convention in 2014.
- Please send feedback to: Larry Nikkel (Board Chair) at [larrynikkel@tabor.edu](mailto:larrynikkel@tabor.edu), or Ed Boschman (Executive Director) at [ebed@usmb.org](mailto:ebed@usmb.org).

USMB Board of Faith and Life.