

## Mennonites and Allegiance

Dear brothers and sisters of CPMC,

In March, 2010, for the first time in its more than 100-year history, Goshen College played the national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner" before a sports event. News of the change in policy disappointed and perhaps confused some of us in CPMC congregations. Others among us were glad for the change, did not notice, or wondered what all the fuss was.

In explaining its decision on playing the national anthem, Goshen College noted that it is "owned" by Mennonite Church USA, but that the denomination has no official policy on playing the anthem.

While we are not calling for a conference or denominational policy on playing the national anthem, we acknowledge that Goshen's decision raises some questions about our role. The Goshen College board of directors has announced that a full review of the anthem decision is scheduled for June 2011. As a conference of Mennonite churches, what can we offer Goshen as guidance in its review process?

On the topic of the church's relation to government and society, the Mennonite *Confession of Faith* affirms that the church is "called to give full allegiance to Christ its head"; and that the "only Christian nation is the church of Jesus Christ, made up of people from every tribe and nation." The Confession also notes that earthly nations "tend to demand total allegiance."

It continues: "As Christians we are to respect those in authority and to pray for all people, including those in government, that they also may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We may participate in government or other institutions of society only in ways that do not violate the love and holiness taught by Christ and do not compromise our loyalty to Christ." (Article 23)

Implications of those beliefs for some Mennonites have been choosing to abstain from such rituals as saying the Pledge of Allegiance, flying the flag, or singing "The Star-Spangled Banner," America's national anthem. However, Mennonites have different ideas about what constitutes a compromise to our loyalty to Christ. Mennonite colleges reflect these differences. Some play the national anthem before sporting events and some do not.

At conference, we will engage in table group discussion to help us better understand each other and to gain a sense of how delegates to CMPC relate to these issues.

What are our individual experiences and practices with regard to expressions of national allegiance, such as singing or playing the national anthem?

How are our practices informed by the Confession of faith and the scriptures?

Do we understand the omission of the national anthem at Mennonite institutions as an expression of full allegiance to God?

Do we see participation in rituals such as saying the Pledge of Allegiance, playing the national anthem or flying the flag as compromising our loyalty to Christ?

What hopes and expectations do we have regarding our Mennonite high schools (IMS and Freeman Academy) when they are pressured to play the national anthem before sports events?

What guidance might we offer to Mennonite colleges who might consider reviewing their practices regarding the playing of the national anthem?

May our love for each other grow stronger as we seek understanding.  
--The Outreach and Service Committee of CPMC