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Historian to examine church's response to John Howard Yoder's abuse of women

A Mennonite Church USA discernment group was formed in August 2013 to continue healing and reconciliation work in the wake of John Howard Yoder's (JHY) abuse of women and some ongoing questions about how the church responded to it. This is one of the stated goals: *In light of the reality that many and varied assumptions are being voiced about what occurred, we will design a process to fairly and accurately document the scope of JHY's sexual abuse and the church's response to it after a careful review of the evidence.*

Dr. Rachel Waltner Goossen is Professor of History at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan.

The discernment group, with the authorization of the Executive Board, has invited an historian to engage historical research and documentation on this subject. Dr. Rachel Waltner Goossen is Professor of History at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan. She has 25 years of experience writing about Mennonite history, peace history and women's history. She is a graduate of Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., with advanced degrees in history from the University of California–Santa Barbara and the University of Kansas in Lawrence. She is a member of Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka, Kan.

Dr. Goossen will work with previously unreleased written sources as well as conduct oral history interviews with persons who were involved in institutional accountability and discipline processes and others who experienced or were knowledgeable about John Howard Yoder's abuse of women. Dr. Goossen's intent is to make her scholarship available through churchwide and scholarly publications, including *The Mennonite, Mennonite World Review* and the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. She anticipates completing her work by the summer of 2015.

Discernment group members are hopeful that a careful synthesis of historical evidence will help the church more fully understand church-related accountability processes—both what the processes achieved in healing and reconciliation and ways in which they failed. The discernment group anticipates that we will all learn from our own recent history so that as a church we are prepared to intervene more effectively to prevent sexual abuse and to care for victims and perpetrators of abuse. The group hopes that greater knowledge about what transpired will be freeing for everyone; sobering, but freeing, in the same spirit with which Jesus assured his followers: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

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*—The **Discernment Group** includes Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, Harrisonburg, Va.; Sara Wenger Shenk, president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, Ind.; Ted Koontz of AMBS; Chuck Neufeld of Illinois Mennonite Conference; Linda Gehman Peachey of Akron, Pa.; and Regina Shands Stoltzfus of Goshen (Ind.) College. Carolyn Holderread Heggen of Corvallis, Ore., is serving the group as an advisor.*