

FUMC Name Change: Post-AGM Update and Proposed Motion

What's happened so far? How did we get here?

We are delighted that this proposal has been well received – we all seem to agree that the time has come for us to change our name. The problem is, from the ‘straw poll’ we took at our AGM, we found that three names had roughly equal amounts of support: South Vancouver Mennonite Church, South Vancouver Peace Church, and Peace Church on 52nd. So the Vision Committee needed to take time to consider which of these three names we thought was best for our church at this time. Our decision was that “Peace Church on 52nd” is the best of these three names, and it was seconded by the Church Council after discussing it at a recent meeting. Below is the motion, and some reasons as to why we are recommending this particular name.

On **June 3rd, 2018**, we will discuss and then vote on the following motion:

Motion: That FUMC change its name to “Peace Church on 52nd”.

NOTE: This would involve changes to our file with the CRA and our constitution as well as changing our physical signage and our website. We will also make sure to have our Mennonite denomination prominently displayed as a tagline or affiliation in our signage.

1) Why not have ‘Mennonite’ in our new name?

We believe that this name change is a critical step in revitalization. FUMC’s commitment to revitalization will mean some discomfort for all of us in different ways, and voting for a name like ‘Peace Church on 52nd’ may be uncomfortable for some of you. However, being committed to revitalization does sometimes mean intentionally stepping into discomfort. An openness to change involves letting ourselves be changed as well, letting God revitalize *us* as well as our church. FUMC voted for revitalization, and the next key step in that process is embracing a new name that our neighbours can easily understand, one that shows them who we are, who we want to be, and what we are about.

While it is hard for many of us to imagine a world in which almost no one knows what the word ‘Mennonite’ means or what being ‘Mennonite’ is all about, that is the world that we find ourselves in here in Southeast Vancouver in 2018. This does not mean that *being* Mennonite is irrelevant. The Mennonite tradition carries within itself, FUMC carries within itself, any number of good gifts that the world we inhabit is especially in need of today. The problem is *not* being Mennonite. The problem is that the word ‘Mennonite’ itself has become a barrier, causing unhelpful confusion in all sorts of ways.

The missional rationale for changing our name—regardless of what it is changed to—is that we change it *for the sake of others*, and not merely to something we personally prefer. This is why we are not recommending the name ‘South Vancouver Mennonite Church’, because it does not go far enough in terms of our mission. It only removes the confusion inherent in ‘First United’.

Because ‘Mennonite’ no longer communicates intelligibly or openly to the community we find ourselves in, we believe that FUMC needs an intelligible and inviting name for *those who are not us*. We are not trying to hide who we are, but to show more faithfully just who we are and who we desire to be. We believe ‘Peace’ is a word that invites people in much more effectively.

2) Why did we choose this name?

We believe ‘Peace Church’ conveys both identity and aspiration. It conveys both who we are and who we want to be: *a peace church for the sake of others*. Historically, ‘peace’ is what Mennonites have been about and what they have placed at the leading-edge of their communal identity and missional practices. The view of the Vision Committee is that ‘Peace Church on 52nd’ best names the reality and desires of the community, while at the same time maintaining continuity with the Mennonite ethos and character. The name carries within itself what we hope for ourselves and what we hope for others, communicating that place matters, that this particular area matters. We believe it is a name that invites, that it is a hospitable name.

From another angle, ‘Peace Church on 52nd’ simply has a nice ring to it. While not the most important part of the name change, it is something for us to be aware of. From another angle, it is the most intriguing of the possible names. We believe it piques curiosity and carries a bit of imaginative flair. It is also easily referred to.

3) Why have ‘Mennonite’ as part of a tagline or affiliation?

Our identity and history as Mennonites is vitally important. No one is trying to set that aside. We are part of a long tradition and a worldwide community. FUMC is linked both denominationally and internationally to sisters and brothers across the globe – we are not a group of people off by ourselves doing our own thing. We are accountable to and part of a much larger story than just our own. Other Mennonite churches may not be placed in a neighbourhood where the vast majority of people don’t really know what a ‘Mennonite’ is, but we are. We don’t want to hide our identity as Mennonites, but rather show that identity more fully and faithfully in ways our neighbors can understand. Hence, the Vision Committee believes that keeping our Mennonite affiliation is vitally important and should be readily noticeable on our signs, our website, and any other publications.

4) Being a Church for the Sake of Others

Part of the reason we believe that ‘Peace Church on 52nd’ best conveys who we are is that it expresses the hope and desire we have for ourselves and for the rest of God’s creation. The mission of God aims at the restoration and renewal, the liberation and endless flourishing, of all his good creation – all this is summarized in the Hebrew word *shalom*, which we translate as ‘Peace’. God’s mission of reconciling love and *shalom* are always on the move among us and out into the world. Because of this, we find it helpful to think of ourselves as *a church for the sake of others*. In other words, we want to be a community increasingly secure in our identity in Christ which allows us to live with our neighbours peaceably, without fear of our own identity being lost or forgotten.

Are we becoming a Church for the sake of others? Or are we actually invested in remaining a church for the sake of ourselves, doing and being church just for us insiders? These are tremendously difficult questions to engage with, but we truly believe that God is calling us to find new ways to connect with our neighbours, so that they too can encounter the source of all true peace, Jesus Christ. We believe that changing our name to “Peace Church on 52nd” is one way we can begin to do that.