

Dear Organizers of the Winnipeg Freedom Convoy,

Thank you for your email and letter sent to Mennonite Church Canada. As this is a regional concern, your letter was forwarded to me as Executive Minister for Mennonite Church Manitoba.

I read your letter with interest, and not without sympathy. The past two years have been hard for all of us, including churches and children, as you have rightly noted. The restrictions necessary to curb a deadly virus have saved lives, but they have also made life challenging in themselves. Nonetheless, as Christians our highest calling is to love God by loving our neighbours, especially our neighbours most vulnerable to harm. In a pandemic this places the elderly, the immune compromised, and other health-vulnerable populations such as Indigenous peoples and disabled persons at the top of our list of neighbours to love. The restrictions have been difficult, but the death or long-term debilitation of these people and others is a much greater burden than we who are still living and healthy have had to bear.

I was pleased to see that you “condemn all manifestations of hate, racism, misogyny and disrespect.” That has been the one dimension of these convoys that all Christians, indeed all Canadians, have found most abhorrent. I would encourage you to make this sentiment clearer in all of your public discourse and to take immediate and practical steps to distance yourself from those, including some national convoy leaders, who espouse those hateful words and follow them up with hateful actions.

As Christians, we are naturally concerned with human rights and basic freedoms. Christians have long been among those at the forefront of establishing and ensuring human rights for all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical or intellectual ability, and more. The goal of this action as Christians has been to protect those most vulnerable to harm and historically most prone to marginalization and oppression by powerful people. We also do not take our freedoms for granted, including freedom of religion and freedom of peaceful assembly. We use those freedoms every time we meet to worship, whether on Zoom or in person, and every time we rally to protest laws which cause harm to powerless persons or a greed-ravaged earth. We are grateful to live in Canada where these freedoms are guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Nevertheless, as Christians this does not define all that “freedom” means. We are free in Christ Jesus to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13-14). We follow Jesus as Lord, who give up his divine rights and privileges to become a servant of humanity, walking in solidarity with the suffering and oppressed even to death on a cross, condemned by the state (Philippians 2:3-8). This Christian understanding of freedom takes precedence over any worldly conceptions of “freedom” or “rights,” and it calls us to “look not to our own interests but to the interests of others.” Against this love “there is no law” that can constrain us (Galatians 5:22-23)—we are always free to love in the way of Jesus, even if being constrained by the state. No government can take that freedom away from us, and this, our Scriptures teach us, is the freedom that really matters.

If you wish to have further conversation about the Christian understanding of freedom and human rights, and how we should discern as Christians when and what laws to protest, I would be glad to do so. I pray for continued good health for you and your families.

Sincerely,  
Michael Pahl