**66. January 25, 1698** [?]. *A letter from Christian Pliem, elder, in the name of the Palatine Mennonite churches to David Rutgers and his fellow Mennonite ministers at Amsterdam. This letter is interesting for its language, for the implications as to church life locally and in Holland, and for the Amish division already in progress in Alsace and Switzerland since 1693. It raises questions not easily answered, with an assertion of unity, an unusual request about certificates of membership, advice about former members migrating back to the Palatinate from Holland, and the disquieting movement of armies.*

[page 1]

From the Palatinate, January 25, 1698[?][[1]](#footnote-1)

David Rutgers[[2]](#footnote-2) together with his fellow ministers in Christ,

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our dear heavenly Father, the great love of His Son, and the holy communion of the Holy Ghost be multiplied to you for eternal salvation. Amen.

Your esteemed letter of the tenth of this month has arrived safely and your manifold efforts and care for our people observed therein. For this we cannot sufficiently thank the dear and merciful God, but hope and pray that He would reward you here in this life and afterwards in eternity. Now I also understand from your letter that many of them have lived as refugees for a while and have received and enjoyed from and with you abundant friendship in natural necessities and in mysteries of the spirit and yet often could not omit to murmur and complain with the children of Israel. Now also some are admitted into one meeting and others into another, and when they come back to us and bring along a church letter and a good testimony of their life, and they again want to yield themselves under the obedience of the Gospel in our congregation and brotherhood, accordingly we want to receive them gladly as dear and worthy friends and brothers. However, it has already occurred that a few who came to us have begun to reproach others, remonstrate, and

to charge that a person did not maintain the one faith. Accordingly, one could not show love and keep unity with another.

For this reason we make a cordial and friendly request of all the ministers of the Mennonites generally in North and South Holland: Since we in the Palatinate up till now want to remain undivided[[3]](#footnote-3) and also always intend to be on the old and true foundation which Christ, His ministers, and Apostles laid for salvation, and intend to exert ourselves to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, [we request] that when some may come and ask for a church letter from you, that you would charge them earnestly that when they come here again into our land and place themselves in our brotherhood and our order, that no one then should blame another about which meeting he attended most and had the most association. When they promise to do that, [page 2] then a little of their promise should be reported in their church letter in order that we can better refer them back [to their promise] and admonish them to unity. We ask in a friendly manner of all the ministers of the Mennonite congregations not to take our letter amiss, for with a few we have already had great trouble about this issue. As we wanted to give a little correction, we received for an answer that in spring some will come who will give us so much to attend to that we will forget the earlier problems.

As to Heindrich Hestant’s[[4]](#footnote-4) request concerning the 100 Rhenish guilders, I went immediately with the letter to his brother-in-law and showed it to him. Since he had not yet received the money himself, he hunted up a friend who advanced it to him and handed it over to me. I will deal with it then according to your wishes; yet everything will be handled not by me alone but with the counsel and approval of our fellow helpers and ministers. If some families wish to come into the Palatinate this spring, I consider it advisable that they begin their journey together as soon as the cold weather permits so that promptly in spring they can yet plan for a summer harvest and plant gardens. So also those who do not have their own places to live could find a better place than if they waited long. For our land so swarms with strangers who seek for dwellings and farms that it is almost unbelievable.

If you dispatch Jacob Miller’s money to Frankfurt, please give me a little report of it, for I have hastily advanced him so much already to start up his household. With this I think I will close for the present. We all send all of you together our hearty greetings, and having commended you to the only wise counsel and protection of God, with desire for your intercession to God, we hope also not to forget [to pray] for you and all believers in Christ, and I remain your most devoted servant and brother in Christ [for] salvation.

Christian Pliem[[5]](#footnote-5) in the name of

the Mennonite congregations

in the Palatinate

Please note: This week the Germans are coming

on this side of the Rhine and they say that today

and tomorrow the French are leaving the cities

and fortresses and the Germans will

move in.

[page 3]

Please deliver the enclosure to the proper place.

[page 4: address]

To the honored

and wise

David Rutgers

to be given to his own hands

in Amsterdam.

1. **66** 1 A more likely reading is 1695; see note below. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. David Rutgers III (1629-1706) was treasurer of the Committee for Foreign Needs for a time and a deacon of the Lamist church in Amsterdam. There were several leaders named David Rutgers. The family was often associated with the Lamist church. *ME* IV, 394; Lavooij-Janzen, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The German original could be interpreted to assert the unity of the church in the Palatinate even more strongly. Since the Amish division had been in progress since 1693 and had already affected the churches in the Palatinate, a date of 1695 for this letter seems more likely. The division was quite rigid in 1698. Pliem himself was one of the signers of a letter which harshly condemned the teaching of Jacob Ammann on Nov. 13, 1697. Roth, pp. 71-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Heinrich Hiestant is mentioned as a minister in Document 77, p. 665. Histant is an alternate North American spelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Christian Pliem also appears in numerous documents in the present book—as early as February 1690 in Document 48. He wrote a letter, Document 62, as elder of the church from Ibersheim in the Palatinate in 1696. He kept a record of charity funds and was deceased by March 3, 1709 (Document 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)