

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



June 20-22, 2024

Welcome from the Planning and Worship Committees

There are several groups who have been thinking about, praying for and preparing for this event for a very long time. We're excited that everyone is at last gathered to worship, discern, learn and enjoy each other's company—and we extend a special welcome to this event from us! We have felt God's leading in our planning and we look forward to the moving of God's spirit in our gathering.

Worship Planners:

David Shenk (Florence)
Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street)
Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street)
Jaimie Houghton-Thompson (Maplewood)
Ardean Friesen (Silverwood)

A big thanks to Cynthea Good Kauffman (Assembly), Goshen College Events Coordinator, and Tia Johnson for their help in logistical details. Thanks to all the many others who have helped in all kinds of ways—from caring for children to taking care of our tech needs to setting up chairs and everything in between— to make this event happen. Thanks to all of you.

Children's Coordinator

Rachel Hershberger (Faith)

Book Raffle

Matt Pritchard (Atlanta)

Some Helpful Tips for a Good Experience

- * Keep this book with you. It has schedules, delegate action items, committee reports and other things to guide you through your time at the Delegate Assembly.
- * If you're lost and confused or need any kind of, visit the registration/information table located in lobby across from the fellowship/delegate hall. We've tried to make our space as accessible as possible. If you don't see what you need, please ask and we'll try our best to accommodate you.
- * Spend some time in the Prayer Room. The Prayer Room is located behind the sanctuary and is a prayerful space to spend some quiet time with God.
- * An offering for Central District will be taken on Saturday morning during the worship service.
- * The hosting congregations have selected La Posada Immigrant Services to receive the Giving Back to the Community Donation from the conference. You may donate online or by check. Please make checks payable to Central District Conference and designate "La Posada" in the memo line. Checks may be placed in the offering.
- * Care for our environment. Use the reusable coffee mug and water bottle you have brought with you. Use the recycling bins provided around the meeting site. Turn off the lights when you leave a room. Enjoy walking around the town and surrounding Goshen area.
- * Scent free policy: In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental and chemical sensitivities, we ask you to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at the Annual Meeting activities. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.
- * If you need first aid or medical assistance, please go to the registration table located just outside the delegate session meeting area.

Wi-Fi Access

To access Wi-Fi, click on GC guest. No user name or password are required but you will need to reset the access every day.

Displays During the Annual Meeting

Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary (AMBS)
Anabaptism at 500
Bluffton University (BU)
Camp Friedenswald (CF)
Everence
Goshen College (GC)
Journey
Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes
Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)
Mennonite Mission Network (MMN)
The Dream Lives On with Jake Elias
CDC Authors Book Table
CDC Free Table
CDC Book Raffle Table

Thanks to all these folks for sharing their time with us. The displays are located around in the hallway.

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE

Delegate Schedule

June 20-22, 2024

College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana

Listen! Wisdom is Calling

Thursday, June 20

Worship services are open to everyone! You don't need to be registered for the annual meeting to attend.

- 2:00 pm Registration begins at College Mennonite Church in the hall outside the fellowship hall
3:00 pm Pre-conference seminar with Sally Weaver Glick in the Koinonia Room
5:00 pm Pastor Appreciation Dinner in the Fellowship Hall
7:30 pm WORSHIP I: College Mennonite Church Sanctuary
Theme: Holy Wisdom on the Way
Text: Proverbs 4:1-13
Speaker: Carol Penner
Offering: La Posada Immigrant Services
- 9:00 pm Ice Cream Social in College Mennonite Church fellowship hall

Friday, June 21

- 8:30 am *Delegate Session I* in CMC fellowship hall

Welcome
Getting acquainted around tables
State of the Conference Address
Centering, silent reflection, and prayer
Congregational Story: The Intention Church
Introduction of Resolutions and Listening Committees, and Parliamentarian

Summary Review of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes
ACTION: 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

Treasurer's Report/Presentation of 2024-2025 Proposed Spending Plan

Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Slate
ACTION: 2024-2025 Slate
Commissioning Prayer: Incoming and continuing committee members

- 9:45 am Break/Snacks in hall outside the fellowship hall, provided by Goshen College

- 10:15 am Committee reports panel discussion
10:40 am Song/Centering
ACTION: Vote to accept St Louis Mennonite Fellowship into membership
Introduction of Peace Mennonite Fellowship
Introduction of Knoxville Mennonite Church
Presentation of Provisional Membership Bylaws Amendment

Sharing around tables/open mic - Dwelling in the Word/Visioning

Introduction of Guests
Announcements

- 11:45 am Lunch in the Union dining hall or on your own
A list of area restaurants is available in the delegate packets
- 1:30 pm *Delegate Session II*
Announcement of St Louis Mennonite Fellowship vote and response
- 1:35 pm Worship/Plenary session with Carol Penner
- 3:15 pm Break in hall outside the fellowship hall
- 3:45 pm *Delegate Session III*
Presentation of MC USA Church Safety documents
- 4:50 pm Stretch break
- 5:00 pm Seminars
Anabaptist 500th Anniversary - Gerald Mast
Bluffton University - Doug/Jane/Gerald
Seasons in the Life Cycle of Congregations – Celeste Groff
- 6:00 pm Dinner in the Union dining hall or on your own
A list of area restaurants is available (in delegate packets)

Saturday, June 22

8:30 - 9:30 am

WORSHIP III: CMC sanctuary
Theme: The Word of the Wise
Speaker: Trey Ferguson
Texts: John 1:1-14; Proverbs 3:19-20 & 8:1
Offering for Central District Conference
Communion

9:30 am Break

10:15 am *Delegate Session IV*
Song/Centering:
Congregational Story
Missional Church Committee
Ministerial Committee

ACTION: Vote on Provisional Membership

11:15 am Song/Centering:
ACTION: 2024-2025 Spending Plan
Open Mic
Listening Committee Report

11:40am Evaluations/Committee Nominations
Close of Delegate Sessions

11:50am Songs/Benediction
12:00 pm Close of Annual Meeting

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Discussion Guidelines for Delegates

The delegate assembly is designed to tend the church's business in a timely manner that allows for due consideration. When we need to process decisions, we invite our delegates into a corporate discernment process. One goal of the discernment process is to avoid tyranny of the majority and to avoid tyranny of the minority. In order to accomplish the goal of tending to the decision-making process in a timely manner, we will use the following guidelines:

Basic Guidelines for Conversation

So that all who seek to be heard may be heard:

- Do not speak more than twice in a day on any one topic.
- Before you speak a second time on one topic, make sure that no one else who has not yet spoken on that topic wishes to do so.
- When you go to the microphone to address the assembly, wait to be recognized by the moderator. Once recognized, state your name and (if appropriate) the group you represent before making your remarks.
- In order to keep the discussion from becoming personal, always address the moderator rather than a previous speaker or someone else in the meeting.
- Always speak respectfully. If you disagree with another person who has spoken, please describe that point of view with respect.
- So that the group can put your remarks in context, always indicate whether you are speaking in favor or against the proposal that is being discussed.
- Only delegates may make motions or vote on them.



Welcome to the delegates from the CDC Board President

Welcome back to Goshen for our 68th Annual Meeting. A huge thank you to the staff, board, and committee members for all they've done to shape the work of the Conference and this Annual Meeting. Welcome to all in the room and all joining via Zoom.

Every two years representatives of the Leadership Council choose a theme to guide our work. Last August, we grounded our brainstorming in the results of the Sacred Listening visits and wondered what might guide us as we seek to do the work God calls us to.

Listen! Wisdom is Calling bubbled to the surface as we shared, meditated, prayed, and worshiped together. And, what a rich theme it is! A few of the ideas sparked so far are:

- A robust Zoom Mid-Year Gathering attended by over 70 people who shared the signs of wisdom they see in their congregations
- A project to collecting Wisdom Sayings from congregations
- A four-part worship series for use by congregations
- Quarterly Zoom retreats and a half day pre-Annual Meeting retreat

The Tending Transformation capital campaign is nearing its goal and has already borne fruit in the work of Matt Pritchard, our Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith, and the wisdom of new communities being birthed among us.

I've heard it said we're a story-telling conference and Sarah Werner, our Communications Coordinator, has helped us share our wisdom with each other and spread the news about the work of CDC congregations in the broader Anabaptist community.

Emma's wisdom and understanding of CDC and her deep care for its people and congregations make our work easier and more productive.

Doug has expanded our understanding of the theme, using it in sermons, Doug's Mug and conversations with congregations and committees and denominational leaders.

I am blessed by the stories of the amazing, faith-filled work being done in congregations. There is, of course, much still to do to bring our world closer to the vision of God's Kingdom. We are stronger when we move together and when we listen for the wisdom that is calling us. I'm grateful to be doing church with all of you.

Jan Lugibihl

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE CONGREGATIONS

Church listing codes:

- * Congregation is a member of both Central District and Indiana-Michigan Mennonite conferences
- ** Congregation is a member of both Central District and Illinois Mennonite conference
- *** Congregation is a member of both Central District and Ohio Mennonite conferences
- **** Congregation is a member of Central District Conference and the Church of the Brethren

Where there are two addresses listed, the **bold type** refers to the **mailing address**

Membership/Covenanted attendee numbers are in parentheses (as reported in the 2023 conference directory)

***Agora Ministries 614.280.1212 <i>Richard/Rebecca Bartholomew, Pastors</i> 400 W Broad St, Columbus, OH 43215 rich@agoraminstries.org	Americus Mennonite Fellowship (30) 229.815.1034 <i>Brian Kilheffer, Contact Person</i> bk.ck1@hotmail.com 409 E Hill St, Americus, GA 31709 http://www.facebook.com/AmericusMennoniteFellowship
*Ann Arbor Mennonite Church (10) 734.996.9198 <i>Chima Ozor, Contact Person</i> dr.chima.ozor@gmail.com meets in homes Mail to: 1455 Kelly Green Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48103	Assembly Mennonite Church (188) 574.534.4190 <i>Karl Shelly, Pastor</i> karlss@assemblymennonite.org <i>Anna Yoder Schlabach, Pastor</i> annays@assemblymennonite.org <i>Scott Coulter, Pastor</i> scotte@assemblymennonite.org <i>Moriah Hurst, Pastor (as of Sept 8, 2024)</i> 727 New York St, Goshen, IN 46526 office@assemblymennonite.org http://assemblymennonite.org
Atlanta Mennonite Church (25) 404.590.1344 <i>Anton Flores-Maisonet, Interim Pastor</i> alternacommunity@gmail.com 1088 Bouldercrest Dr SE, Atlanta, GA 30316 Website: http://www.atlmenno.org/ Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ATLMenno/	Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (35) 919-357-5496 chmf@chapelhillmennonite.org <i>Ben Krieder, Pastor</i> ben@chapelhillmennonite.org <i>Catherine Lee, Children and Youth Pastor,</i> catherine@chapelhillmennonite.org Meets at Church of Reconciliation: 110 N. Elliott Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514 (no mail here) PO Box 2145, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2145 Website https://chapelhillmennonite.org/ https://www.facebook.com/ChapelHillMennonite/
Chicago Community Mennonite Church (87) 773.343.4251 <i>Tim Peebles, Transitional Pastor</i> tjpeebles@gmail.com meets at First Church of the Brethren, 425 S Central Park Blvd, Chicago, IL 60624 http://www.ccmcil.org	Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship (44) 513.871.0035 <i>Brian Moll, Pastor</i> brianthomasmoll@gmail.com meets at 4229 Brownway Ave, Cincinnati, OH Mail to: 3046 Minot Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45209 office@cincinnati-mennonite.org http://www.cincinnati-mennonite.org
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Covenant Mennonite Fellowship (100) 941.366.3545 <i>Jason Kuniholm, Pastor</i> <i>jkuniholm@gmail.com</i> 5420 Ashton Rd, Sarasota, FL 34233 covenantmennonite@gmail.com www.covenantmennonite.com https://www.facebook.com/mennonites	Eighth Street Mennonite Church (192) 574.533.6720 <i>Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau, Pastor</i> <i>bpaetkau@8thstmennonite.org</i> <i>Julia Gingrich, Pastor</i> <i>jgingrich@8thstmennonite.org</i> 602 S 8 th St, Goshen, IN 46526 office@8thstmennonite.org www.8thStMennonite.org
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North Danvers Mennonite Church (151). 309.963.4554 <i>Brian Johnson, Pastor</i> brian.johnson67@gmail.com 5517E 1950 North Rd, Danvers, IL 61732 northdanversch@gmail.com www.northdanverschurch.com	***Oak Grove Mennonite Church (294) 330.669.2697 <i>Seth Miller, Pastor (as of mid-August)</i> 7843 Smucker Rd, Smithville, OH 44677 office@oakgrovemc.org www.oakgrovemc.org
Open Table Mennonite Fellowship (20) 574.534.1537 <i>Karla Minter, Pastor/doula</i> karlaminter@outlook.com meets at 413 S 7 th St, Goshen, IN 46526 http://www.opentablemennonite.org/	Paoli Mennonite Fellowship (80) 812.723.2414 <i>Paul Brubaker, Pastor</i> paul.brubaker.lm@gmail.com 2589 N County Road 100 W, Paoli, IN 47454 mennos.paoli@gmail.com
Raleigh Mennonite Church (40) 919. 833.1182 <i>Melissa Florer-Bixler, Pastor</i> melissa@raleighmennonite.org Meets at Church of God Good Shepherd, 121 Hillsborough St , Raleigh NC 27603 (919) 831-2000 Mail to: PO Box 25545, Raleigh, NC 27611 Website: https://www.raleighmennonite.org Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/RaleighMennonite/	****Shalom Community Church (72) 734.761.7366 <i>Trevor Bechtel, Co-pastor</i> trevor.bechteld@gmail.com <i>Jodie Boyer Hatlem</i> jo@shalomcc.org meets at 1001 Green Road, Ann Arbor Mail to: PO Box 8080, Ann Arbor, MI 48105 pastors@shalomcc.org www.shalomcc.org

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<p>Southside Fellowship (65) 574.293.2825 <i>David Moser, Pastor</i> <i>davidssfelkhart@gmail.com</i> meets at AMBS Sermon on the Mount Chapel, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517 Mail to: Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount, Lower Level, 3003 Benham Ave, Elkhart, IN 46517 ssfelkhart@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/Southside-Fellowship-1591825 197704822/</p>	<p>St Paul Mennonite Fellowship (8) 651-291-0647 <i>David Edminster, Contact Person</i> <i>brodaahoud@gmail.com</i> meets at Cherokee Park United Church, 371 West Baker Street, St. Paul, MN 55107 http://spmfmennolink.org/</p>
<p>New Community of Faith **Asian Mennonite Community Church 630.801.5060 <i>Jai Prakash (JP) Masih, Pastor</i> <i>pastorjpamcc@gmail.com</i> meets at Lombard Mennonite Church, 528 E Madison St, Lombard, IL 60148</p>	<p>In Membership Process St Louis Mennonite Fellowship 314.632.6846 <i>Joshua Richardson, Pastor</i> <i>stlmenno@gmail.com</i> 3752 Giles Ave, St Louis, MO 63113 https://www.slmf.org/</p>
<p>Knoxville Mennonite Church 865.290.0552 <i>Pat McFarren, Interim Pastor</i> <i>kmc@knoxvillemennonite.org</i> 4401 Sullivan Rd, Knoxville, TN 37921 https://www.facebook.com/knoxvillemennonitechurch</p>	<p>Peace Mennonite Fellowship 567.703.7075 <i>David Elkins, Interim Pastor</i> <i>peacemennonitefellowship@gmail.com</i> 22897 US-20 ALT, Archbold, OH 43502 https://www.facebook.com/peacemennonitefellowship</p>
<p>Emerging Communities of Faith Moveable Feast 312.967.6785 <i>Celeste Kennel-Shank Groff, Pastor</i> <i>pastor@moveablefeastcommunity.org</i> https://www.moveablefeastcommunity.org/</p>	<p>Olentangy Wild Church 304.741.9370 <i>Sarah Werner, Pastor</i> <i>sarah@mcusacdc.org</i> https://www.facebook.com/groups/1291710278335294/</p>
<p>Ministerio Jehová Luz y Esperanza 646.637.4737 <i>Dio Arauz, Pastor</i> <i>garihond@gmail.com</i> <i>Ana Arauz, Pastor</i> <i>analoreado56@yahoo.com</i> https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089983146 864</p>	

2023-2024 CDC LEADERSHIP

Board of Directors

President (2025):

Jan Lugibihl Chicago Community Mennonite Church

President-elect (2025)

Joel Miller Columbus Mennonite Church

Secretary (2025)

Christine Guth Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Treasurer (2025)

Tim Lind Florence Church of the Brethren-Mennonite

Member-at-large (2024)

Rachel Stolpe Milwaukee Mennonite Church

Member-at-large (2024)

Phil Martens First Mennonite Urbana

Member-at-large (2026)

Lydia Brenneman Lima Mennonite Church

Leadership Council

The Leadership Council is comprised of the Board of Directors, Ministerial Committee, Missional Church Committee, Stewardship Committee, Bluffton University rep, Camp Friedenswald, executive director, Conference Minister, Associate Conference Minister of Emerging Communities of Faith, Communications Coordinator, and Administrator.

Historian/Archives

Historian

Perry Bush (2026) First Mennonite Church Bluffton

Archives & Special Collections Coordinator

Carrie Phillips phillips@bluffton.edu
Musselman Library, 1 University Dr, Bluffton, OH 45817

Resolutions Committee

Rich Preheim (2024)

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church

Jeff Boehr (2025)

Lima Mennonite Church

Kiva Nice-Webb (2026)

Chicago Community Mennonite Church

Gifts Discernment Committee

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (2024)

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Brenda North Martin (2024)

Raleigh Mennonite Church

David Moser (2025)

Southside Fellowship

Laura Brenneman-Fullwood (2025)

First Mennonite Church Urbana

George Lehman (2026)

First Mennonite Church Bluffton

Chuck Gibson (2026) First Mennonite Church Urbana

Stewardship Committee

Tim Lind (2025)

Florence Church of the Brethren-Mennonite

Doug Luginill (Staff), Ex-officio

Emma Hartman (Staff), Ex-officio

Ministerial Committee

Robin Walton (2024) Columbus Mennonite Church

Michael Crosby (2024) First Mennonite Urbana

Ruth Guengerich (2025)

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Kevin Chupp (2025) Mennonite Church of Normal

Brian Bolton (2026)

Shalom Mennonite Congregation

Gayle Gerber Koontz (2026)

Assembly Mennonite Church

Missional Church Committee

Elizabeth Kelly (2024)

First Mennonite Church Bluffton

Anthony Flores-Maisonet (2024)

Atlanta Mennonite Church

Brian Sauder (2025)

Chicago Community Mennonite Church

Xaris Martinex (2025)

Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship

Gary Martin (2026)

Faith Mennonite Church

Julia Gingrich (2026)

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Matthew Pritchard (ex-officio)

Atlanta Mennonite Church

Camp Friedenswald Board

Evan Miller (2024)

Open Table Mennonite Fellowship

Todd Kirton (2024) Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Kendra Yoder (2024)

Southside Fellowship

Alita Yoder Funk (2025)

Silverwood Mennonite Church

Steven Hartman-Keiser (2025)

Milwaukee Mennonite Church

Sarah Werner (2025) Columbus Mennonite Church

Chris Moser (2026) First Mennonite Church Bluffton

Mark Roeschley (2026)

Mennonite Church of Normal

Deanna Risser (2026)

Assembly Mennonite Church

AUXILIARY GROUPS

Mennonite Men

Steve Thomas, Coordinator

steveforpeace@gmail.com

574.202.0048

CONFERENCE RELATED MINISTRIES

Chicago Mennonite Learning Center (CMLC)

Board of Directors

Sueann VonGunten

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church

Sara Reschly

Chicago Community Mennonite Church

Libby Hostetler

Lima Mennonite Church

Richard Rutschman

Evanston Mennonite Church

Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes Board

Peter Martin (2024)

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS)

Credentialed Faculty

Janeen Bertsche Johnson, Campus Pastor

Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Rachel Miller Jacobs

Assistant Professor of Congregational Formation

Faith Mennonite Church

David Cramer, Managing Editor, Institute of

Mennonite Studies, Core Adjunct Professor

Keller Park Church

CDC STAFF

Conference Minister

Doug Luginbill

First Mennonite Church Bluffton

Associate Conference Minister of Emerging

Communities of Faith

Matt Pritchard

Atlanta Mennonite Church

Communications Coordinator

Sarah Werner

Columbus Mennonite Church

Administrator

Emma Hartman

Faith Mennonite Church

Bookkeeper

Beth Yoder Mackenzie

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



Part I

Action/Discussion

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE
Minutes
June 22-24, 2023
College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
Tending Transformation

Thursday, June 23

*Transformation as Sacred Journey led by Naomi Wenger

*Pastor Appreciation Dinner at College Mennonite Church

WORSHIP I: College Mennonite Church

Theme: When the Church is the Church, the Community Rejoices

Texts: Proverbs 11:10, John 4:4-42, Jeremiah 6:13-14; 8:10b-11; 29:5-9

Speaker: Matt Pritchard

Offering: Anabaptist Disabilities Network

Ice Cream Social

Friday, June 24

Delegate Session I

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Come, all you peoples*, from *Voices Together* (VT 2)

Welcome

James Rissler (Emmanuel) welcomed delegates to the 67th annual meeting with the sounding of the gavel. He invited participants to introduce themselves around tables and to share what excites them the most about the church today.

State of the Conference Address:

James Rissler, (Emmanuel) shared that in searching for a word that might best describe the sense of who the conference is this year, he landed on the word ‘exploring.’ Last year’s descriptor was expecting. This year we will be exploring the ways we might be transformed by the things we worked on last year.

*Sacred listening with 35 or 40 communities of faith. Feedback from congregations indicated that they appreciated the process. James thanked the volunteers who participated in the listening process and are working to organize what was heard into theme reports.

*The Board also wants to continue exploring why 10 of our congregations chose not to participate in the listening sessions. In an attempt to be attentive to our congregations, the Board has been inviting congregational representatives to join us at each Board meeting.

*Communications: Mary Klassen resigned as conference editor and James thanked her for her work over the past few years. After a communications audit conducted by Marathana Prothro, Sarah Werner was hired as the Communications Coordinator. In addition, Flint Hills Design was hired to update the website.

*Matt Pritchard was hired as Associate Conference Minister of Emerging Communities of Faith. We now have dedicated staff time to explore how God is calling communities to be communities of faith. We tend transformation by being attentive to new things that bubble up.

Each congregation will be receiving a copy of *The Peace Table*, a storybook Bible published by

MennoMedia that emphasizing peacemaking, and a copy of *Believe and Be Baptized: Conversations on baptism in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition* by John D Roth and Thomas Yoder Neufeld.

We are grateful for the sustained giving that enables us to fund excellent staff and to sustain the work we are doing. Congregational life and ministry will always be the center of our lives.

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Congregational Story: Olentangy Wild Church

Sarah Werner (Columbus) shared that the Wild Church movement began 14 years ago in Great Britain when a group of people wanted to worship outside. About ten years ago a Mennonite pastor in Ontario started the Wild Church movement in North America. Goshen Wild Church started 18 months ago. Sarah started a Wild Church in Columbus that started meeting the first Sunday of Advent. The group had been meeting once/month and recently began meeting twice/month. The service begins with welcoming words. Participants spend half of worship wandering around in the woods or sitting and meditating by the fire. They then return to the worship circle and share what they heard with the larger group.

Introductions: Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) introduced the following:

Resolutions Committee: Jeff Boehr (Lima), Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community), Rich Preheim (Hively Ave)

Listening Committee: Carrie Mast (First Bluffton), Ron Byler (Eighth Street), Scott Coulter (Assembly)

Parliamentarian: Gerald Mast

Summary Review Minutes: Christine Guth (Eighth Street) summarized the minutes of the 2022 annual meeting. *A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes of the 2022 annual meeting as written. Ardean Friesen (Silverwood), Arman Habegger (Grace). The motion was affirmed.*

Treasurer's Report/Presentation of 2023-2024 Proposed Spending Plan: James Rissler (Emmanuel) thanked congregations for their support and reported that CDC will meet the spending plan this year.

James directed delegates to the 2023-2024 spending plan on p33 of the report book. The spending plan includes budgeting for the Tending Transformation campaign.

Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Slate: Brenda North Martin (Raleigh) introduced the members of the Gifts Discernment Committee: Laura Brenneman-Fullwood (First Urbana), Jon Hilty (Grace), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street), Joel Miller (Columbus), and David Moser (Southside). She thanked those who accepted the call to serve in the conference and encouraged delegates to share names of those with gifts for conference work with the Gifts Discernment Committee. Brenda introduced the nominees presented on the slate (p35 of the report book):

*Board of Directors: Joel Miller (Columbus), president-elect and Lydia Brenneman (Lima), member-at-large

*Ministerial Committee: Brian Bolton (Shalom Mennonite Congregation) and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Assembly)

*Missional Church Committee: Julia Gingrich (Eighth Street) and Gary Martin (Faith)

*Camp Friedenswald Board: Mark Roeschley (Mennonite Church of Normal), Chris Moser (First Bluffton) and Deanna Risser (Assembly)

On behalf of the Gifts Discernment Committee, Brenda moved to affirm the 2023-2024 slate of nominees. The motion was affirmed.

Commissioning Prayer: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) thanked all new and ongoing committee and board members for their willingness to share their gifts, experience, time and energy to the work and worship of Central District Conference. He led in prayer.

Break

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Cantai ao Senor (O Sing to the Lord)*, VT 113

Committee reports panel discussion: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) invited Gayle Gerber Koonts (Assembly) from the Ministerial Committee, Karla Minter (Open Table) from the Missional Church Committee, and Jenna Liechty Martin (Eighth Street), executive director of Camp Friedenswald to report of the work of their respective committees using a panel format.

Ministerial Committee

The Ministerial Committee recognized the pastors who died in the last year:

- *Phil Mininger (Paoli)
- *Donald Nofziger (Eighth Street)

Newly credentialed pastors were recognized:

- *Peter Eash-Scott (Milwaukee)
- *Anton and Charlotte Flores (Atlanta)
- *Carolyn May (Jubilee)
- *Rachel R Miller (Eighth Street)
- *Marty Troyer (Columbus)
- *Carrie Mast (First Mennonite Bluffton)
- *Karla Minter (Open Table)
- *Julia Schmidt (Faith)
- *Tim Peebles (Chicago Community)
- *Mariah Martin (Faith)
- *Gwen Stetler (Jubilee)
- *Phil Yoder (First Mennonite Bluffton)
- *Pratik Bagh (Hively Avenue)
- *Debbie Bledsoe (Southside)
- *Kevin Chupp (Mennonite Church of Normal)

Congregational Story: Moveable Feast

Celeste Groff shared that Moveable Feast was formed, as the Holy Spirit formed the church at Pentecost, on the principle of solidarity with each other, with all other people, and with all of the creatures of the earth. The congregation engages in formation of several types: interfaith Sabbath suppers, Bible study book group, and a monthly Sunday morning house church. They partner with a Lutheran church to welcome migrants and tend a garden. Celeste shared the story of the baptism of Adrian Jay.

Acknowledging closing of Ames Mennonite Church

James Rissler (Emmanuel) gave a brief history and background of Ames Mennonite Church, which closed after 45 years of ministry.

Introduction of St Louis Mennonite Fellowship

Steven P Miller and Janelle Basinger shared that St Louis Mennonite Fellowship, a dual conference congregation, had been part of CDC until 2005. For reasons of proximity they chose to affiliate solely with Illinois Mennonite Conference at that time. The congregation is now choosing to affiliate again with CDC. Steven and Jenelle shared the mission statement of the congregation. They are now the only

Mennonite church located in south St Louis. Although there are ~60 people listed in the directory, there are ~20 who attend weekly. The congregation uses the consensus process for making decisions. They were founded in 1975. They appreciate that CDC is aligned in spirit and in deed with the MC USA guidelines. The conference is a good fit demographically. The congregation is in need of the support that CDC can provide. They are currently looking for a new pastor as they lament the circumstances that caused the current pastor to leave the state because of recent transgender laws in Missouri.

Dwelling in the Word/Visioning (PowerPoint presentation)

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) invited delegates to reflect on Exodus 3:1-10 using lectio divina. He invited table groups to share what they heard and caught their attention. Following table discussion, groups were invited to share what they hear with the larger group.

Introduction of Guests: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) welcomed and introduced guests and representatives from Mennonite Church USA executive leadership and its agencies, Mennonite schools and from other organizations related to the conference.

Ken Hochstetler (Everence) briefly reviewed a proposal to reposition Everence from an agency of Mennonite USA to a ministry partner. The proposal will be brought to delegates at MennoCon23.

Lunch, Visiting Displays

Delegate Session II

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Sing a new world into being*, VT 809.

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Tending Transformation: Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led a conversation with Debbie Bledsoe (Southside Fellowship) and Sarah Werner (Columbus) about the way they have experienced living with disabilities.

Debbie Bledsoe: Debbie noted that not all disabilities are visible. It is important to trust someone when they say they have different needs. She shared the disabilities she is living with and how they have impacted her life.

Questions: Responses in italics

*What new ways do you want people to think about disability accommodations? *Extend grace and assurance that the disability is not a burden. Accommodations can look like so many things.*

*What important thing do you want people to think about themselves? *Be aware of what accessibility issues may need accommodations and let people know.*

*What is something that people can do now? *Do the Anabaptist Disabilities Network audit in your congregation.*

Sarah Werner: Sarah shared that she is living with increasing levels of disability and shared some of her story. She is happy to talk and answer questions about her disability.

Questions:

*How do you talk to God about your disability? *We all have imperfect bodies. After living a long time in my head, I am incredibly grateful for life.*

*Do you pray for your body? *I pray for healing from pain and for patience. I do not pray for healing. God created all of us to be exactly who we are. Who we are is holy.*

*What would you advise not to say to a disabled person? *It is not appropriate to ask someone why they use a wheelchair or crutches when you first meet them. Develop a relationship first, don't start a conversation with how folks look. The hardest thing about being in a wheelchair is that it's the first thing people see.*

Delegates were invited to talk together at their tables about the accessibility resolution.

Reporting back:

**Jaimie Houghton-Thompson (Maplewood)*: Being aware of one disability often makes other things more accessible as well and can make people feel a part of the congregation.

**Ron Ropp (Mennonite Church of Normal)*: The most undiagnosed illness is depression in the elderly. Losing physical, mental and other capacities add up and can become overwhelming.

**Gayle Gerber Koontz (Assembly)*: When trying to address accessibility issues, congregations face obstacles such as limited financial resources to put in elevators. Working with mental disabilities are often the most difficult.

**Samir Knego (Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship)*: Our table discussed how disabled people can support other disabled people, especially people with invisible disabilities.

**Peter Graber (Anabaptist Disabilities Network)*: The church needs to move to language of belonging and away from inclusion. Everyone belongs. Our job to help everyone feel like they belong.

**Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street Mennonite Church)*: Could we create a place on website that lists congregations with Zoom services and online services.

**Mark Moser (Emmanuel Mennonite Church)*: Our table discussed how important listening fits into accessibility. The more we listen to each other, the more the problem of disabilities works itself out.

**Beth Bontrager (Faith Mennonite Church)*: One way to make communion accessible when they are not comfortable with it is to invite them to cross their arms to indicate they would like to receive a blessing rather than partake in the cup and bread.

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Break

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Uyai mose (Come All You Peoples)*, VT 2.

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Tending Transformation: The Ministerial Committee led this session of worship and discussion

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Create in me a clean heart*. VT 141, refrain and v. 1

The committee presented the following litany:

Here we are God. Tending transformation in our souls and in our world.

We confess that change does not come easily for us, nor is transformation our daily prayer.

When we gather for worship, we prefer harmonies that lift our spirits,
words that affirm our faithfulness,
confessions in which we imagine others' sins and not our own.

We are not used to being called to repentance,

scolded for our narrow hospitality,
invited to imagine an even greater beloved community.

We wish to forget the sins of our past, sins of our forebears and our own,
sins that excluded and drew heavy lines between the welcomed and the shunned,
sins of slavery and sweatshops,
sins of forced removal of those who walked this land for generations before us,
sins of racism and patriarchy, environmental destruction and overconsumption.

The psalmist cries out:

“Dear God, don’t blame us for the sins of our parents.
hurry up and help us; we’re at the end of our rope.
You’re famous for helping; God, give *us* a break.
your reputation is on the line.
Pull us out of this mess, forgive us our sins—
do what you’re famous for doing!” (Psalm 79)

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Create in me a clean heart*. VT 141, refrain and v.
2

Silent reflection

As a Central District Conference, we have not yet fulfilled our mission.

We confess:

We have not fully understood Christ’s abundant love and we have sometimes refused to answer God’s
persistent call to share God’s love with one another and the world.
We have hoarded your good news and preached only to the choir.
We have made decisions that privilege the majority and diminish the gifts and calling of those who
have been marginalized.

We confess:

We have failed to build healthy and mutual relationships with one another across races and ethnicities.
We have narrowly defined who can be in committed and loving relationships and we investigated
pastors who performed marriages in good conscience and with the blessing of their congregation.

We confess:

We have refused to recognize the spiritual gifts of those who don’t fit our vision of god’s image-
bearers.
We are diminished in vitality and faithfulness by the loss of our LGBTQIA siblings who have chosen to
leave because of exclusionary practices.

We confess:

We have not affirmed the full status and worth of queer siblings as fully beloved by God.
We have driven wedges between marginalized groups, failing to creatively find welcome for all.
We have preached a shallow unity that left others further marginalized and alone.

Today we place empty chairs among us, representing those whose gifts have not been welcomed,
and chairs shrouded in obscurity, representing others who chose to remain hidden.

Those who have been rejected and discouraged,
those who could not trust or feel safe to be truly themselves in the church.

Leaders whose lives and careers have been disadvantaged in material and economic ways due to discriminatory policies around credentialing, ordination, and professional ministry in CDC.

During the silent reflection which will follow our song, you are invited to light a candle and place it on one of the tables near an empty chair, symbolizing someone you know whose gifts have not been welcomed by the church or someone who has not been able to be fully themselves in the church.

Create in me a clean heart, VT # 141; refrain and v.3

Silent reflection and lighting of candles

We believe and confess you are a God of forgiveness and reconciliation,
a God of hope and new possibilities.

The psalmist pleads,
“Oh! Teach us to live well!
teach us to live wisely and well.
Come back, God—how long do we have to wait?—
and treat your servants with kindness for a change.
Surprise us with love at daybreak;
then we’ll skip and dance all the day long.
Make up for the bad times with some good times;
we’ve seen enough evil to last a lifetime.” (Psalm 90)

Tending transformation begins by pulling away the curtains of denial,
recognizing the image of God in the stranger and the other,
confessing the brokenness we have caused and must own.

Tending transformation calls us to pay attention,
to know ourselves and our motives more fully,
to open ourselves to the power of the holy spirit,
to let go of our desire for control so that God’s transformation seeps into us like gentle rain softening the soil.

Tending transformation invites us to love ourselves more fully,
to nurture the image of god within us,
to receive Christ’s life-giving bread and wine, nourishing our bodies, as vines rooted in the soil of God’s love,
to bear fruit worthy of repentance, fruit that nourishes a hungry world.

The psalmist asks,
“Why not help us make a fresh start—a resurrection life?
then your people will laugh and sing!
Show us how much you love us, God!
give us the salvation we need!
I can’t wait to hear what God says.
God’s about to pronounce God’s people well,
love and truth meet in the street,
right living and whole living embrace and kiss!
Truth sprouts green from the ground,
right living pours down from the skies!

Oh yes! God gives goodness and beauty;
our land responds with bounty and blessing.” (Psalm 84)

Create in me a clean heart, VT # 141; refrain and v. 4

Silent reflection

Central District Conference is tending transformation.

We are taking steps toward repentance,
and journeying toward transformation.

The CDC Ministerial Committee is seeking to live into the repentance and transformation resolution affirmed at the special delegate session of Mennonite Church USA in May of 2022.

We have been on this journey for a while, sometimes clumsily, sometimes boldly.

In 2015, we affirmed a theological understanding for credentialing which provided the foundation for treating all credential requests the same way, regardless of sexual orientation.

In 2018, we ceased conducting credential reviews of pastors who officiated same-sex marriage ceremonies with the support of their congregations. More recently conference minister, Doug Luginbill, met with some of these pastors to hear about their experience.

In 2022, we partnered with Camp Friedenswald, the Missional Church Committee and the CDC Board of Directors to provide financial support for Mennonite leaders of the LGBTQIA community to participate in a visioning retreat at Camp Friedenswald.

In 2022, we extended an open invitation to be heard, inviting members and allies of the LGBTQIA community to share stories of how they have experienced life in the Mennonite church. Two individuals have responded so far.

We confess that our journey toward repentance and transformation is not complete.

We are sorry for the way our policies, our boundaries, our conformity, and our silence has marginalized and shunned followers of Christ.

We lament that there are empty chairs among us today.

We will continue tending transformation.

The Apostle Paul assures us,

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the love of Christ. For Christ is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart....Christ came and ‘announced the good news of peace to you who were far away, and to those who were near’; for through Christ, we all have access in one spirit to our God. This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are included in God’s holy people and are members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2)

Silent reflection

In 1971, Keith Schrag was ordained as a minister of the gospel in Wichita, Kansas.

In 1977, Ames Mennonite Church was born and Keith Schrag was called as their pastor.

In 1987, Keith was called before the CDC Ministerial Committee which was meeting at Camp Friedenswald. He was called to account for his lifestyle. As a gay man, his leadership was in question. Keith relinquished his credential and was asked to step down from serving on the Peace, Service and Justice Committee.

In July of last year, Ames Mennonite participated in a sacred listening process. Some participants shared about the challenges of being a welcoming congregation in the Mennonite church and the pain they experienced from the conferences to which they were connected.

Jane Roeschley and Rachel Stolpe, the CDC volunteers leading the sacred listening process, were also told that a statement of apology, sent by conference minister Lois Kaufman and the Ministerial Committee in 2015, was so meaningful. Keith teared up recalling Janeen Bertsche Johnson's warmest welcome when Keith was at Central District Conference annual meeting in 2015.

Keith remained an active member of Ames Mennonite until January of this year when the congregation closed and Keith retired to Goshen.

Between August of last year and January of this year, Doug Luginbill received three inquiries wondering if Keith's credential could be reinstated. Keith had not requested this.

In April of this year, the Ministerial Committee met at Camp Friedenswald. Keith responded to our invitation to be heard and shared his story with us. Keith wondered if there might be the possibility of reinstating his credential.

After Keith left the meeting, the Ministerial Committee discerned that reinstating Keith's credential as a retired minister of Central District and Mennonite Church USA honored the spirit of repentance and transformation.

In conversations with former conference minister, Mark Weidner, and MC USA Minister of Ministerial Leadership, Rachel Ringenberg Miller, both agreed that reinstating Keith's credential was appropriate.

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) reinstated Keith Schrag's credential with the following words:

Keith Schrag, on behalf of the Central District Conference, I apologize for the pain, marginalization, and separation, that you experienced from the conference. We recognize your prophetic and pastoral gifts, walking with and ministering to many who were marginalized. You were a pastor to many throughout your nearly sixty years of ministry in Kansas, Iowa, and other communities. Today we recognize you as a credentialed leader in Central District Conference and Mennonite Church USA. Keith, continue to preach the word, share your gifts, and bear witness in word and deed to the gospel.

Keith was presented with a certificate of ordination and gifted with an anointing flask.

Delegates were invited to discuss the following questions with their table groups:

*What are some of the feelings you experienced during this worship time?

*When you imagine repentance, do you think mostly in personal terms? What does it mean for institutions, like the church or government, to repent? What might this look like?

*How could you imagine your congregation seeking to live into the *repentance and transformation resolution*?

*In her book, *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*, author Danya Ruttenberg states, "For the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud (commentaries on the Hebrew scriptures), and for our guide Maimonides (a Twelfth Century philosopher and scholar of Jewish law),

forgiveness is much less important than the repair work that the person who caused harm is obligated to do. The Hebrew word that is often translated as ‘repentance’ is *tshuvah*, which literally means ‘returning.’” What are your thoughts about this understanding of forgiveness? To what are we to “return?”

Table groups were invited to share responses via open mic:

- *Elizabeth Kelly (First Mennonite Church Bluffton): This was a profound, powerful and deep experience. It is an example of the hard work of repair that needs to be done.
- *Brenda North Martin (Raleigh Mennonite Church): We need time for silence and time to feel this experience. We acknowledge Keith’s willingness to be vulnerable.
- *Frank Trnka (St Paul Mennonite Fellowship): (via Zoom) I would like to have been there in person.
- *Ron Ropp (Mennonite Church of Normal): We are thankful for this burning bush. It’s been a very long time. It hurts to look back on what has happened.
- *Jaimie Houghton-Lake (Maplewood Mennonite Church: Jaimie will share her experience when she goes back to Maplewood but wishes that everyone could have experienced the feelings that were present and are so important.
- *Phil Yoder (First Mennonite Church Bluffton): We talked about the grief and what it means for an institution to apologize.
- *Paul Brubaker (Paoli Mennonite Fellowship): The first response was that this is good. Words aren’t big enough.

Dinner

Free Time or Seminars at CMC

- *Tending Transformation Across Mennonite Ministries with Doug Luginbill
- *Discovering God’s Work in Your Community: An Interactive Seminar with Matt Pritchard
- *The Bible and the Book of Creation (that is, the whole earth) for an Intergenerational Audience with Lora Nafziger
- *Marking Adulthood Transitions Through Ritual and Reflection with Joel Miller

Saturday, June 24

WORSHIP II: College Mennonite Church

Theme: Transforming Practice

Texts: I Corinthians 11:17-26

Speaker: Wanda Stopher

Offering: Central District Conference

Communion

Break

Delegate Session IV

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Cantai Ao Senor (O Sing to the Lord)*, from *Voices Together (VT 113)*

Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee Mennonite Church) announced the winners of the art auction.

Congregational story: Silverwood Mennonite Church - Donna Mast

Donna shared the story of the discernment process Silverwood used to determine its stance of LGBTQ inclusion.

- *Began as a conversation within the pastoral team and determining where the pastoral team was by telling stories
- *Team took the conversation to the board
- *Board spent much time in conversation over many meetings before bringing the conversation to the congregation
- *Pastors were present at the board meetings
- *Board sought feedback from other congregations and from the LGBTQIA community
- *Conducted a congregational survey that asked what the fears and hopes were, provided a map of different stances along the way and asked people to identify where they were on the continuum.
- *After receiving the raw results back from the survey, two pastors edited the comments so they were anonymous
- *Further discuss/discernment took place within the congregation in the following ways:
 - **Adult Sunday school classes met six times covering how to agree and disagree in love
 - **Congregation heard stories of a gay person, stories from parents with gay children, and stories from the pastors
 - **Cafe conversations were held on three Sunday afternoons. The conversations began with centering and commitments to listen and respect each other.
- *Following the conversations, a special board meeting was held to prepare for a final congregational meeting.
- *The congregation met for a special congregational meeting after worship. It began during lunch and went all day. During the discernment process, they were not able to come to consensus until it was noted in the statement that the congregation did not all agree. When that was added, the congregation came to consensus.

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Tending Transformation: Led by the Missional Church Committee

Elizabeth Kelly (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) opened with reflections on Micah 6:1-6 and introduced Trevor Bechtel (Shalom Community Church) who presented background on his work with the [For Justice in the U.S. Criminal Legal System](#) study resolution. He noted that Mennonites have long been people opposed to war but have not always been clear about how that relates to policing.

- *The passion behind this study resolution began with two college students.
- *It is a reformist resolution that calls for some concrete things, i.e., cash bail. It doesn't call for an abolition of prisons or defunding the police.
- *The resolution calls for people to study and learn about our system and how it works in our communities.
- *The hope is that the resolution will invite us to respond by thinking about our anti-war stance and the use of guns against humans.

Elizabeth invited delegates to spend time around their tables considering what they brought to the session and what they heard. She invited them to use the following focus questions in their discussion, to take notes of key conversation topics and questions and to write them down for consideration by the Missional Church Committee after the annual meeting.

- *What questions does this topic raise for you as an individual and as a member of a congregation?
- *What inspires you and/or your congregation?
- *What follow-up information, conversations, resources would be helpful for you congregation to have for engaging in this study and discussion?

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Sing a new world into being*, from *Voices Together* (VT 809)

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) led delegates in a centering prayer and closed with a prayer of blessing.

Congregational Story: Raleigh Mennonite Church - Brenda North Martin

Brenda shared the story of how her congregation has been creating relationships within the minimum security prison in Raleigh. It was especially challenging during the Covid pandemic. Some of the things they are doing to provide social opportunities for women close to release or on work release include:

- *Monthly birthday parties
- *Playing bingo and bringing meaningful prizes
- *Providing worship services
- *Providing ice cream for July 4 or Mothers Day celebrations
- *Taking women out into the community
- *Forming support groups around women who have been released.

She noted that when you become involved directly with women who have been involved in the system, you realize the injustice in the system,

Elizabeth invited delegates to share at their tables using the following guide:

- *Name a significant theme (or two) discussed at your table.
- *Name one thing we want to see happen in the next year.
- *In what ways does this session promote learning/conversation about social justice?
- *In what ways does this session prompt congregational action?

Responses:

*Lynn Miller (First Mennonite Church Bluffton): Lynn worked in prison ministry. One of his observations is that when it comes to shutting down prisons, economics is part of problem as well as injustice.

*Gwen Gustafson-Zook (Open Table Mennonite Fellowship): Relationships are important and can be and need to be nurtured in many ways, There is a need for belonging both in prison and when coming out. Churches are particularly suited for this.

*Anita Rediger (Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship): Anita has been learning a lot about Israel and Palestine through her involvement with MennoPin. She has learned about the economics of imprisonment.

*Rick Buterbaugh (Evanston Mennonite Church): Rick has served 31 years as a staff person in the Salvation Army Reentry Center. He is appreciative of the resolution but acknowledged there is always more that can be added. He is seeing the results of the possession of guns and reentry help such as counseling, violence counseling, and family/marriage counseling.

Elizabeth closed the session with a blessing.

ACTION: 2023-2024 Spending Plan: Tim Lind (Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite) thanked congregations for their continued support of the conference. On behalf of the board of directors, he moved to affirm the 2023-2024 proposed spending plan as presented. The motion was affirmed unanimously.

Open Mic: James Rissler (Atlanta Mennonite Church) invited delegates to share comments via open mic.

*Heidi Sommer Simones (Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship): Heidi extended an invitation to attend the Mennonite Arts Weekend hosted by Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship in February 2024.

*Jan Croyle (First Mennonite Church Wadsworth): Jan extended an invitation for women to attend the Women's Retreat at Camp Friedenswald, Sept 15-18, 2023.

*Gwen Gustafson-Zook (Open Table Mennonite Fellowship): Gwen expressed her delight in being at the annual meeting. She heard that we are moving from inclusion to belonging.

*Lydia Brenneman (Lima Mennonite Church): Lydia mentioned the work being done by the Mennonite Palestine Israel Network (MennoPIN) and encouraged folks to attend some of their workshops that are planned for MennoCon 23.

*Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street): Janeen share information about the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary (AMBS).

Listening committee report: Carrie Mast (First Mennonite Church Bluffton), Scott Coulter (Assembly Mennonite Church), and Ron Byler (Eighth Street Mennonite Church) shared the following:

Carrie:

We are the official listening committee: Scott Coulter (and his pronouns are he/him), Ron Byler (and his pronouns are he/him), and Carrie Mast (and my pronouns are she/her), and while we recognize the official theme of this 67th Annual Meeting of the Central District Conference was Tending Transformation Part II, we also noticed a theme that was an undercurrent in all of our time together: listening. Which also names us. (Listening Committee.) and we'll take this very important honor of having a theme named after us, even if we were the ones naming this theme. And now this honor bestowed on us.

Truly, though, we did recognize listening as a theme in the work of:

- *The Board of Directors and many volunteers across the conference who conducted sacred listening sessions with 35 congregations and continue to listen between the lines to consider why ten churches did not participate;

- *The Ministerial Committee and Doug as they conducted interviews with 18 pastors who emerged to lead congregations;

- *The Ministerial Committee and Doug who, in the work of repentance and transformation, listened to two queer pastors share their stories;

- *The Missional Church Committee who is listening for ways they can support congregations beyond financial resources and grant applications;

- *Camp Friedenswald where we learn to listen to the earth to deepen our connections with her and Jenna Liechty Martin who is always listening for our stories from the peaceful woods;

- *Matt Pritchard who hears the calls of people in between the Mennonite Churches looking for the peace theology and simple living practices espoused by Mennonites;

- *Sarah Werner who writes, edits, and photographs after listening to our congregational stories to remember;

- *And all of you as you listened to the stories of:

- **Emerging communities:

- **Olentangy Wild Church pastored and tended by Sarah Werner

- **Moveable Feast pastored by Celeste Groff

- **St Louis Mennonite Fellowship who seeks membership in our conference - welcome back!

- **Silverwood Mennonite who shared honestly the kind of time and waiting involved in the transformation to a queer affirming congregation;

- **Central District Conference who shared a story that unfolded over decades, too many decades, during which we caused deep harm. And as the story unfolded, we lamented together, and through the generous and gracious spirit of Keith Schrag, we experienced reconciliation, and as Wanda Stopher preached this morning, re-memembering.

- *And as you listened to seminar leaders:

- **Naomi Wenger as she guided you in a spiritual practice and embodied prayer;

- **Doug Luginbill and friends from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Mennonite Mission

Network (MMN), Everence, and Bluffton University as they described the transformation their organizations are seeing in those they serve as well as how their organizations are seeking ways to transform themselves to better serve others;

****Matt Pritchard** as he shared a tool to help us listen to those in our communities to help us connect with our neighbors;

****Lora Nafziger** as she told stories about how Assembly Mennonite Church is using the earth all around us to teach the Bible to young and old;

****Joel Miller** as he shared the process he developed at Columbus Mennonite to mark and celebrate the transitions and transformations of adulthood.

In all these ways, we extend the honor of having a theme named after us, to all of you, for the very important work of listening you have already engaged in, and must continue to do as followers of Christ, in the work of the church through Central District Conference.

Scott

Much of our work together as conference delegates this weekend has been exploring what the commitments, made by the three MC USA resolutions, mean for us: for our conference and for our congregations. We have been invited to consider what work there is for us to do, and what fruit will come.

Again, this has been a work of careful listening together: listening to voices of those whose bodies have been marginalized, and listening to what our own bodies are telling us. These are some of the ways we listen for the work of God.

We heard that tending transformation requires adaptive leadership: improvisation, risk-taking, and imagination, and a willingness to set bold intentions and to tackle problems that evade simple definition.

Here are some of the things that we heard when we listened:

Accessibility

- * Disability can be invisible. Listen and trust those who request accommodation.
- * Everyone needs accommodation at some point; able-bodied experience is temporary.
- * We all inhabit imperfect bodies. God makes all people the way they are. We are whole as we are, with our disabilities.
- * Everyone belongs. It is our job to help everyone experience belonging.
- * Communicate clearly what accommodations your congregation offers.
- * Invitation to embodied spiritual practice should be accessible to different types of bodies, different kinds of physical ability.
- * Everyone can learn and become more self-aware through listening to those with disabilities.

Repentance and transformation

- * We are not used to being called to repent.
- * Transformation has not been our daily prayer.
- * Appropriate repair comes out of a good listening process.
- * We have failed to share God's love and good news fully.
- * We have privileged the majority, and we have shunned and excluded the marginalized.
- * We have been diminished by saying "no" to many individuals' gifts in the church.
- * We are sorry.
- * We are taking concrete steps toward repentance.
- * Tending transformation is practicing more love for ourselves.
- * The journey is not complete.

- * God is a God of forgiveness, reconciliation, hope, and new possibility.
- * Our feelings are deeper than can be expressed in words.

For justice

- * We are asking: How can we connect our historic peace witness to contemporary conversation around policing, prisons, and the US criminal legal system?
- * We hope people will study and learn about how policing and the criminal legal system works in the US.
- * Our congregations can be communities of belonging for people coming out of incarceration.
- * Listening to those who experience incarceration energizes our advocacy for change.
- * We are grateful for opportunities to be in relationship with prosecutors, police, and others in the legal system as we advocate for reform.
- * Some of us have experienced parachurch prison ministry as an opportunity for relationship-building across theological and denominational lines in the wider church.

Ron:

“Sing a new world into being, live the promise you believe,” we sang. And sing we did, throughout our conference. We sang with gusto and joy.

Thursday evening, Matt Prichard told us that we must “insist like Mary (Miriam) that God (Jesus) take action in our world of need.” As I heard the stories of our congregations’ journeys throughout our time together, it is clear to me that Matt’s words are deeply grounded in the work of our congregations to actively be a part of God’s mission in our world.

It was my task to try to comment on our worship together. That was not as easy as it may sound because our worship and our work were intertwined and both were deeply rooted in our conference theme, “tending transformation.”

Throughout our time together, I heard over and over of the opportunity we see in people turning away from church, but possibly turning toward our understanding of peace and wholeness. James Rissler told us in his state of the conference remarks, that last year, the word was expecting, but this year, the word is exploring ministry development. We don’t yet know what the fruit of our conference labor will be.

I talked to a number of new congregations and new participants to CDC and all were expectant - and exploring - of their relationship with us and they found CDC to be a welcoming place. One comment from our table groups about eagerly sharing resources speaks to how CDC congregations can equip each other for ministry. Our reading of Exodus 3 helps us, as one of us said, to see burning bushes everywhere!

Our conference continues to re-form and reshape itself, to breathe and pay attention.

Our three resolutions on accessibility, on repentance and inclusion and on the criminal justice system were received enthusiastically and prayerfully. A highlight for me was seeing the credentials of my friend and fellow congregation member Keith Schrag restored. Praise be to God!

Our work and worship these days made clear to me our deep desire to tend transformation in our hearts and in our world. But we also recognize the challenges ahead. Said one, “we confess that our journey toward repentance and transformation is not complete.” Tending transformation includes:

- pulling back the curtain of denial,
- opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit,
- nurturing the image of God within us,
- and bearing fruit for a hungry world.

Did I say we sang?

We sang, “Where no children ever hunger, but are filled with God’s shalom,
Where all people work for justice, where all hate and vengeance cease.”

This is Central District Conference. We are a community of faith, tending transformation. Christ lives in us and God is at work among us.

Carrie:

This is the story of the Central District Conference at this moment on June 24, 2023, a conference that listened together, laughed together, remembered together, lamented together, wept together, celebrated together. It is why we look forward to chapter 68.

Evaluations/Committee Nominations: Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community Mennonite Church) invited delegates to fill out the evaluation forms and share suggestions for committee nominations.

Close of Delegate Sessions James Rissler (Atlanta Mennonite Church)

James expressed his gratitude and joy in serving as president of the Board of Directors for CDC. He closed the delegate sessions with the sounding of the gavel, which he passed on to Jan Lugibihl. He received a standing ovation from the delegates.

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) led in singing *Sing a new world into being*, from *Voices Together* (VT 809). Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) closed with prayer.

Children’s Program: Thanks to Aimee Weishaupt (Silverwood Mennonite Church) and her helpers for coordinating childcare and leading the K - Grade 5 programming.

Emma Hartman
Recorder

Central District Conference 2024-2025 Spending Plan									2024-2025 Proposed Spending Plan
			SP 2021-2022	Actual 2021-2022	SP 2022-2023	Actual 2022-2023	SP 2023-2024	YTD Actual As of 3/31/2024	
INCOME									
		Congregational giving	\$191,000.00	\$201,797.90	\$211,111.00	\$217,077.63	\$227,948.00	\$179,370.72	\$244,859.00
		Annual Meeting	\$12,000.00	\$12,777.00	\$12,000.00	\$16,176.50	\$17,500.00	\$0.00	\$18,500.00
		Ann Mtng Offering/Fundraisers	\$3,000.00	\$190.00	\$3,000.00	\$2,986.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00	\$2,000.00
		Additional Giving	\$32,500.00	\$44,997.50	\$45,000.00	\$42,227.00	\$50,000.00	\$30,425.00	\$55,000.00
		Bequests/Designated gifts in-kind		\$0.00		\$662.83		890	
		Earned/Interest income	\$6,000.00	\$6,623.93	\$6,000.00	\$6,513.95	\$6,000.00	\$1,550.00	\$6,000.00
		Miscellaneous income	\$1,680.00	\$550.00	\$1,266.00	\$2,303.18	\$237.00	\$4,879.24	\$1,799.00
		Total	\$246,180.00	\$266,936.33	\$278,377.00	\$287,947.09	\$303,685.00	\$217,114.96	\$328,158.00
EXPENDITURES									
Direct Congregational Services/Networking									
		Missional Church Committee	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,040.40	\$2,000.00	\$932.23	\$2,000.00
		Ministerial Committee	\$5,500.00	\$2,639.07	\$7,500.00	\$4,571.03	\$5,400.00	\$3,295.89	\$6,000.00
		Historian/*Archives	\$3,975.00	\$6,916.00	\$4,200.00	\$3,548.56	\$4,200.00	\$0.00	\$4,200.00
		Publications	\$5,000.00	\$4,178.96	\$5,000.00	\$3,111.54	\$5,000.00	\$3,323.02	\$5,000.00
		Communications Coordinator	\$5,807.00	\$5,807.00	\$5,912.00	\$8,162.46	\$20,000.00	\$15,000.03	\$21,600.00
		Regional Meetings/Congregational Listenin	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,142.01	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$500.00
			\$23,282.00	\$21,541.03	\$25,612.00	\$21,576.00	\$37,600.00	\$22,551.17	\$39,300.00
Denominational Relations									
		Mid-States Conferences		\$0.00	\$0.00	66.06	\$100.00	\$63.93	\$100.00
		*General Assembly Delegate Escrow	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,350.00	\$1,800.00
		Denominational Meetings	\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,358.86	\$3,000.00	\$2,859.89	\$3,000.00
		Constituency Leaders Council	\$3,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,000.00	\$2,710.39	\$5,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,000.00
			\$6,300.00	\$1,800.00	\$6,300.00	\$5,935.31	\$9,900.00	\$4,273.82	\$7,900.00
Conference Leadership/Administration									
		Board of Directors Meetings	\$2,000.00	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,375.36	\$2,500.00	\$2,034.37	\$2,500.00
		Gift Discernment Committee	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
		Stewardship Committee	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
		Leadership Council	\$2,500.00	\$0.00	\$2,500.00	\$6,310.51	\$3,900.00	\$3,288.03	\$4,000.00
		Annual Meeting Expense	\$12,000.00	\$1,082.81	\$12,000.00	\$19,877.75	\$18,000.00	\$193.76	\$20,000.00
			\$16,700.00	\$1,082.81	\$16,700.00	\$28,563.62	\$24,600.00	\$5,516.16	\$26,700.00
Adminstrative Support Costs									
		*Sabbatical Coverage Escrow				0			
		*Liability Insurance	\$2,500.00	\$2,433.06	\$2,500.00	\$2,802.47	\$2,500.00	\$2,462.80	\$2,500.00
		*Rent	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$2,331.00	\$3,500.00
		Supplies	\$2,500.00	\$1,979.32	\$2,500.00	\$3,216.68	\$3,500.00	\$3,274.41	\$3,500.00
		Equipment	\$2,500.00	\$1,467.97	\$2,500.00	\$3,001.03	\$3,500.00	\$3,380.09	\$3,500.00
		Telecommunications	\$2,750.00	\$3,484.86	\$3,000.00	\$3,476.57	\$3,500.00	\$2,399.50	\$3,000.00
		Postage	\$1,000.00	\$1,137.67	\$1,200.00	\$1,541.52	\$2,000.00	\$1,707.65	\$2,000.00
		*Bookkeeping Services	\$3,277.00	\$3,277.00	\$3,336.00	\$3,376.00	\$3,525.00	\$2,643.75	\$3,807.00
		Staff Travel	\$6,000.00	\$434.98	\$6,000.00	\$5,134.65	\$7,000.00	\$4,652.42	\$7,000.00
		Misc.		\$385.69		\$426.25		\$701.64	\$1,000.00
			\$23,635.00	\$17,708.55	\$24,144.00	\$26,083.17	\$28,633.00	\$23,553.26	\$29,807.00
Personnel									
		*Salaries	\$132,417.76	\$132,417.84	\$135,760.00	\$141,677.63	\$152,871.00	\$112,507.38	\$166,003.00
		*Benefits	\$30,051.54	\$30,319.35	\$32,162.00	\$34,234.50	\$36,815.00	\$26,328.76	\$45,448.00
		*Payroll tax/Worker's Comp	\$5,501.08	\$5,501.17	\$5,502.00	\$6,355.20	\$7,266.00	\$4,778.01	\$7,000.00
			\$167,970.38	\$168,238.36	\$173,424.00	\$182,267.33	\$196,952.00	\$143,614.15	\$218,451.00
Cash Reserves			\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6,000.00	\$4,500.00	\$6,000.00
		Total Expenses	\$237,887.38	\$210,370.75	\$246,180.00	\$264,425.43	\$303,685.00	\$204,008.56	\$328,158.00
		The salary and benefits for the Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith is not included in the spending plan.							
		His salary is covered by the Tending Transformation Campaign.							
				Assoc Minister's Salary		\$10,325.57	\$25,268.93	\$18,951.66	\$27,625.98
				Benefits		\$5,654.74	\$12,592.01	\$9,443.95	\$13,039.64

2024-2025 Slate of Nominees



Position: **Board of Directors,**
Member-at-large
Name: Melissa Florer-Bixler
Congregation: Raleigh Mennonite Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Missional Church Committee**
Name: ***Anton Flores Maisonet
Congregation: Atlanta Mennonite Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Board of Directors,**
Member-at-large
Name: Brian Johnson
Congregation: North Danvers
Mennonite Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: *Kendra Yoder
Congregation: Southside Fellowship
Occupation: Associate Professor of
Sociology, Goshen College



Position: **Ministerial Committee**
Name: *Robin Walton
Congregation: Columbus Mennonite
Congregation
Occupation: Retired Hospital
Chaplain, Manager of
Pastoral Care, Clinical Ethics
consultant (25 yrs)



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: *Evan Miller
Congregation: Open Table Mennonite
Fellowship
Occupation: Spiritual Companion



Position: **Ministerial Committee**
Name: Matthew Yoder
Congregation: Grace Mennonite
Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: Allison Troyer
Congregation: Grand Rapids Mennonite
Fellowship
Occupation: Library Page at Grand Rapids
Public Library; Animal Nutrition
Volunteer at John Ball Zoo



Position: **Missional Church Committee**
Name: ***Elizabeth Kelly
Congregation: First Mennonite Church
Bluffton
Occupation:

* = incumbent
** = Appointed to fill a seat left open by a resignation
mid-term
***First elected term

Jan. 30, 2023

To Central District Conference

This past Fall, St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship came to consensus about our desire to move our conference membership to Central District Conference.

Historically our congregation was part of both Central District Conference and Illinois Mennonite Conference. After the merger to form Mennonite Church USA, our congregation made a decision to belong to only one conference — Illinois Mennonite Conference. This decision was a financial and geographical one.

Our desire to change conferences is centered on the lack of support our congregation has received from IMC over the last six years as IMC has struggled with a number of conference minister changes. The last several years have seen a series of interim ministers and periods with no conference minister at all. As we are now the only MCUSA congregation in our area (and, as far as we know, the state of Missouri), we often feel like we are on a congregational island. We desire the connections and resources of Central District Conference so that we can deepen our relationship with MCUSA.

As we enter a time when the congregation will be beginning a pastoral search process, we recognize our need for consistent support. As IMC is in the midst of their own discernment process, we fear our congregation would not be well-supported. As a congregation that has come to consensus around calling a pastor regardless of sexual orientation, we also want to make sure whomever we call as the next pastor is able to be ordained by our conference. IMC has been examining this question for the past three years, without coming to a place of resolution.

We have been in contact with IMC leadership about this discernment process. They have been very supportive of our process. We are working to find a date for all relevant parties to meet in order to discuss and write a joint letter.

Sincerely,

St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship Governing Board
Rachel Dothager
Michelle Kaufman
Steven P. Miller



**Central
District
Conference**
A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Doug Luginbill
Conference Minister
1015 Division Street
Goshen, IN 46528-2000
confmin@mcusadc.org
574-534-1485

***Knowing
Christ's love...
Answering
God's Call***

February 9, 2023

St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship
3752 Giles Ave,
Saint Louis, MO 63116
Via email to Pastor Jennifer Harris Dault, doveintheattic@gmail.com

Dear friends of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. Through email correspondence and Zoom calls with Pastor Jennifer over the past months, we have been aware of your interest to transfer your affiliation from Illinois Mennonite Conference to Central District Conference. We understand this was a deliberative discernment process which ended in affirmation by the congregation. We are also aware that Illinois Mennonite Conference has been informed of your decision through conference moderator Darrel Miller. We affirm your careful discernment.

We received your formal request to join Central District Conference in a letter dated January 30, 2023. At a CDC board of directors meeting on February 6, the board unanimously and enthusiastically affirmed moving forward with your membership request. This is a two-step process in that you would be introduced to CDC delegates at our June 2023 Annual Meeting and then affirmed by delegates at our June 2024 Annual Meeting.

As one of the 16 conferences of Mennonite Church USA, and as a conference of 45 congregations, we recognize the importance of being connected with other conferences and congregations for support and accountability. We understand the purpose of being a conference is to provide encouragement, share resources, and build mutually beneficial relationships between congregations. We recognize that some within your congregation will already be familiar with Central District Conference since you were part of CDC some years ago. Welcome back!

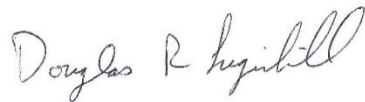
Below are steps that we believe will help foster good process and relationships as we discern together the Spirit's leading.

1. All congregations seeking membership with CDC are expected to be familiar with and support the "[Membership Criteria](#)" of the conference. We would request a letter stating your support of these criteria, preferably by April 1, 2023.

2. We invite you to participate in our Mid-Year gathering at First Mennonite Church, Champaign-Urbana on March 4, 2023. You can find information about that [HERE](#). You are also invited to our Annual Meeting at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN on June 22-24. (The details of this meeting are forthcoming.) At the meeting you will be introduced to the delegates. Either James Rissler, CDC President, or I will contact Pastor Jennifer in the coming weeks to talk more about this.
3. Throughout the year, you are invited to participate fully in CDC activities and events, receive our publications, and interact with our members and leadership as we continue to discern together God's leading toward possible membership.
4. I have already met with your Pastor Search Committee and enjoyed getting to know some of your members.
5. Sometime prior to our June Annual Meeting, I and another board member would like to worship with you, get to know you, and respond to any questions you might have.
6. Assuming continued interest by both St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship and Central District Conference, the delegates at our June 2024 Annual Meeting would vote on membership.

Please don't hesitate to contact us or other CDC leadership when questions arise. May God's grace, wisdom and peace be with you during this season of discernment.

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Douglas R. Luginbill".

Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

James Rissler, President of the CDC Board of Directors



3752 Giles Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63116
Tel: (314) 773-1155
E-mail: stlmenno@gmail.com
Web site: www.slmf.org

(Sent via email to Doug Luginbill, doug@mcusacdc.org)

April 23, 2024

As representatives of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship (SLMF), we write to the Central District Mennonite Conference (CDC) community to reaffirm our congregation's desire to formally join the CDC and to end our membership with the Illinois Mennonite Conference. We wholeheartedly affirm the posted "Membership Criteria" for the Central District Conference. In reference to the separately posted "Central District Conference Polity," we are struck by how the CDC's approach to relating to its member congregations and to the broader denomination is now the prevailing trend within the Mennonite Church USA. We are thrilled to be part of this journey within the conference and denomination.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your help throughout our process of discernment and transition. We have appreciated the chance to fellowship with you here in St. Louis and also at the 2023 CDC Annual Meeting. Your assistance during our pastoral search last year was immensely helpful, and that support has continued during Josh Richardson's first year as SLMF Pastor. We also would like to state our gratitude to the Illinois Mennonite Conference for their graciousness as we changed conferences.

In sum, we have already been welcomed with open arms into CDC, and we look forward to making it official at the 2024 Annual Meeting, where we will send at least one representative. Thank you for helping us to, as our mission statement reads, "be a sign of God's presence in the world and grow stronger together in faith and compassion."

In peace,

SLMF Governing Board:

Michelle Kaufman, Steven P. Miller, and Mary Beth Neufeld-Wall

Pastor Josh Richardson

Knoxville Mennonite Church
4401 Sullivan Road
Knoxville, Tennessee 37921
elders@knoxvillemennonite.org

January 20, 2024

Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister
Central District Conference

Re: Acceptance of Knoxville Mennonite Church as member congregation

The congregation of the Knoxville Mennonite Church has voted to leave the Virginia Mennonite Conference and, by this letter, we request that the Central District Conference accept our congregation as a member.

Our church was established in 1917 by Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Byers and for several years services were held in their home. In 1922 the Virginia Mission Board provided funding for a building in the downtown area. Later, in 1977, the church moved to our current location. We currently have around 45 members, though not all are active, with some having moved away but retaining their membership. On an average Sunday, we have 25-30 people in attendance. The church leadership consists of our pastor, Pat McFarren, and three elders who are elected for 3 year terms. The current elders are Melissa Mink, Judy Mink, and Reuben Budiardja.

Our church has deliberated the decision to separate from Virginia Conference for many years. We believe that God is calling our congregation to be more accepting of members of the LGBTQ+ community. For this reason, we believe that we can more fully reflect that calling as part of the Central District Conference.

Therefore we ask that you accept our congregation as part of the Central District Conference. Thank you very much for your consideration of our request and we ask for your prayerful support in this process.

Very sincerely,

Pat McFarren, Pastor
Melissa Mink, Lead Elder
Judy Mink, Elder
Reuben Budiardja, Elder

Dear Chuck,

Thank you for joining us on June 11, 2023, and sharing in our journey as we discern where the Lord wants us to be within MC-USA. This discussion, as well as the one we shared with you on November 20, 2022, was very helpful. In response to those meetings, please regard this email as the official request from Knoxville Mennonite Church to move our conference membership from Virginia Mennonite Conference to the Central District Conference.

As we have shared, KMC has deliberated this decision to move from Virginia Conference for many years. We are aware that our understanding of the role of women in Christian ministry differs from that of many other congregations in VMC. We also believe that God is calling our congregation to be more accepting of members of the LGBTQ+ community than is the case for many congregations in the Conference. Though we treasure our history and continuing relationships with members of TCKD and VMC, we believe the conference does not accurately represent our understanding of the inclusion of women in church ministries and of our brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ+ community in the full life of the church.

Therefore we ask that you please submit our request to the TCKD and VMC and keep us informed as this process moves forward.

Very sincerely,

Melissa Mink
Lead elder at Knoxville Mennonite Church



**Central
District
Conference**
A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Doug Luginbill
Conference Minister
1015 Division Street
Goshen, IN 46528-2000
confmin@mcusacdc.org
574-534-1485

***Knowing
Christ's love...
Answering
God's Call***

February 5, 2024

Knoxville Mennonite Church
c/o Melissa Mink; mmink3@gmail.com

Dear friends of Knoxville Mennonite Church,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. In June of 2023 I had conversations with Melissa Mink and Chuck Hostetter (Virginia Mennonite Conference District Minister) regarding your exploration of transferring your membership from Virginia Mennonite Conference to Central District Conference (CDC). On January 11, 2024 I received word from Melissa that your congregation was officially seeking membership with CDC. I had email communication with Chuck Hostetter and also with Michael Danner and Glen Guyton of Mennonite Church USA regarding your desire to transfer membership. On January 22, Jan Luginbill, our CDC board president and I met with your Elders via Zoom to learn more about your discernment and your reasons for making this transition.

We received your formal request to join Central District Conference in a letter dated January 20, 2024. At a CDC board of directors meeting on February 2, the board unanimously affirmed moving forward with your membership request.

As one of the 15 conferences of Mennonite Church USA, and as a conference of 46 congregations, we recognize the importance of being connected with other conferences and congregations for support and accountability. We understand the purpose of being a conference is to provide support, share resources, and build mutually beneficial relationships between congregations.

Below are steps that we believe will help foster good process and relationships as we discern together the Spirit's leading.

1. All congregations seeking membership with CDC are expected to be familiar with and support the ["Membership Criteria"](#) of the conference. A letter affirming your support of the Membership Criteria must be received prior to full membership in CDC.
2. We invite you to participate in our Annual Meeting at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN, June 20-22, 2024. At the meeting you will be introduced to the delegates. Either Jan Luginbill or I will contact Melissa in the coming weeks to talk more about this. You will have ten minutes to tell us about your

congregation, briefly describe your discernment process and reasons for wanting to join CDC.

3. Our CDC board of directors recently approved creating a Provisional Membership category for congregations seeking to join CDC. This needs to be approved by our delegates at this year's Annual Meeting. We are quite confident that delegates will affirm this recommendation. Thus, when you are released from Virginia Mennonite Conference in July, 2024, you will be recognized as a Provisional Member of CDC which allows you to continue membership in MC USA and allows us to receive the credentials of your pastor.
4. Prior to April 1, 2025 you may request full membership in CDC. Should you choose to do so, the delegates at our June 2025 Annual Meeting would be informed of your desire to join as full members. Then, at our June 2026 Annual Meeting, delegates would be asked to affirm welcoming you as full members.
5. As Provisional Members, you are invited to participate fully in CDC activities and events, utilize our resources and support, receive our publications, interact with our members and leadership as we continue to discern together God's leading toward possible membership. The only restriction is that only full members are able to vote on decisions brought to the delegates.
6. Our CDC ministerial committee will be in conversation with Pastor Pat McFarren regarding the transfer of his credential and expectations of CDC pastors. Please let us know if there are other credentialed persons in your congregation.

Please don't hesitate to contact us or other CDC leadership when questions arise. May God's grace, wisdom and peace be with you during this season of discernment.

In Christ's love,



Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

Jan Luginbuhl, DL

Jan Luginbuhl, CDC President

January 29, 2024

Dear Central District Conference Board of Directors:

On behalf of our fellowship, we are requesting to join Central District Conference. From the beginning, we have desired to belong to a Mennonite Conference and ultimately Mennonite Church USA. Our process of arriving at this decision included inviting Doug Luginbill to speak at PEACE Mennonite Fellowship, with a question and answer time following. We had similar discussions with Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. After this, we polled the fellowship and found the majority preferred to join CDC, which was then confirmed by an affirmation poll.

PEACE Mennonite is a conglomeration of people from many different congregations in the area who wanted to be a part of an affirming church. The group began meeting in June of 2023 and quickly grew to approximately 75 people associating themselves with PEACE Mennonite Fellowship, with an average worship service attendance of 80 people. Because of the size of the group, a Steering Committee was formed and tasked with beginning the process of leading the fellowship. In the fall, the Steering Committee recommended that Dave Elkins be brought on as the fellowship's ministry leader, a role which allows him to organize worship each Sunday, provide pastoral care as needed, and give shape to the first hour discussion groups, among other things.

While a worship planning team has been in place from the beginning, we also have recently formed a Finance Team, which is handling the fellowship's budget, and a Discovery Team, which will be discovering what leadership should look like in the future of PEACE.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our fellowship, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

PEACE Mennonite Fellowship's Steering Committee

Gabe Beck, Kerry Beck, Dee Custar, David Elkins, Ken Gruenhagen, Stacy Lehman, Marla Miller, Kent Nafziger, Jen Nichols, Denton Yoder



**Central
District
Conference**
A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Doug Luginbill
Conference Minister
1015 Division Street
Goshen, IN 46528-2000
confmin@mcusacdc.org
574-534-1485

***Knowing
Christ's love...
Answering
God's Call***

February 5, 2024

PEACE Mennonite Fellowship
c/o Stacy Lehman, raymlynn.2011@gmail.com

Dear friends of PEACE Mennonite Fellowship,

Greetings to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. In June of 2023 I had conversations with Sheila Gruenhagen regarding your emerging community of faith and the possibility of joining Central District Conference as a new congregation. Over the next several months I had conversations with others from the congregation. On November 19, 2023 I worshipped with your congregation. I shared a message, talked about Central District Conference, and responded to questions. On January 22, 2024 I received word from Stacy Lehman that your congregation was officially seeking membership with CDC.

We received your formal request to join Central District Conference in a letter dated January 29, 2024. At a CDC board of directors meeting on February 2, the board unanimously affirmed moving forward with your membership request.

As one of the 15 conferences of Mennonite Church USA, and as a conference of 46 congregations, we recognize the importance of being connected with other conferences and congregations for support and accountability. We understand the purpose of being a conference is to provide support, share resources, and build mutually beneficial relationships between congregations.

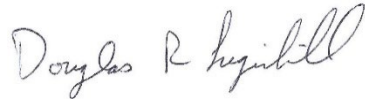
Below are steps that we believe will help foster good process and relationships as we discern together the Spirit's leading.

1. All congregations seeking membership with CDC are expected to be familiar with and support the "[Membership Criteria](#)" of the conference. A letter affirming your support of the Membership Criteria must be received prior to full membership in CDC.
2. We invite you to participate in our Annual Meeting at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN, June 20-22, 2024. At the meeting you will be introduced to the delegates. Either Jan Luginbill or I will contact Melissa in the coming weeks to talk more about this. You will have ten minutes to tell us about your congregation, briefly describe your discernment process and reasons for wanting to join CDC.

3. Our CDC board of directors recently approved creating a Provisional Membership category for congregations seeking to join CDC. This needs to be approved by our delegates at this year's Annual Meeting. We are quite confident that delegates will affirm this recommendation. Thus, on June 22 you will be recognized as a Provisional Member of CDC which allows you to be recognized as a congregation of MC USA and allows us to receive the credentials of anyone in your congregation who is ordained in MC USA.
4. Prior to April 1, 2025 you may request full membership in CDC. Should you choose to do so, the delegates at our June 2025 Annual Meeting would be informed of your desire to join as full members. Then, at our June 2026 Annual Meeting, delegates would be asked to affirm welcoming you as full members.
5. As Provisional Members, you are invited to participate fully in CDC activities and events, utilize our resources and support, receive our publications, interact with our members and leadership as we continue to discern together God's leading toward possible membership. The only restriction is that only full members are able to vote on decisions brought to the delegates.
6. Our CDC ministerial committee will be in conversation with your credentialed persons regarding the transfer of credentials and expectations of CDC pastors. Please let us know who these credentialed persons are your congregation.

Please don't hesitate to contact us or other CDC leadership when questions arise.
May God's grace, wisdom and peace be with you during this season of discernment.

In Christ's love,



Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

Jan Luginbuhl, DL

Jan Luginbuhl, CDC President

Constitution

Article III, Section B: Application for membership

Congregations attain Full Membership upon Conference delegate approval of the Board of Directors' recommendation. Congregations may attain Provisional Membership upon approval of the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors shall establish policies and procedures for congregations to attain membership in the conference.

Policies and Procedures

Communities of Faith Joining CDC

A. For Congregations Already Part of an MC USA Conference

1. Congregations which are members of another MC USA conference are expected to follow the process for changing conferences as outlined by MC USA leadership.
2. Congregations requesting membership with Central District Conference shall submit a written request to the CDC Board of Directors to begin the membership process. A congregation which has requested to join the Conference, has met membership criteria, and has been visited by a Conference representative(s) may be introduced by the Board of Directors to the Conference at an Annual Meeting. Congregations whose requests are received 120 days prior to the forthcoming Annual Meeting may be introduced at that Annual Meeting. Upon mutual agreement by the requesting congregation and the Board of Directors, the congregation will be presented to the delegates for affirmation of membership at the Annual Meeting following the year in which they were introduced. During the period between introduction and a delegate decision to affirm membership, the congregation is able and encouraged to participate fully in all conference activities except voting privileges.

B. Congregations Which Are Not Part of an MC USA Conference

1. A congregation or emerging community which is not part of an MC USA conference may apply at any time to join the Conference as a Provisional Member. Congregations or emerging communities attain provisional membership upon approval of the Board of Directors. Provisional Members must be working towards fulfilling the membership criteria. Provisional membership expires as of July 1 of each year and may be renewed for the following year by the Board of Directors prior to expiration. Provisional Members are encouraged to participate in conference activities but do not have voting privileges. Provisional Members derive membership in Mennonite Church USA and may apply for full membership in CDC following the process described in A.2 above.
2. A group which desires to relate to the Conference, but does not yet meet the membership requirements, or does not desire congregational status, is encouraged to participate in conference activities, but does not have voting privileges.

Membership Criteria (already part of the Policies and Procedures)

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



Part II

Conference Financial and Staff Reports

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE
Balance Sheet
As of April 30, 2024

Checking	393,876.53
Savings	142,582.21
	<hr/>
	536,458.74
Undeposited Funds	95.52
Prepaid expenses	502.47
Missional Fund	184,589.97
	<hr/>
	185,187.96
	<hr/>
	721,646.70
	<hr/>
	721,646.70
	<hr/>
Accounts Payable	-1,280.08
Other Agency Transfer	18,064.60
Other Current Liabilities	5,302.01
Funds/Escrows	
General Assembly Escrow	5,892.17
Cash Reserve Escrow	128,743.39
Conference Minister's Sabbatical Escrow	13,343.74
Ministry Inquiry Program	319.75
Missional Church Committee	18,027.57
Leadership Development	21,900.65
Emerging Communities of Faith	92,878.51
Tending Transformation New Hire	15,187.68
Jubilee Fund	1,522.56
Transitional Pastors Sabbatical	11,114.27
Reign of God Grant	2,992.00
Surplus Reserve Fund	22,611.30
Missional Committee Grants	15,093.20
Healthy Boundaries	1,049.76
Moveable Fest Escrow	8,000.00
Celtic Pilgrimage	35,275.50
	<hr/>
Total Current Liabilities	416,038.58
	<hr/>
	416,038.58
Equity	
Net income	95,922.18
Total Equity	305,608.12
	<hr/>
Total Liability and Equity	721,646.70

Central District Conference
Income and Expense Statement
As of April 30, 2024

	Actual 2023-2024 thru April 30 (10 months)	SP 2023-2024 thru April 30 (10 months)	SP 2023-2024 (12 months)	Actual 2022-2023 12 months	SP 2022-2023 (12 months)
INCOME					
Congregational Giving	\$210,318.18	\$189,956.68	\$227,948.00	\$217,077.63	\$211,111.00
Annual Meeting Registration/Offering	\$0.00	\$16,250.02	\$17,500.00	\$17,987.50	\$12,000.00
Annual Meeting Donations: Memorial/G	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,150.00	\$3,000.00
Additional Funding	\$31,435.00	\$41,666.68	\$50,000.00	\$42,227.00	\$45,000.00
Bequests/In-kind donations	\$890.00	\$0.00		\$0.00	
Earned/Interest income	\$6,490.14	\$5,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,513.95	\$6,000.00
Miscellaneous income	\$1,745.23	\$197.50	\$237.00	\$2,303.18	\$1,266.00
Total	\$250,878.55	\$253,070.88	\$303,685.00	\$287,259.26	\$278,377.00
EXPENDITURES					
Direct Congregational Services/Networking					
Missional Church Committee	\$1,214.37	\$1,666.68	\$2,000.00	\$1,040.40	\$2,000.00
Ministerial Committee	\$3,365.89	\$4,500.00	\$5,400.00	\$4,571.03	\$7,500.00
Historian/*Archives	\$0.00	\$3,500.00	\$4,200.00	\$3,548.56	\$4,200.00
Publications	\$3,714.56	\$4,166.68	\$5,000.00	\$3,111.54	\$5,000.00
Communications Coordinator	\$16,666.70	\$16,666.68	\$20,000.00	\$1,495.78	\$5,983.00
Mid-YearGatherings	\$0.00	\$833.34	\$1,000.00	\$1,142.01	\$1,000.00
	\$24,961.52	\$31,333.38	\$37,600.00	\$14,909.32	\$25,683.00
Denominational Relations					
Mid-States	\$63.93	\$83.34	\$100.00	\$66.06	\$0.00
*General Assembly Delegate Escrow	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00
Denominational Meetings	\$2,859.89	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$1,358.86	\$2,500.00
Constituency Leaders Council	\$971.43	\$4,166.68	\$5,000.00	\$2,710.39	\$5,000.00
	\$5,395.25	\$8,250.02	\$9,900.00	\$5,935.31	\$9,300.00
Conference Leadership/Administration					
Board of Directors Meetings	\$2,034.37	\$2,083.34	\$2,500.00	\$2,375.36	\$2,000.00
Gift Discernment Committee	\$0.00	\$83.34	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
Stewardship Committee	\$0.00	\$83.34	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
Leadership Council	\$3,570.18	\$2,500.00	\$3,900.00	\$6,310.51	\$2,500.00
Annual Meeting Expense	\$193.78	\$15,000.00	\$18,000.00	\$19,877.75	\$12,000.00
	\$5,798.33	\$19,750.02	\$24,600.00	\$28,563.62	\$16,700.00
Adminstrative Support Costs					
*Sabbatical Coverage Escrow					
*Liability Insurance	\$2,747.80	\$2,083.34	\$2,500.00	\$2,802.47	\$2,500.00
*Rent	\$2,849.00	\$2,590.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00
Supplies	\$3,715.28	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$3,216.68	\$3,500.00
Equipment	\$3,408.59	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$3,001.03	\$3,500.00
Telecommunications	\$2,468.17	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$3,476.57	\$3,000.00
Postage	\$1,727.64	\$1,666.68	\$2,000.00	\$1,541.52	\$1,500.00
*Bookkeeping Services	\$2,937.50	\$2,937.50	\$3,525.00	\$3,376.00	\$3,376.00
Staff Travel	\$5,003.57	\$5,833.34	\$7,000.00	\$5,134.65	\$9,000.00
Misc.	\$1,108.39	\$0.00		\$426.25	
	\$25,965.94	\$23,860.90	\$28,633.00	\$26,083.17	\$29,484.00
Personnel					
*Salaries	\$125,008.20	\$125,008.28	\$152,871.00	\$141,677.63	\$141,677.45
*Fringe	\$28,031.89	\$30,679.43	\$36,815.00	\$34,234.50	\$33,824.76
*Payroll tax/Workman's Comp	\$5,309.62	\$5,294.60	\$7,266.00	\$6,011.33	\$6,355.20
	\$158,349.71	\$160,982.31	\$196,952.00	\$181,923.46	\$181,857.41
Cash Reserves					
	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total	\$225,470.75	\$249,176.63	\$303,685.00	\$257,414.88	\$263,024.41

Tending Transformation Campaign	Over 3 years	Per Year
Total	\$ 350,000.00	\$ 116,667.00
Emerging Communities (50%)	\$ 175,000.00	\$ 58,333.00
Staff (30%)	\$ 105,000.00	\$ 35,000.00
Leadership Development (10%)	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 11,667.00
Missional Activities (10%)	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 11,667.00
	<u>\$ 350,000.00</u>	<u>\$ 116,667.00</u>

Other Income	21-22	22-23 Actual	22-23 SP	Actual/ SP Comp	23-24 YTD Actual	23-24 SP	Total TT (inc 21-22 donations)	24-25 SP Year 3
5200 - Campaign Donations	52,565.00	155,785.06	116,667.00	39,118.06	70,550.00	116,677.00		
Total Campaign Donations	<u>52,565.00</u>	<u>155,785.06</u>	<u>116,667.00</u>	<u>39,118.06</u>	<u>70,550.00</u>	<u>116,677.00</u>	278,900.06	
TENDING TRANSFORMATION ALLOCATIONS								
Emerging Communities of Faith	26,282.50	77,892.53	58,333.00	19,559.53	35,275.00	58,333.00	139,450.03	58,333.00
Missional Activities	5,256.50	15,578.51	11,667.00	3,911.51	7,055.00	11,667.00	27,890.01	11,667.00
Leadership Development	5,256.50	15,578.51	11,667.00	3,911.51	7,055.00	11,667.00	27,890.01	11,667.00
Associate Conference Minister	15,769.50	46,735.52	35,000.00	11,735.52	21,165.00	35,000.00	83,670.02	35,000.00
Total TENDING TRANSFORMATION ALLOCAT	<u>52,565.00</u>	<u>155,785.06</u>	<u>116,667.00</u>	<u>39,118.06</u>	<u>77,548.94</u>	<u>116,667.00</u>	<u>278,900.06</u>	<u>116,667.00</u>
Other Expense								
7400 - Campaign Expenses	457.43	55.04			49.80			
Total Campaign Expenses	<u>457.43</u>	<u>55.04</u>			<u>49.80</u>		<u>562.27</u>	
Net Campaign Income		155,730.02			70,500.20		278,337.79	

Campaign Allocation Detail	Beg Bal 2022	2022-2023 YTD	2022-2023 YTD IN	2022-2023 YTD OUT	2023-2024 YTD	2023-2024 YTD IN	2023-2024 YTD OUT
2109 · Leadership Development	9,877.73	26,900.65	25,775.01	8,752.09	21,900.65	-	5,060.00
2147 · Missional Ch Committee	-	17,027.67	20,835.01	3,807.44	18,027.67	1,000.00	0.00
2174 · Emerging Communities of Faith	9,000.00	113,425.03	104,125.03	-	92,878.51	-	20,546.52
2175 · TT New Hire (Assoc Conf Min)	-	46,527.70	62,325.01	15,977.31	15,187.68	-	31,340.02

Central District Conference Congregational Contributions

Number of giving units (as reported in 2023) is in parentheses

*Dual Conference Congregations

Congregations	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
	As of 4/30/24 10 months	12 months	12 months	12 months
Agora*			\$0.00	\$0.00
Americus (13)	\$900.00	\$1,225.00	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00
Ames (closed)		\$150.00	\$250.00	\$150.00
Ann Arbor*		\$500.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
Asian Mennonite Community			\$1,000.00	\$0.00
Assembly (122)	\$19,875.00	\$11,227.50	\$6,352.50	\$8,470.00
Atlanta (18)	\$4,179.98	\$4,845.40	\$3,136.08	\$2,106.18
Berea (now Atlanta Mennonite Church)			\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Chapel Hill (20)		\$2,000.00	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00
Chicago Community (25)	\$4,000.00		\$5,000.00	\$10,000.00
Cincinnati (33)	\$6,450.00	\$8,308.00	\$9,290.00	\$5,336.00
Columbus (120)	\$17,918.00	\$16,934.00	\$16,295.00	\$16,271.00
Community Mennonite*(9)		\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Covenant (59)	\$10,000.00	\$9,000.00	\$8,500.00	\$6,000.00
Eighth Street (93)	\$15,777.12	\$20,465.30	\$24,666.50	\$19,169.23
Emmanuel (13)	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,400.00	\$2,000.00
Emmaus Road (24)	\$2,730.00	\$3,640.00	\$3,185.00	\$1,820.00
Evanston* (8)	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
Faith (27)	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
First, Bluffton (123)	\$18,000.00	\$21,296.61	\$17,148.00	\$17,144.00
First, Chicago			\$0.00	\$0.00
First, Sugarcreek (9)	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
First, Urbana* (62)	\$8,750.00	\$6,750.00	\$6,500.00	\$6,500.00
First, Wadsworth (20)	\$800.00	\$300.00	\$800.00	\$650.00
Florence (21)		\$1,400.00	\$1,400.00	\$1,400.00
Grace Mennonite (35)	\$9,750.00	\$8,347.50	\$8,130.00	\$6,097.50
Grand Rapids	\$80.00			
Hively Avenue (33)	\$6,000.00	\$6,900.00	\$7,150.00	\$6,600.00
Joy Fellowship*			\$0.00	\$0.00
Jubilee (5)	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00	\$1,350.00
Keller Park (20)	\$1,500.00	\$4,000.00		
Lima* (15)	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$1,500.00	\$3,750.00
Madison (45)	\$8,000.00	\$7,750.00	\$7,500.00	\$7,500.00
Maplewood (32)	\$962.50	\$1,250.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Mennonite Church of Normal* (90)	\$16,549.08	\$15,999.99	\$14,783.52	\$15,341.01

Congregations	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
	As of 4/30/24			
	10 months	12 months	12 months	12 months
Milwaukee (10)			\$0.00	\$0.00
Morning Star*			\$0.00	\$0.00
North Danvers (50)		\$2,025.00	\$470.00	\$445.00
Oak Grove* (82)	\$5,565.50	\$5,225.00	\$9,175.00	\$12,312.50
Open Table Mennonite Fellowship (13)	\$800.00	\$995.00	\$0.00	\$1,607.00
Paoli* (25)	\$6,360.00	\$5,299.33	\$4,116.00	\$4,032.96
Raleigh (40)	\$2,430.00	\$5,100.00	\$5,000.00	\$6,440.00
Shalom Community (33)	\$1,650.00	\$6,750.00	\$3,850.00	\$1,650.00
Shalom Mennonite Congregation (73)	\$12,871.00	\$5,724.00	\$6,950.00	\$5,791.00
Silverwood (74)	\$11,250.00	\$13,500.00	\$9,750.00	\$10,500.00
Southside (31)	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$2,500.00	\$8,000.00
St Louis	\$500.00			
St Paul (6)	\$670.00	\$670.00	\$600.00	\$600.00
Trenton (33)- withdrew			\$500.00	\$1,000.00
Total	\$210,318.18	\$217,077.63	\$201,797.60	\$200,933.38



Conference Minister's Report 2024

Listen! Wisdom is calling. This is the theme carrying us through our 2025 Annual Meeting. The theme is inspired by Proverbs 8:1 (Does not wisdom call and does not understanding raise her voice?) and Ephesians 3:10 (Through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.) Wisdom (Chochmah in Hebrew and Sophia in Greek) is always personified as female. She hovered over creation from its beginning, an eternal partner with God. She is a collaborative relationship builder. Sophia bears the fruits of wisdom, love, justice, purity, and peace. She arises most prominently during seasons of confusion, exile, loss, and disillusionment. She is both mystery and enlightenment. Jesus identifies himself with Sophia most directly in Matthew 11:18-19, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Paul declares in I Cor. 1:30, "God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God..."

In this season of political polarization, climate crisis, destructive war, growing nationalism, institutional skepticism, and shifting understandings of the church, how are you experiencing Sophia? Does God still entrust Divine wisdom to the church? As Anabaptists approach our 500th year, have we lost our way? Or is Sophia hovering above us and among us, guiding us in creative ways to live into the beloved community of God?

I am grateful for the wisdom of our CDC staff; Emma, Beth, Sarah, and Matt. I experience wisdom among our Leadership Council. I am inspired by the wisdom of our pastors, lay leaders, and parishioners as I visit our congregations. As Matt likes to say, "It is a great time to be a Mennonite!" This is not a hurrah to exceptionalism but a testament to a way of being church that is welcoming, affirms the face of God in all people, believes in the way of peace, and seeks to "answer God's persistent call to share love with one another and the world." (CDC Mission)

We are experiencing wisdom as we welcome St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship as a member congregation and as we welcome Peace Mennonite Fellowship and Knoxville Mennonite Church as Provisional Members. (Provisional Membership is a new category that we invite delegates to affirm.) We are welcoming wisdom as we get to know new pastors, chaplains, and other credentialed leaders.

We are finding wisdom as we reflect on the Civil Rights Learning Tour that took place in May. We are seeking wisdom through a conference-wide book study, worship series, quarterly spiritual retreats, and an Our Whole Lives human sexuality curriculum training.

We are seeking wisdom as five congregations remain in pastoral search. This is the lowest number of churches in pastoral search in several years. Praise God for calling and blessing pastors to serve in leadership. At the same time, all of us are called to name, encourage, and bless others with gifts for ministry among us. Sophia will walk with them and with us!

We all know that God's church is broken and beautiful. Some people are hurt even as others find healing. I look forward to listening to Carol Penner and Sibonokuhle Ncube as they share their wisdom with us in worship and conversation. May we be brave in our sharing, courageous in our caring, sincere in our confessing, and joyful in our worshipping. For we are 45 and soon to be 48, parts of the body of Christ, the wisdom of God.



Associate Conference Minister's Report 2024

My weeks are filled with joy! Hearing the incredible acts of peace, justice and inclusion undertaken by congregations of Central District Conference, both emerging and established has been encouraging and energizing. God is good!

Building a Network of Thriving Emerging Communities of Peace

As the Associate Conference Minister in CDC (working $\frac{1}{3}$ time or about 15 hours a week), I support emerging faith communities and aid existing congregations seeking revitalization. Over the past year, my focus has been on developing relationships, structures and processes to nurture emerging communities aligned with CDC's vision "to answer God's persistent call to share that love with one another and the world." This work has included:

- **Growing Network:** Cultivating relationships and resourcing several emerging communities including:
 - Moveable Feast (Chicago, IL)
 - Olentangy Wild Church (Columbus, OH)
 - The Intention Church (Online)
 - Imagine Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH)
 - Ministerio Jehová Luz y Esperanza (Atlanta, GA)
 - Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (Grand Rapids, MI)
 - PEACE Mennonite Fellowship (Archbold, OH)
- **Expanded Support:** Launching a monthly pastor peer gathering to foster collaboration and connection among leaders of emerging communities.
- **Financial Assistance:** Missional Church Committee awarded \$41,500 in grants to emerging communities, enabling them to strengthen and expand their presence and mission.
- **Resource Development:** Creating resources for emerging communities including guides for naming emerging communities, insurance and community engagement.
- **Standardized Practices:** Developing policies and procedures for areas like financial management, grant applications, child safety, and onboarding/developing emerging communities and their leaders.
- **Collaboration:** Expanding partnerships and exploring collaboration opportunities with others in and beyond Mennonite Church USA including a monthly gathering of conference ministers focused on church planting and helping design new training with Mennonite Mission Network.
- **Established Community Revitalization:** Consulting with several established churches seeking opportunities and resources for revitalization.

Central District Conference is making significant progress in its mission to cultivate a vibrant network of emerging "communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world!"

Ministerial Credential Report

June 1, 2023 – May 31, 2024

ORDINATIONS

- *Sarah Werner, Columbus Mennonite Church, Ordained, September 17, 2023 by Doug Luginbill
- *David Cramer, Keller Park Church, Ordained, October 29, 2023 by Doug Luginbill
- *Diogenes Arauz, Ministerio Jehova Luz y Esperanza, Atlanta, Georgia, (licensing toward the recognition of his ordination), Jan 21, 2024 by Matt Pritchard
- *Timothy Peebles, Chicago Community Mennonite Church, Jan 21, 2024, by Doug Luginbill
- *César Moya, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Feb 4, 2024 by Doug Luginbill

LICENSINGS

- *Daryl Turley, Licensed Toward Ordination (chaplain), Columbus Mennonite Church, Columbus, Ohio, June 4, 2023 by Doug Luginbill
- *Tim Peebles, Licensed Toward Ordination, Chicago Community Mennonite Church, Chicago, Illinois, June 11, 2023, by Doug Luginbill
- *Ben Kreider, Licensed Toward Ordination, Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, Sept 3, 2023, began Aug 15, 2023
- *Joshua Richardson, Licensed Toward Ordination, St Louis Mennonite Fellowship, Oct 22, 2023, began Sept 1
- *Carrie Mast, Licensed Toward Ordination, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio, Oct 1, 2023
- *Chaska Yoder, Licensed Toward Ordination, First Mennonite Bluffton, Chaplain at Mercy Health Systems, Lima, Ohio, Nov 5, 2023
- *David Shenk, Licensed Toward Ordination, Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite, Dec 3, 2023
- *Sibonokuhle Ncube, Licensed Toward Ordination, Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Jan 7, 2024 co-director for Africa and Europe, MMN
- *Ana Loreda, Licensed Toward Ordination, Ministerio Jehova Luz Y Esperanza, Atlanta, Georgia, Jan 21, 2024

CREDENTIAL TRANSFERS

- *Bruce Martin, Shalom Community Church (Waynesboro Mennonite Church), to Virginia Conference, August 28, 2023
- *Jewel Martin, Shalom Community Church (Waynesboro Mennonite Church), to Virginia Conference, August 28, 2023

INSTALLATIONS

- *Pratik Bagh, Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, .5FTE Pastor, began July 1, 2023, installed Aug 20, 2023
- *Conrad Mast, Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, .5 FTE Pastor, began Aug 14, 2023, installed Aug 20, 2023
- *Ben Kreider, Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, began Aug 15, 2023, installed Sept 3, 2023
- *Carrie Mast, First Mennonite Bluffton, Associate Pastor, Oct 1, 2023
- *Joshua Richardson, St Louis Mennonite Fellowship, Pastor, Oct 22, 2023
- *David Shenk, Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite, Dec 3, 2023
- *César Moya, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, began Jan 1, 2024, installed Feb 4, 2024

CHANGE OF CREDENTIAL

- *Keith Schrag, Retired, recredentialed, June 23, 2023
- *Debbie Bledsoe, Southside Fellowship, from license toward ordination to withdrawn, July 30, 2023

- *Alison Casella Brookins, Sisters of Charity Hospital, from active without charge to active, Aug 15, 2023
- *Michael Gehman, First Mennonite Church Sugarcreek, license toward ordination changed to license for specific ministry, Aug 31, 2023
- *Sandra Miller, Silverwood Mennonite Church from active to active without charge, August 31, 2023
- *Dennis Wagner, Trenton Mennonite Church, from retired to withdrawn, August 31, 2023
- *Libby Caes, Madison Mennonite Church, inactive to withdrawn, August 31, 2023
- *Tim Stair, Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, active to active without charge, August 31, 2023
- *Loren Johns, Southside Fellowship, active without charge to retired, August 31, 2023
- *Susannah Griffith, Keller Park Church, license toward ordination terminated, September 25, 2023
- *Devon Miller, Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite, license toward ordination, expired Oct 19, 2023
- *Peter Janzen, Maplewood Mennonite, ordination withdrawn. Peter accepted a pastorate at First Baptist Church, Ft. Wayne, IN on December 17, 2023.
- *James Rissler, Emmaunel Mennonite Church, active to active without charge, Feb 4, 2024
- *Georgia Metz, Shalom Mennonite Congregation, license toward ordination extended thru December 31, 2025, April 4, 2024
- *Theda Good, from active without charge to inactive
- *Doug Zehr, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, from active to active without charge, May 13, 2024
- *Miriam Zehr, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, from active to active without charge, May 13, 2024

RESIGNATIONS

- *Peter Martin, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, June 30, 2023
- *Debbie Bledsoe, Southside Fellowship, July 30, 2023
- *Susannah Griffith, Keller Park Church, September 25, 2023
- *Doug Zehr, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, May 13, 2024
- *Miriam Zehr, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, May 13, 2024

ANNIVERSARIES / SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL EVENTS

- *Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 40 year anniversary, May 27-28, 2023

INTERIM / TRANSITIONAL PASTORS

RETIREMENTS

- *Gary Martin, Faith Mennonite Church, Transitional Pastor, October 31, 2023
- *Arlen Epp, Southside Fellowship, December 31, 2023

DEATHS

- *Chibuzor Ozor, Ann Arbor Mennonite Church, July 31, 2023
- *Ernest Porzelius, First Mennonite Church Bluffton, October 13, 2023
- *Leonard Wiebe, Eighth Street Mennonite Church, April 3, 2024

CONGREGATIONAL TRANSITIONS

In Search Processes

Atlanta Mennonite Church
 Community Mennonite Church
 Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship
 Keller Park Church
 Mennonite Church of Normal

Locations of Central District Conference Annual Sessions

1957	First Mennonite Church, Normal, Illinois
1958	First Mennonite Church and Founders Hall, Bluffton, Ohio
1959	Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
1960	First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana
1961	Calvary Mennonite Church, Washington, Illinois
1962	Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio
1963	Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa
1964	Salem Mennonite Church, Kidron, Ohio
1965	First Mennonite Church, Normal, Illinois
1966	Fairview Mennonite Church (OM), Fairview, Michigan
1967	First Church of the Nazarene and Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana
1968	First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth, Ohio
1969	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
1970	East Bay Camp, Lake Bloomington, Illinois
1971	First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana
1972	Camp Windermere, Lake of the Ozarks, Roach, Missouri
1973	Goshen College Campus, Goshen, Indiana
1974	East Bay Camp, Bloomington, Illinois
1975	Ottumwa, Iowa
1976	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
1977	Calvary Mennonite Church, Washington, Illinois
1978	First Brethren Church, Wooster, Ohio
1979	Maplewood Mennonite Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
1980	First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana
1981	Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois (Joint with Illinois Mennonite Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1982	First Mennonite Church (MC), Middlebury, Indiana
1983	Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio
1984	Kidron Mennonite Church (MC), Kidron, Ohio (Joint with Ohio Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1985	Wayland Mennonite Church, Wayland, Iowa
1986	Calvary Mennonite Church, Washington, Illinois
1987	College Mennonite Church (MC), Goshen, Indiana (Joint with Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1988	Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio
1989	Camp Windermere, Lake of the Ozarks, Roach, Missouri
1990	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
1991	Summit Christian College, Fort Wayne, Indiana (Joint with Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1992	Fairview Mennonite Church (MC), Fairview, Michigan
1993	Trinity Mennonite Church (MC), Morton, Illinois (Joint with Illinois Mennonite Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1994	College Mennonite Church (MC), Goshen, Indiana
1995	Mennonite Church of Normal, Normal, Illinois
1996	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio (Joint with Ohio Conference of the Mennonite Church)
1997	First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana
1998	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
1999	Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt Pleasant, Iowa
2000	Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana (Joint with Illinois Mennonite Conference, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, and Ohio)

	Conference of the Mennonite Church)
2001	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
2002	Meadows Mennonite Church, Chenoa, Illinois
2003	Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio
2004	Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio
2005	Maplewood Mennonite Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
2006	Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio
2007	First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana
2008	Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois
2009	First Mennonite Church, Sugarcreek, Ohio
2010	Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio
2011	Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
2012	Mennonite Church of Normal
2013	Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio
2014	Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, Wisconsin
2015	Southside Fellowship (on AMBS campus)
2016	Columbus Mennonite Church, Columbus, Ohio
2017	Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio
2018	College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
2019	Milwaukee Mennonite Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
2020	Via Zoom
2021	Via Zoom
2022	Goshen College, College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
2023	Goshen College, College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
2024	Goshen College, College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana

Conference Presidents, 1957-2024

1957-	Lotus E Troyer	2001-2003	Kevin Farmwald
1958	Ernest J Bohn	2003-2005	Mick Sommers
1959-1960	Harry Yoder	2005-2007	Alice Roth
1961-1962	Gordon J Neuenschwander	2007-2009	Gordon Oyer
1963-1964	Jacob T Friesen	2009-2011	Karl Shelly
1965-1966	Lorris A Habegger	2011-2013	Joyce Schumacher
1967-1968	Claude F Boyer	2013-2015	Ron Guengerich
1969-1970	Leonard Wiebe	2015-2017	Lisa Weaver
1971-1973	Larry Voth	2017-2019	Arman Habegger
1974	Lloyd L Ramseyer	2019-2021	Anna Yoder Schlabach
1975-1976	Howard Raid	2021-2023	James Rissler
1977-1978	James Dunn	2023-	Jan Lugibihl
1979-1980	Roger Siebert		
1981-1984	James Waltner		
1985-1986	Vyron Schmidt		
1987-1988	Howard Baumgartner		
1989-1991	Ruth Naylor		
1991-1993	Jake Elias		
1993-1995	Barry Schmell		
1995-1997	Larry Wilson		
1997-1999	Stan Clemens		
1999-2001	Janeen Bertsche Johnson		

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA

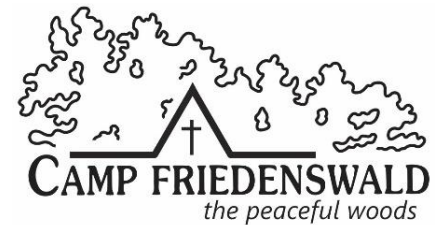


Part III

Conference Committee Reports

CDC Annual Report 2023

Submitted by Jenna Liechty Martin, executive director



The following highlights provide a glimpse into the past year and illustrate the interactions between Camp Friedenswald, Central District Conference, and its congregations.

- Winter youth camps brought together 220 youth from across the conference and beyond. Congregations participating in Senior and Junior High camps included: Assembly, Columbus, Eighth Street, Faith, FMC Bluffton, Maplewood, Milwaukee, Silverwood, Southside Fellowship, and FMC Sugarcreek.
- Camp Friedenswald partnered with CDC to provide hospitality and financial support to a queer leadership gathering in March 2023 as a part of a broader commitment to inclusion, repentance, and transformation.
- Camp was the host site for the spring and fall CDC board and leadership meetings.
- Hospitality was extended to 8 CDC congregations for a time of retreat, whether for a Sunday morning baptismal service or a weekend retreat. Churches served included: Mennonite Church of Normal, Assembly, Southside Fellowship, Silverwood, Keller Park, Grand Rapids, Hively Avenue, and Faith.
- We welcomed 607 campers (youth and family) in the summer of 2023. 50% of the 334 youth campers came from 24 different CDC congregations.
- Of the 31-summer staff, half came from six different CDC churches. Camp Friedenswald continues to be a place that cultivates and fosters leadership gifts within young adults across CDC.
- The 2023 summer theme was Water Ways and wove together the ecology of water with stories of water in biblical texts. Camp pastors from CDC congregations included: Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street), Georgia Metz (Shalom, Harrisonburg), Alaina Dobkowski (Grand Rapids), Aimee Weishaupt (Silverwood), Julia Schmidt (Faith), and Michael Crosby (FMC Urbana-Champaign).
- Camp has an impact on the lives of people that can be hard to measure. One tangible expression of impact occurred in June 2023 when 10 youth from First Mennonite Church Bluffton were baptized at church. As the youth shared their stories of faith, Camp Friedenswald was mentioned by nine different youth. One person reflected on the morning sharing and the impact camp has had by writing: "For some [people] it was an experience in nature, others recalled a conversation with a counselor, for some it was friendships and conversations with other campers, and others mentioned the space to be alone, without distractions, to calm their mind and think. "
- Camp planted 9,000 trees on land that had previously been conventionally farmed. Over 800 hours (of staff and volunteer time) was spent tending and stewarding the land. This work of repair and restoration is an extension of the work of CDC congregations and several volunteers from CDC churches actively participated in these efforts.
- Women's Retreat, an annual retreat hosted at Camp Friedenswald and planned by women from across CDC, was planned by a group representing several Ohio CDC congregations.
- Throughout the year \$52,790 of financial support was given through CDC or directly from congregations in support of Camp Friedenswald. Thank you for your support!



Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

This year's Journey program includes 17 participants and 16 mentors in our North American program and 21 participants and 8 mentors in our Southeast Asia program. Three participants were from Central District Conference: **April Lo** of Chicago Community Mennonite (mentor **Anne Munley**, Mundelein, Illinois; North Suburban); **Rachel Stolpe** of Milwaukee Mennonite (mentor **Mariah Martin** (Goshen, Indiana; Faith Mennonite); and **Denise Berbach** of Atlanta Mennonite (mentor **Lois Johns Kaufmann**, New Paris, Indiana; Assembly Mennonite).

All Journey students and mentors gathered at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Michigan, for the fall Weekend Learning Event. **Conference Minister Doug Luginbill** led an optional spiritual retreat before formal programming began, which was well attended and much appreciated. Worship times laid the foundation for our time together and took place four times throughout the weekend. Learning sessions focused on spiritual disciplines and character formation for ministry; developing personal timelines, including significant points of spiritual and vocational growth; personality inventories; and exploring spiritual direction. Mentors participated in a mentoring workshop and mentors and mentees met together to develop and update their learning covenants, which help to guide them through the program.

Following the fall gathering, in mid-September, participants joined online missional leadership development classes. As part of these studies, they also carried out a wide variety of ministry assignments in their congregations and communities. Throughout the session, they also met with their mentors, typically bi-weekly, to discuss their classes and ministry experiences. In February, participants joined new online classes and continued to meet bi-weekly in mentor-mentee pairs.

The winter Weekend Learning Event was held on the AMBS campus January 26-28, 2024, around the theme, Leadership for God's Reconciling Mission. The weekend included worship sessions, mentor and mentee workshops, and work on learning covenants. During the Sunday morning worship time, mentees in their final year of the program shared a reflection, and their conference minister or mentor provided a blessing and prayer.

Twice a year, mentees submit short reflection papers describing their learnings from the previous online class, and mentors submit reflections describing their observations of their mentees' learning and growth. These reflection papers are shared with mentees' conference ministers to help conference ministers stay informed of mentees' growth and development in the program.

The Journey Board plays a vital role in shaping and guiding the program. Many thanks to **Lois Johns Kaufmann** (chair), **Gayle Gerber Koontz** (CDC Ministerial Committee representative), and **Doug Luginbill** for serving on the Journey Board.

Journey participants and alumni frequently tell us that Journey is a tremendous learning opportunity for pastors, lay leaders, church planters, and other emerging leaders! If you want to develop or deepen your ministry gifts or are exploring a call to ministry, please speak to Doug Luginbill about whether the Journey program might be the right next step.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jewel Gingerich Longenecker". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker
Dean of Lifelong Learning

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

3003 Benham Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46517, USA • 574.295.3726 • ambs.edu



Ministerial Committee

Members: Brian Bolton (Shalom, Harrisonburg), Kevin Chupp (Mennonite Church of Normal), Michael Crosby (First, Champaign-Urbana), Gayle Gerber Koontz (chair; Assembly, Goshen), Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street, Goshen), Robin Walton (Columbus), Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister (ex officio).

The major ongoing work of this committee, a rewarding task that absorbs a majority of our time, is **interviewing candidates for pastoral licensing and ordination**. The development of Zoom resources during the pandemic has made it possible for us to spend time with CDC pastoral candidates from as far away as Atlanta and to join from our own locations in Illinois, Virginia, Ohio and Indiana. Interviews include conversation and external recommendations regarding theological, spiritual, personal and leadership commitments and competencies. Since the end of April 2023 we completed 11 interviews and were pleased by the quality and enthusiasm of new and developing pastoral leaders serving our conference.

One of the questions this process raised was **whether or not theological education was a prerequisite for credentialing in all cases**. We determined that, given our commitments to spirit-led leadership, such education would not be a prerequisite if there were a clear and supported call to ministry and adequate informal leadership education and experience. In such cases we also strongly recommend the furthering of education utilizing such resources as the Journey program, online theological education and CDC scholarship support.

Since the beginning of the **Seminary Scholarship Grant program we initiated last year** we have awarded three scholarships, up to \$2500 each.

In relation to our commitment to implement the **Resolution for Repentance and Transformation** passed by MC USA in 2022, Doug Luginbill wrote to five CDC pastors who had been investigated in the past for performing same sex weddings, recognizing the changes that have developed in MC USA since these actions and affirming the study, prayer, reflection and courage they had exhibited “in providing a new spirit of welcome and hospitality to our queer siblings in faith.”

We continued to provide regular **counsel and support for the substantial work of our conference minister** in developing and sustaining congregational leadership. Of special concern this year were a number of congregations dealing with conflict. The additional collegial staff support of Sarah Werner and Matt Pritchard helped release Doug for ministry to and with these congregations.

As part of our role in **providing resources to pastors and other church leaders**, we agreed to sponsor a training for the “Our Whole Lives” human sexuality curriculum, scheduled for November 2024 at Camp Friedenswald. In addition, Doug developed a letter outlining CDC resources for pastors and church leaders. This overview contains digital links to further information and documents to make finding such materials easier.

Submitted by Gayle Gerber Koontz



Missional Church Committee Report

Members: Anton Flores-Maisonet (Atlanta), Julia Gingrich (Eighth Street), Elizabeth Kelly (First Bluffton), Gary Martin (Faith), Xaris Martinez (Chapel Hill), Brian Sauder (First Urbana), David Voth (Grace), Matt Pritchard (Atlanta, Staff, ex-officio), Emma Hartman, Staff, ex-officio)

During the 2023-2024 year, the Missional Church Committee asked ourselves the following question: Listen! Wisdom is calling --- How do we listen and learn from those we are listening to, not operating within our echo chambers or with eagerness to fix or mold others into our image?

Missional Church Committee offers three grants which we hope you will consider applying for:

- Anti-racism Grant: For CDC member congregations whose congregants are committed to engaging in anti-racist work together.
- Reign of God Grant: To encourage and resource two or more CDC congregations to follow God's Spirit and be missional people in God's world.
- Emerging Communities of Faith Grant: Designed to encourage the growth of emerging communities of faith in our conference.

Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Congregations Matt Pritchard brings a wealth of experience in church planting and emerging church development. Matt's fresh eyes on policies, procedures, and grant applications led us to make changes that aligned the various grant application processes, clarified information and expectations for applicants, and developed practical mechanisms to support grant recipients through the process and across the funding timeline. Critical areas of practical support relate to insurance, safe church policies and protocols, and financial organization for fledgling congregations.

Before a grant comes to the committee for discussion and decision, two committee members/staff talk with the applicant(s) about their hopes and expectations, as well as soliciting information about their most pressing needs and thinking forward toward long-term sustainability. We want to minimize groups re-inventing the same wheels that others have already invented, help them make connections with other congregations that are further along the path, and provide coaching when helpful. Initial feedback from applicants indicates that they find these conversations helpful and welcome the developing connections.

We have discussed the differing needs of new emerging communities versus the needs of established congregations wishing to reimagine or revitalize missions and ministries in their changing communities. There is a need to support both, but the tools and processes are different.

In response to a request from CDC Executive Leadership, we developed a draft proposal for the development of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/RER program. One that supports education and training of Conference and local leaders and aligns CDC values across the conference.

Missional Church funded the following grants during the past year:

Emerging Communities

- *Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship - \$8000
- *Moveable Feast - \$8000
- *Imagine Cincinnati - \$8000
- *Intention Church - \$8000
- * Ministerio Jehovah Luz y Esperanza - \$8000

Reign of God Grant

- *Assembly/Faith - \$758
- *Ministerio Jehovah Luz y Esperanza, Atlanta Mennonite Church, Americus Mennonite Fellowship, Emmanuel Mennonite Church - \$2500

Submitted by Elizabeth Kelly

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



Part IV

Reports by Related Institutions



Mennonite Church USA equipped, empowered and gathered the church together in many ways in 2023.



The annual [Hope for the Future](#) conference in Atlanta, Georgia, Feb. 3-5, 2023, brought together 70 Black, Indigenous and people of color from across the church to worship, network and honor legacy leaders.

More than 1,400 youth and adults attended [MennoCon23](#), MC USA's leading faith formation event, in Kansas City, Missouri, July 5-8, 2023, where they were invited to "Be Transformed" by the Holy Spirit.

The [Delegate Assembly](#), leading decision-making body, convened in July 2023, voting to clarify the MC USA bylaws and shift Everence and MHS Association from program agencies to ministry partners.

MC USA expanded its Peace & Justice work to include a deeper emphasis on climate justice. Three hundred youth and young adults attended MC USA's [Climate Summit](#) in Kansas City, July 7, 2023, where they put their faith to work, addressing the spiritual and human crisis caused by climate change.



In 2023, MC USA's [Justice Fund](#) provided resources to five congregations who are sharing the reconciling work of Christ by alleviating poverty, dismantling racism, addressing immigration reform or reimagining policing in their communities.

MC USA launched [Safe Church](#), a new abuse prevention ministry to equip and educate conferences and congregations to protect the most vulnerable among us.

MC USA reinforced the church's peace mission by honoring denominational peacemakers Jonathan Kuttub and Sydney Leah Bontrager with the 2023 [Bring the Peace](#) award.

The [Learn, Pray, Join: End Gun Violence](#) initiative called the denomination to understand this crisis through the lens of our Anabaptist faith and to inspire action to bring God's healing to our hurting communities.



MC USA collaborated with Mennonite Church Canada to host the annual Binational [Conference Minister/Regional Pastors Retreat](#) in Banff, Canada, in Nov. 2023, where leaders focused on worship and pastoral wellbeing.



Our Mission

The mission of the MC USA Executive Board is to equip and empower leaders to share with others the gift of God's peace and transformative love.

Our Vision

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Our Renewed Commitments

- Follow Jesus
- Witness to God's peace
- Experience transformation

Church Vitality

MC USA's Church Vitality team empowers and equips the church every day through:

- Pastor salary guidelines
- Wellbeing in ministry resources
- The Corinthian Plan healthcare plan for church workers
- Ministerial Leadership Inquiry process

Learn more here.



Subscribe to MC USA's weekly email newsletter.

La Iglesia Menonita de EE. UU. equipó, empoderó, y reunió a la iglesia de muchas maneras en 2023.



La conferencia anual de [Esperanza para el futuro](#) en Atlanta, Georgia, del 3 al 5 de febrero, 2023, reunió a 70 personas de raza negra, de pueblos originarios y de color de toda la iglesia para adorar, conectarse en red y honrar a líderes que han dejado su legado.

Más de 1.400 jóvenes y adultos asistieron a [MennoCon23](#), el evento principal de formación de fe de la Iglesia Menonita de EE. UU. (MC USA por sus siglas en inglés) en Kansas City, Misuri, del 5 al 8 de julio, 2023, donde recibieron la invitación a “Ser transformados” por el Espíritu Santo.

[La Asamblea de delegados](#), el cuerpo decisorio principal, reunidos en julio 2023, votaron para clarificar los estatutos de MC USA y establecer a Everence y la Asociación MHS como ministerios de coparticipación en vez de programas de agencia.

MC USA expandió su trabajo por la paz y la justicia para incluir un énfasis más profundo en la justicia climática. Trescientos juveniles y adultos jóvenes asistieron a la [Cumbre climática](#) de MC USA en Kansas City el 7 de julio, 2023, donde pusieron su fe a trabajar, abordando la crisis humana y espiritual causada por el cambio climático.



En 2023, el [Fondo de justicia](#) de MC USA proveyó recursos para cinco congregaciones que están compartiendo el trabajo reconciliador de Cristo a través del alivio de la pobreza, la desmantelación del racismo, el abordaje de la reforma migratoria o la reimaginación de la fuerza policial en sus comunidades.

MC USA lanzó [Iglesia segura](#), un nuevo ministerio de prevención del abuso para equipar y educar a las conferencias y congregaciones en la protección de aquellos más vulnerables entre nosotros.

MC USA reforzó la misión de paz de la iglesia al honrar a los trabajadores denominacionales por la paz Jonathan Kuttub y Sydney Leah Bontrager con el premio [Trae la paz](#) 2023.

La iniciativa [Aprende, ora, únete: terminar con la violencia armada](#) convoca a la denominación a comprender esta crisis a través del lente de nuestra fe anabautista e inspirar a la acción para acercar la sanación de Dios a nuestras comunidades que sufren.



MC USA colaboró con la Iglesia Menonita de Canadá para realizar el [Retiro de pastores regionales y ministros de conferencia](#) binacional anual en Banff, Canada, en noviembre 2023, donde los líderes se enfocaron en la adoración y el bienestar de pastores.



Nuestra misión

La misión de la Junta Ejecutiva de MC USA es equipar y capacitar a los líderes para compartir con otros el regalo de la paz y el amor transformador de Dios.

Nuestra visión

Dios nos llama a ser seguidores de Jesucristo y, por el poder del Espíritu Santo, crecer como comunidades de gracia, alegría y paz, para que la sanación y la esperanza de Dios fluyan a través de nosotros hacia el mundo.

Nuestros compromisos renovados

- Seguir a Jesús.
- Testificar de la paz de Dios.
- Experimentar la transformación.

Church Vitality

El equipo de Vitalidad de la Iglesia de MC USA empodera y equipa a la iglesia todos los días, de distintas maneras:

- Lineamientos para los salarios pastorales.
- Recursos sobre el bienestar en el ejercicio del ministerio.
- El Plan de Corinto de cuidado de la salud para trabajadores de la iglesia.

Conozca más aquí.



MenoTicias, el nuevo magazine digital en español de MC USA y Ministerios Hispanos de la Agencia Menonita de Educación.

"People plan their path, but the Lord secures their steps."

– Proverbs 16:9 (CEB)

Your Mission. Your Finances.

Everence 2024 report

Central District Conference
Annual Meeting
June 20-22, 2024

Everence revamps advocate program

Exciting changes are happening with the Everence® church stewardship program in 2024!

After working with churches, advocates and stewardship consultants, the redesigned Everence Stewardship Partners program will include major enhancements – including expanded participation opportunities for pastors and other stewardship leaders, and the possibility for participating churches to be eligible for up to \$3,000 a year in Sharing Funds.

Everence has been building strong relationships with churches for over 30 years through its church stewardship program, and today more than 1,100 churches participate. Go to everence.com/partners to learn more about the changes.

Sharing Fund helps churches impact their community



When the going gets tough, we have community to lift each other up. Churches can make an impact in their community by helping their members through a Sharing Fund grant.

The Everence Sharing Fund program helps thousands of families and individuals every year. In fact, over the last five years alone, the Sharing Fund has distributed nearly 9,000 grants for a total of \$4.7 million – all of which was matched by an additional \$7.1 million from churches.

You can support the Everence Sharing Fund with a fully tax-deductible donation, and 100% of your gift will go to meet financial needs. Visit everence.com/sharing-fund to donate or learn more.

MyNeighbor card a tool for giving to charitable causes



With the Everence Federal Credit Union MyNeighbor credit card program, individuals, businesses and churches generate reward dollars for their favorite nonprofits every time they make a purchase.

Whenever a cardholder uses their MyNeighbor card to buy groceries, pay bills or make other purchases, Everence donates 1.50% of the purchase total to the charity of his or her choice. Then in January, Everence writes and sends checks to the selected 501(c)(3) public charitable organizations.

In January 2023, Everence distributed over \$500,000 in donations to support nonprofits, including individual churches.

Want to know more? Visit everence.com/myneighbor.

Find a stewardship advocate for your church



Want to learn how a healthy stewardship ministry can contribute to your church's ministry? An Everence stewardship advocate can help encourage and inspire your faith community toward greater understanding and practice of biblical stewardship.

Everence stewardship advocates are volunteers who work with your church's pastor and other leaders to support and strengthen your church's mission and ministry by sharing resources designed to help church attendees live out faith values in their financial decisions.

Want to learn more about how a stewardship advocate can contribute to your congregation? Talk to your Everence stewardship consultant and/or visit everence.com/advocates.



*"Al hombre le toca hacer planes,
y al Señor dirigir sus pasos. "*

– Proverbios 16:9 (DHH)

Everence renueva su programa de promotores

¡Habrán cambios emocionantes con el programa de mayordomía de Everence® en 2024!

Después de trabajar con iglesias, promotores y consultores de mayordomía, el programa rediseñado de Socios de Mayordomía de Everence incluirá mejoras importantes, incluyendo mayores oportunidades de participación para pastores y otros líderes de mayordomía, y la posibilidad de que las iglesias participantes sean elegibles para recibir hasta \$3,000 al año del Fondo Compartido.

Everence ha estado construyendo relaciones sólidas con iglesias durante más de 30 años a través de su programa de administración de iglesias, y hoy más de 1,100 iglesias participan en él. Vaya a everence.com/para-iglesias para obtener más información sobre los cambios.

Con el Fondo Compartido, las iglesias generan impacto en su comunidad



Cuando hay dificultades, tenemos a la comunidad para ayudarnos unos a otros. Las iglesias pueden tener un impacto en su comunidad ayudando a sus miembros a través de una subvención del Fondo Compartido.

El programa de Everence ayuda a miles de familias e individuos cada

Tu misión. Tus finanzas.

Reporte Informativo de Everence 2024

Conferencia del Distrito Central
Reunion anual
20 a 22 de junio de 2024

año. De hecho, sólo en los últimos cinco años, el Fondo Compartido ha distribuido casi 9,000 subvenciones por un total de \$4.7 millones, todo lo cual fue acompañado de \$7.1 millones adicionales de las iglesias.

Puedes apoyar al Fondo Compartido de Everence con una donación totalmente deducible de impuestos, y el 100% de tu donación se destinará a cubrir necesidades financieras. Visite everence.com/sharing-fund (en inglés) para donar u obtener más información.

Tarjeta MyNeighbor una herramienta para donar a causas benéficas



Con el programa de tarjeta de crédito MyNeighbor de Everence Federal Credit Union, las personas, las empresas y las iglesias generan recompensas en dólares para sus organizaciones sin fines de lucro favoritas cada vez que realizan una compra.

Siempre que alguien utiliza su tarjeta MyNeighbor para comprar alimentos, pagar facturas o hacer otras compras, Everence dona el 1.50% del total de la compra a la organización benéfica de su elección. Luego, en enero, Everence escribe y envía cheques a las organizaciones benéficas públicas 501(c)(3) seleccionadas.

En enero de 2023, Everence distribuyó más de \$500,000 en donaciones para apoyar a organizaciones sin fines de lucro, incluidas iglesias individuales.

¿Quiere saber más? Visite everence.com/myneighbor-es.

Encuentre un promotor de la mayordomía para su iglesia



¿Quiere saber cómo un ministerio de mayordomía saludable puede contribuir al ministerio de su iglesia? Un promotor de mayordomía de Everence puede ayudar a alentar e inspirar a su comunidad de fe hacia una mayor comprensión y práctica de la mayordomía bíblica.

Los promotores de mayordomía de Everence son voluntarios que trabajan con el pastor de su iglesia y otros líderes y apoyan y fortalecen la misión y el ministerio de su iglesia, compartiendo recursos diseñados para ayudar a los que atienden la iglesia a vivir los valores de la fe en sus decisiones financieras.

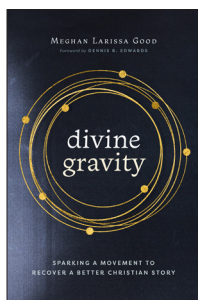
¿Quiere saber más sobre cómo un promotor de la mayordomía puede contribuir a su congregación? Hable con su consultor de mayordomía de Everence y/o visite everence.com/promotor.

Report to Central District Mennonite Conference

Spring 2024

At MennoMedia we publish curricula and books that call readers to follow Jesus in word and deed. We publish resources about Christian discipleship, spirituality, reconciliation, justice, and theology from an Anabaptist perspective. Our curricula, periodicals, and hymnals reach a broad spectrum of evangelical, mainline, and Anabaptist readers and congregations, cultivating passion for faith formation and an active life of discipleship.

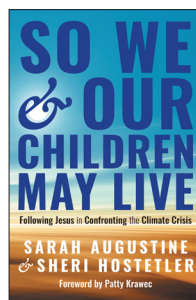
NEW RESOURCES FOR THE ENTIRE CHURCH, FROM HERALD PRESS



Divine Gravity

Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story

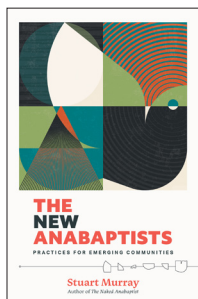
Meghan Larissa Good invites readers into a movement that is finding ways to tell a better Christian story. Readers will rediscover what an authentic, Jesus-centered Christianity looks like and how, through Christ, God is breathing new life among us, restoring creation, and reconciling all divided things. In this better story, isolation, intolerance, polarization, and death have no grip.



So We and Our Children May Live

Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis

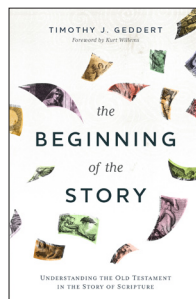
Everywhere we look, we see signs that all is not right with our earth. Ecological justice requires challenging our assumptions about creation and our relationship to it. It requires decolonization. Authors Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler offer hope for a better future alongside concrete actions for joining with Indigenous Peoples to protect life and negotiate with decision-makers for sustainable change in the way of Jesus.



The New Anabaptists

Practices for Emerging Communities

What does it look like to be an Anabaptist community in the modern world? In this companion to *The Naked Anabaptist*, author Stuart Murray identifies 12 common practices of churches and communities that are shaped by an Anabaptist vision. He explores how these practices might shape emerging Christian communities and inspire those seeking fresh expressions as cultural changes accelerate.



The Beginning of the Story

Understanding the Old Testament in the Story of Scripture

Although the Bible contains 66 books, most Christians turn first—and perhaps only—to the New Testament. Author Tim Geddert says that to understand the Bible—the grand story of God's dealings with humanity, of God's relationship to the whole universe—we must learn to read the first three-quarters of Scripture as Jesus did, and as the New Testament teaches us to do.

NEW FOR SUMMER: PATH TO PEACE CURRICULUM FROM SHINE

Shine's new *Path to Peace* summer curriculum allows teachers and children to follow the peace paths in *The Peace Table* storybook Bible. The curriculum includes faith formation materials for PreK–Kindergarten and Elementary age levels.

For 2024, the unit is built around the "Peace with Creation" peace path from *The Peace Table* and includes three 5-session modules. Each session includes songs, prayers, instructions for telling the Bible story, wondering questions, activities, and media connections. Churches will need a copy of *The Peace Table* for each classroom.



New for Families: "Follow the Peace Path" Cards

Extend learning and bring the Bible story home with a deck of "Peace with Creation" cards. Each of the 52 cards in the deck comes packed with ideas for families to do at home together. Whether a church has summer Sunday school or not, these cards are a great way to stay connected with families and provide parents and caregivers with an easy and fun faith formation resource. Purchase one deck of cards for each family.

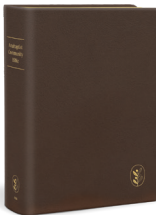
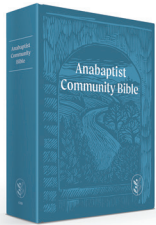
**PATH to
PEACE**
with Creation

SHINE
LIVING IN GOD'S LIGHT

Learn more at ShineCurriculum.com.

ANABAPTISM AT 500: LOOKING BACK, LIVING FORWARD

The 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in 2025 gives the church a unique opportunity to celebrate the Spirit's calling together of diverse people across all boundaries of culture and geography. MennoMedia's vision is to lead the way in helping North American Anabaptist Christians experience spiritual renewal by creating fresh, forward-looking resources for Anabaptism's quincentenary celebration.



Coming January 2025: *The Anabaptist Community Bible*

Embark on a transformative journey with the *Anabaptist Community Bible*. Immerse yourself in the teachings of Scripture, seamlessly interwoven with the rich tapestry of the Anabaptist movement. Expertly designed using the Common English Bible translation, this edition connects you more deeply to the biblical story, the Anabaptist story, and your own story. Experience a renewed engagement with Scripture as you engage the text in conversation with a larger community of believers, expecting God's Word to transform your life. Accessible to Christians from all faith traditions who want to read Scripture through a Jesus-centered lens. The *Anabaptist Community Bible* will be available in hardcover, soft touch, and limited edition genuine leather for preorder in late spring 2024.

Key features of all editions:

- The text of the Common English Bible (CEB)
- Single-column format for the biblical text, with over 7,200 marginal notes
- Biblical book introductions written by Anabaptist pastors, leaders, and scholars provide context and guidance
- Biblical Context notes from Anabaptist pastors, leaders, and scholars
- Community Reflection notes from nearly 600 Bible study groups
- Early Anabaptist Witness notes offer insights into how early Anabaptists engaged the Bible
- 40 original linocut illustrations of the biblical story
- Informative essays on Anabaptist hermeneutics, the Apocrypha, and other topics useful for group discussion
- A 365-day Bible reading plan and suggestions for group Bible study
- Durable Smyth-sewn lay-flat binding
- Presentation page for gift-giving
- 2-color interior
- Full-color Oxford maps
- 10-point font size

Learn more about other products marking this anniversary at AnabaptismAt500.com.

FINANCIALS, FISCAL YEAR 2023–24*

* MennoMedia's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Amounts are listed in USD.

INCOME	FY23–24 to date		FY23
	July–Dec. budget	July–Dec. actuals	July–Dec. Actuals
GROSS SALES			
Herald Press	\$ 525,000	\$ 519,802	\$ 478,353
Curriculum/Church Products	\$ 294,250	\$ 248,938	\$ 284,217
Periodicals	\$ 130,000	\$ 122,932	\$ 128,484
Shine Project Income	\$ 150,000	\$ 103,560	\$ 80,670
Distribution & Royalty	\$ 32,900	\$ 33,689	\$ 33,451
Total Gross Sales	\$ 1,132,150	\$ 1,028,921	\$ 1,005,175
COGS & ROYALTIES	\$ 301,208	\$ 374,253	\$ 314,758
Gross margin	\$ 830,942	\$ 654,668	\$ 690,417
OTHER INCOME			
Misc. Income	\$ 44,094	\$ 63,680	\$ 41,341
Donations	\$ 384,600	\$ 266,651	\$ 306,056
Grants	\$ 17,502	\$ 1,265,000	\$ 30,000
Total Other Income	\$ 446,196	\$ 1,595,331	\$ 377,397
TOTAL INCOME LESS COGS	\$ 2,249,999	\$ 2,249,999	\$ 1,067,814
EXPENSES			
Wages & Benefits	\$ 591,642	\$ 653,485	\$ 510,373
Fixed Expenses	\$ 49,216	\$ 49,947	\$ 50,256
Variable Expenses	\$ 584,535	\$ 507,962	\$ 625,240
Other Expenses	\$ 6,984	\$ 14,241	\$ 16,170
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 1,232,377	\$ 1,225,635	\$ 1,202,039
NET INCOME	\$ 44,761	\$ 1,024,364	\$ (134,225)

2024 Report to Central District Conference

Submitted by Karen Lehman, President/CEO

MHS Association Vision

MHS is the go-to leader for integrating faith and work in health and human services.

MHS Association Mission

Anchored in Anabaptist values, MHS inspires and strengthens health and human service ministries to fulfill their missions.

MHS Association (Mennonite Health Services) is a network of 78 Anabaptist health and human services ministries located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. MHS Association has members in the following states where CDC congregations are located:

- Florida
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Michigan
- Ohio
- Virginia

Activities

- The 2024 MHS Assembly will be held March 12 – 14 in Savannah, GA. Registration opened on December 19, 2023. Featured keynote speakers include Dr. Betty Pries, Dr. Michaela O'Donnell, Chad Horning, Amy Castleberry, and Jeremy Kauffman. For more information and to register [visit our website](#). All are welcome to attend.
- MHS Association provides monthly webinars on a variety of governance, workforce development, leadership, and faith and work topics. These webinars are free and open to anyone interested. Registration for upcoming webinars can be accessed [via our website](#).
- MHS Association members continue to appreciate tools and resources to support their ministries. [Visit our website](#) for more information on our member services.
- [MHS Consulting](#) continues to serve MHS Association members and nonmembers in the health and human services sector; primarily providing resources in governance, executive searches, executive coaching, interim placement, strategic planning and positioning, and operational, financial, and market assessments.
- The MHS Association Board of Directors and MHS Association Staff continue to advance diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion (JEDI) initiatives. Read [Confessions from our Journey Toward Belonging Rooted in Justice](#), written by MHS Association COO, Clare Krabill, to learn more about our JEDI journey thus far.

MHS Association asks for continued prayer for staffing retention and recruitment for MHS Association member organizations that are facing these challenges. We are grateful for the financial gifts, gifts in kind, prayer, and volunteer support given to MHS Association member organizations.

Be local. Be global. Be the Gospel.

When the people of God take Jesus' call to live lives of peace seriously, there is hope.

In the midst of war and strife, God is still at work, and we are committed to joining in that work. Here are some ways in which you can join too:



Partner with workers across the street and around the world through financial support. Contact KarenH@MennoniteMission.net to support workers financially.



Support Mission network ministries and workers by becoming a prayer partner. Visit our website to join: MennoniteMission.net/Prayer.



Explore what service options are the best fit for adults and youth in your congregation: MennoniteMission.net/Serve.



Learn about social justice through a spiritual lens by participating in a Just Peace Pilgrimage: MennoniteMission.net/JustPeace.



On behalf of all of us at Mennonite Mission Network, thank you Central District Conference for your commitment and support! Your prayers, contributions and participation in our programs is a vital part of our partnerships with congregations, organizations and individuals around the world. Like 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, each of us uses our gifts for the good of one another, and we can trust that our service and love for others is guided and strengthened by God. Blessings to you!

Marisa Smucker

Marisa Smucker, Executive Director



Central District Conference has responded to and has joined in the mission of God. Your compassion and kindness has made this possible. Thank you so much for helping make a difference in the world.

Naun Cerrato

Naun Cerrato, Constituent Engagement Representative

Central District Conference partnership

Note: Underlined words indicate active links.

Worker support around the world



Worker support

Delicia Bravo Aguilar and Peter Wigginton, serving in Quito, Ecuador
» Lima Mennonite Church
» Paoli Mennonite Fellowship
Joseph and Rachel Givens, serving in Calais, France
» Grace Mennonite Church
Matthew and Toni Krabill, serving in Paris, France/Accra, Ghana
» Oak Grove Mennonite Church
Jane and Jerrell Ross Richer, served in the Eastern Rain Forest region in Ecuador
» Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Christy Harrison and Peter Sensenig, serving in N'Djamena, Chad
» Atlanta Mennonite Church
» First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth, Ohio
Kate Widmer, serving in Montbéliard, France.
» Oak Grove Mennonite Church
Rebekah York, serving in Bogota, Colombia
» Silverwood Mennonite Church

Service participants



Service site

Mennonite Voluntary Service unit
» Chicago
SOOP
» Camp Friedenswald
Mennonite Voluntary Service
Cassidy Bush, served in San Francisco, California
Cade Fisher, serving in Tucson, Arizona
Gayatri Salzer, serving in Chicago, Illinois

Service Adventure

Rylee Weishaupt, serving in Albuquerque, New Mexico
SOOP
Shirley and Vernon King, Tucson, Arizona
Gayle and Ted Koontz, Tucson, Arizona
Kay and John Reimer, Gotha, Florida
Kathy and Keith Springer, San Antonio, Texas

Congregational giving to Mission Network



During Mission Networks' past fiscal year, August 1, 2022, through July 31, 2023, Central District Conference congregations gave **\$156,186**. Thank you!

Prayer partners

36

Thank you for your continued partnership in God's mission!

www.MennoniteMission.net Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872

Sé local. Sé global. Sé el evangelio.

Cuando el pueblo de Dios toma seriamente el llamado de Jesús a vivir vidas de paz, hay esperanza.

Dios aún actúa en medio de guerras y conflictos, y estamos comprometidos a unimos a él en su obra. Algunas maneras en que usted también puede sumarse son:



Participe con obreros/as del otro lado de la calle y alrededor del mundo mediante su apoyo financiero. Contáctese con KarenH@MennoniteMission.net para apoyar financieramente a obreros/as.



Apoye los ministerios de la Red de Misión y sus obreros/as como acompañante en la oración. Visite nuestro sitio MennoniteMission.net/Prayer.



Explore qué alternativas de servicio son las mejores tanto para adultos como para jóvenes de su congregación: MennoniteMission.net/Serve.



Conozca acerca de la justicia social a través de una lente espiritual participando en un Peregrinaje por la paz justa: MennoniteMission.net/JustPeace.



En nombre de quienes integramos la Red Menonita de Misión, queremos agradecer a la Conferencia Central District por comprometer su apoyo. Sus oraciones, ofrendas y participación en nuestros programas son una parte esencial de nuestra coparticipación con congregaciones, organizaciones e individuos alrededor del mundo. Como dice 1 Pedro 4:10-11, cada uno de nosotros usa sus dones para el bien de los demás, y podemos confiar que Dios es quien dirige y fortalece nuestro servicio y amor por otros. ¡Bendiciones!

Marisa Smucker

Marisa Smucker, Directora Ejecutiva



La conferencia Central District ha respondido a la misión de Dios y se ha unido a ella. Su compasión y amabilidad lo ha hecho posible. Muchas gracias por ayudar a hacer una diferencia en el mundo.

Naun Cerrato

Naun Cerrato,

Representante de Relaciones con los Constituyentes

Coparticipación de la Conferencia de Central District

Nota: Las palabras subrayadas indican enlaces activos.

Apoyo a obreros/as alrededor del mundo



Apoyo a obreros y obreras

Delicia Bravo Aguilar y Peter Wigginton, sirven en Quito, Ecuador

» Lima Mennonite Church
» Paoli Mennonite Fellowship

Joseph y Rachel Givens, sirven en Calais, Francia

» Grace Mennonite Church

Matthew y Toni Krabill, sirven en París, Francia/Accra, Ghana

» Oak Grove Mennonite Church

Jane y Jerrell Ross Richer, sirvieron en la Región Amazónica del Ecuador region in Ecuador

» Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Christy Harrison y Peter

Sensenig, sirven en N'Djamena, Chad

» Atlanta Mennonite Church
» First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth, Ohio

Kate Widmer, sirve en Montbéliard, Francia.

» Oak Grove Mennonite Church

Rebekah York, sirve en Bogota, Colombia

» Silverwood Mennonite Church

Participantes y lugares de servicio



Sitio de Servicio Cristiano

Unidad de Mennonite Voluntary Service (Servicio Voluntario Menonita)

» [Chicago](#)

SOOP

» [Camp Friedenswald](#)

Mennonite Voluntary Service (Servicio Voluntario Menonita)

Cassidy Bush, sirvió en San Francisco, California

Cade Fisher, sirve en Tucson, Arizona

Gayatri Salzer, sirve en Chicago, Illinois

Service Adventure

(Voluntarios Aventureros)

Rylee Weishaupt, sirve en Albuquerque, New Mexico

SOOP (Oportunidades de Servicio con Nuestros Hermanos)

Shirley y Vernon King, Tucson, Arizona

Gayle y Ted Koontz, Tucson, Arizona

Kay y John Reimer, Gotha, Florida

Kathy y Keith Springer, San Antonio, Texas

Aporte congregacional a la Red Menonita



Durante el último año fiscal de la Red de Misión, desde el 1 de agosto de 2022 al 31 de julio de 2023, las congregaciones de la Conferencia Central District ofrendaron **\$156.186. ¡Gracias!**

Comprometidos en oración

36

¡Gracias por su colaboración continua en la misión de Dios!

www.MennoniteMission.net Línea Gratuita: 1-866-866-2872

Report to Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA

AMBS serves the church as a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world.

Our programs integrate academics, spiritual formation and practice. Join us — in person or at a distance, full time or part time — and deepen your understanding of Scripture, faith and Anabaptist theology!

Degrees and programs (* = distance-friendly program)

- Master of Divinity*
- Master of Arts in Christian Formation
- Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies
- Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism*
- Doctor of Ministry in Leadership*
- Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction*
- Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies* (fully customizable)
- Mennonite Education Agency Hispanic Ministries – AMBS Graduate Certificate in Theology* (in Spanish)
- Journey Missional Leadership Development Program* (undergraduate-level, nondegree)

ambs.edu/degrees-and-programs

We offer generous need-based financial aid, scholarships and matching grants for both full- and part-time graduate students. You *can* afford seminary!

ambs.edu/affordability

Leadership and enrichment

Grow your ministry skills and gain Anabaptist approaches to today's leadership challenges through our nondegree offerings. (* = distance-friendly program)

Short-term options

- Practical Leadership Training modules*
- Online Short Courses*: six weeks, discussion-based, noncredit (no grades, no papers!)
- Invite AMBS*: request a speaker (in person or online)
- Pastors & Leaders conference*: Feb. 17–20, 2025

Yearlong offerings

- Spiritual Direction Seminars*
- Transition to Leadership: program for new pastors
- Integrity Circles*: reflect theologically on leadership within a group

ambs.edu/leadership-and-enrichment

Central District Conference connections

- **Doctor of Ministry students:** Charles Buller (Silverwood), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth St), Doug Luginbill (First – Bluffton), James Rissler (Atlanta, Emmanuel)
- **Master of Divinity students:** Scott Coulter (Assembly), Alaina Dobkowski (Grand Rapids), Melika Kauffman Hershberger (Normal), Daniel Teye Nuertey (Hively Ave), Kyle Schlabach (Assembly)
- **Master of Arts students:** Andrea Cramer (Keller Park), Christian Nawai (Hively Ave), Jon Zirkle (Assembly)
- **Graduate Certificate student:** Carrie Mast (First – Bluffton)
- **Journey participants/mentors:** Rebeca Benavides and Mariela Sanchez (IN-MI Conf)/Deb Byler (Hively Ave), Denise Berbach (Atlanta)/Lois Kaufmann (Assembly), April Lo (Chicago Community)/Anne Munley (Illinois Conf), Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee)/Mariah Martin (Faith)
- **Board member:** John Daniels (Covenant)

AMBS statistics

- In 2023–24, 149 graduate students were enrolled at AMBS: 65 from the U.S., 11 from Canada and 73 international students.
- The undergraduate-level Journey program has 40 participants in Canada, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Uganda and the U.S.

Want to try out seminary?

- Sign up for an Online Short Course:
 - Exploring Peace and Justice in the Bible
 - Exploring Anabaptist History and Theology
 - Understanding Anabaptist Approaches to Scripture: What's Different and Why?
 - Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication
 - Resisting Christian Nationalism with the Gospel of Peace

ambs.edu/online-short-courses

- Take a graduate-level course — online or on campus. Nonadmitted students get 50% off tuition for their first three credit hours! ambs.edu/upcoming-courses
- Schedule a virtual or in-person visit and learn what AMBS has to offer! ambs.edu/visit
- Stay connected: facebook.com/followAMBS • instagram.com/ambs_seminary • youtube.com/ambsedu • ambs.edu/subscribe

Informe a la Conferencia Central District de la Iglesia Menonita de EE. UU.

AMBS sirve a la iglesia como una comunidad de aprendizaje con una visión anabautista, educando a l@s seguidores/as de Jesucristo para ser líderes en la misión de Dios de la reconciliación en el mundo.

Nuestros programas integran lo académico, la formación espiritual y la práctica. Estudie con nosotros —en persona o a distancia, tiempo completo o medio— y profundice su comprensión de las Escrituras, la teología anabautista y la fe.

Programas académicos (*disponible a distancia)

- Maestro de Divinidad*
- Maestro de Artes en Formación Cristiana
- Maestro de Artes: Teología y Anabautismo Global*
- Maestro de Artes: Teología y Estudios de Paz
- Doctorado en Ministerio en Liderazgo*
- Certificado de Posgrado en Dirección Espiritual*
- Certificado de Posgrado en Estudios de Teología*
- Certificado de Posgrado en Teología AMBS de Ministerios Hispánicos de MEA* (en español)
- Journey: Un Programa de Desarrollo del Liderazgo Misional* (sin título)

ambs.edu/degrees-and-programs

Ofrecemos ayudas financieras generosas basadas en la necesidad, subvenciones y becas para ayudar a que su educación de posgrado sea económica. ¡Sí, se puede asistir al seminario! ambs.edu/affordability

Liderazgo y enriquecimiento (*disponible a distancia)

Desarrolle sus habilidades ministeriales y obtenga enfoques anabautistas para los desafíos de liderazgo de hoy a través de nuestras ofertas sin título.

Opciones a corto plazo

- Módulos de Capacitación en Liderazgo Práctico*
- Cursos Cortos Anabautistas*: en línea, cuatro a seis semanas, basados en la discusión, sin crédito
- Invite a AMBS*: solicite un/a orador/a
- Conferencia de Pastores/as y Líderes*: 17–20 de febrero del 2025

Ofertas de un año

- Seminarios de Dirección Espiritual*
- La Transición al Liderazgo: un programa para nuev@s pastores/as
- Círculos de Integridad*: reflexione teológicamente sobre el liderazgo dentro de un grupo

ambs.edu/leadership-and-enrichment

Conexiones a la Conferencia Central District

- **Alumn@s: Doctorado en Ministerio en Liderazgo:** Charles Buller (Silverwood), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth St), Doug Luginbill (First – Bluffton), James Rissler (Atlanta, Emmanuel)
- **Alumn@s: Maestro de Divinidad:** Scott Coulter (Assembly), Alaina Dobkowski (Grand Rapids), Melika Kauffman Hershberger (Normal), Daniel Teye Nuerter (Hively Ave), Kyle Schlabach (Assembly)
- **Alumn@s: Maestro de Artes:** Andrea Cramer (Keller Park), Christian Nawai (Hively Ave), Jon Zirkle (Assembly)
- **Alumna: Certificado de Posgrado:** Carrie Mast (First – Bluffton)
- **Participantes/mentores(as) en Journey:** Rebeca Benavides y Mariela Sanchez (Conferencia IN-MI)/ Deb Byler (Hively Ave), Denise Berbach (Atlanta)/ Lois Kaufmann (Assembly), April Lo (Chicago Community)/ Anne Munley (Conferencia Illinois), Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee)/Mariah Martin (Faith)
- **Miembro de la Junta:** John Daniels (Covenant)

Las estadísticas de AMBS

- En 2023–24, 149 alumn@s de posgrado estudiaron en AMBS: 65 de los EE. UU., 11 de Canadá y 73 de otros países. El Certificado de Posgrado en Teología AMBS de Ministerios Hispánicos de MEA tiene 10 alumn@s.
- El programa Journey (sin título) tiene 40 participantes en Canadá, los EE. UU., las Filipinas, el Sudeste Asiático y Uganda.

¿Quiere explorar el estudio del seminario?

- Realice un Curso Corto en Línea (sin crédito):
 - Explorar la Paz y la Justicia en la Biblia
 - Explorar la Historia y la Teología Anabautista
 - Comprender los Enfoques Anabautistas de las Escrituras
 - Transformar el Conflicto y la Comunicación Congregacional
 - Resistir al Nacionalismo Cristiano con el Evangelio de la Paz

ambs.edu/online-short-courses

- Realice un curso de posgrado en línea o en el campus. ¡L@s alumn@s no admitid@s obtienen un 50% de descuento en sus primeras tres horas de crédito!

ambs.edu/upcoming-courses

- Programe una visita virtual o en persona. ¡Aprenda lo que AMBS tiene para ofrecer! ambs.edu/visit
- Conéctese con nosotros: facebook.com/followAMBS
 - instagram.com/ambs_seminary
 - youtube.com/ambsedu • ambs.edu/subscribe

2024 Annual Report

As I was driving a shuttle for people attending Life Enrichment, a weekly lecture series that brings around 200 people aged 60 and older to campus on Wednesday mornings, a group of students was gathering to carpool to a protest for peace in the Middle East. Another group looked to be headed for an athletic practice or event, while others came and went from the cafeteria or classes. Campus continues to be a place where students, matriculating and graduated, gather together in community to pursue a wide range of interests.

Bethel continues its work to become a federally designated work college. With the success of the current Employment Experiences pilot program, we are expecting all incoming freshmen in the fall of 2024 to be enrolled in the program and placed in a job as part of their curriculum. By fall of 2027, all Bethel students will be gaining valuable work experiences along with valuable classroom experiences.

Bethel continues its work to meet the needs and expectations of a diverse student population. Focus has been added to areas of student wellness and retention through the office of student success and retention and campus upgrades, such as our redesigned student-focused café. Beginning in July, we will welcome our first-ever vice president for culture and belonging- a position created so students, faculty, and staff have a comfortable space to have conversations around belonging, diversity, and inclusion.

Bethel entered the public phase of our campaign to bring a dedicated wellness center building to campus. By providing state-of-the-art fitness facilities, wellness programs, and mental health resources, the center will create a holistic environment that fosters physical and mental resilience for campus and community.

Inspiration for music included in the recent concert choir tour program came from Langston Hughes: "To sit and dream. To sit and read. To sit and learn about the world." We strive to make Bethel a place where students and community can continue to explore their passions, connect with one another, and become active members of a global family.

Thank you for your continued support!

Ben Lichti, coordinator for alumni and church relations



Students and faculty tie prayer ribbons to a cross



Architect rendering of a new wellness center



The Rosette Nebula photographed by the Bethel observatory



2024 Report to Central District Conference

STRONG ROOTS. BRIGHTER FUTURE.

Dr. Katherine Fell, University of Findlay president, and **Dr. Jane Wood**, Bluffton University president, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) declaring the intention to pursue a merger of Bluffton University operations with University of Findlay. Findlay and Bluffton will become one higher education community on two campuses. The decision was made by votes of each institution's Board of Trustees. Pending all regulatory approvals, the merger is anticipated to be completed by Fall 2025. Bluffton intends to remain affiliated with Mennonite Church USA while the University of Findlay intends to remain affiliated with the Churches of God, General Conference. Additional information can be found at www.findlayblufftonfuture.com.

TEACHING PEACE TO CHILDREN

The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center's graduate assistant/co-director, **Tareq Abuhallima**, and students began presenting "Teaching Peace to Children," a series of sessions on issues such as conflict resolution and cultural understanding during 2023-24. A native of Gaza, Palestine, Abuhallima is connected with MennoPin (Mennonite Palestinian Israel Network), and shared "Experiences in the Gaza Strip" during a January Forum. **Dr. Paul Neufeld Weaver**, professor of education and director of global education, serves as the center's director.

SPIRITUAL LIFE WEEK

During the 2023-24 spiritual life weeks on campus, **David Glick '07**, spoke during the fall on the theme "Be Rooted" using John 15:5 while **Lindsay Horn '19** engaged students in the spring with the theme "Even when we are not... God is" and Mark 5:25-34.

124TH COMMENCEMENT

Glen Guyton, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, was chosen to be the Commencement speaker during the May 4 ceremony in Sommer Center. Guyton's speech, titled, "I Succeeded," focused on celebrating your wins. "The future will take care of itself. Today is a day to celebrate how far we have come."

KEENEY PEACE LECTURE

Sarah Augustine shared the annual Keeney Peace Lecture on March 26. She invited the campus community to consider indigenous wisdom for faithful ecological solutions beyond the economic and cultural systems responsible for the current climate crisis. Augustine and 1984 Bluffton alumnus Sheri Hostetler wrote, "So We and Our Children May Live: Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis," and co-founded the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery.

Thank you!

Bluffton University currently enrolls four students from Central District Conference Churches: **Theodore Andreas** and **Kaleigh Coffman**, First Mennonite Church of Bluffton; **Blake Clum** and **Madelyn Renner**, Grace Mennonite Church; and **Rilynn Kaufmann**, Assembly Mennonite Church.

Church Matching Scholarship support is \$4,000 for 2023-24.

The Bluffton trustees from Central District Conference are **Annette Heslep '89**, First Mennonite Church of Bluffton; **Heather Reichenbach '99**, secretary, Eighth Street Mennonite Church; **Jane Roeschley '77**, Mennonite Church of Normal; **Tim Stried '98**, Columbus Mennonite Church.

Online MSW

- Offered in partnership with Goshen College
- Mental health specialization
- Sit for licensure in any state

Classes start in August.

Learn more at
www.bluffton.edu/msw

For more information, contact
Gerald Mast
Church relations coordinator
and professor of communication
mastg@bluffton.edu

Graduate Certificate in Faith-Based Peacebuilding Launches

“What peacebuilding is, to me, has to be and is undergirded by my faith,” affirmed Keren Kandel, one of the first three graduates of EMS’s new certificate program. She described how she both learned about principles *and* put them into practice in the community. Students in the 18-credit program take courses on campus or online, with flexibility built into the degree so students can choose relevant courses in theology, biblical studies, racial justice, conflict analysis and peacebuilding.

EMS Celebrates 2023 Graduates

On May 7, EMS celebrated its largest graduating class since before the pandemic in 2019. Nineteen graduates earned master’s degrees in Christian leadership, divinity, and religion; and certificates in Christian studies, general theology, and faith-based peacebuilding. 2022-23 seminary enrollment was strong, with a 14% increase over the previous year.



Seminary graduates receive a blessing at EMU commencement

Conflict Transformation Trainings Equip Ministry Leaders

The first series of workshops in conflict transformation, trauma resilience, and adaptive leadership were held in the spring 2023. Director Dr. Jacob Cook works with leaders at EMS and EMU’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding to equip pastors and lay leaders through digital content, online courses, regional on-site



Participants learn trauma-aware practices in May 20 workshop

trainings and on-campus workshops. Utilizing a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., EMS is developing these interdisciplinary leadership workshops and trainings that integrate personal spiritual formation, biblical and theological frameworks, and conflict transformation skills. More offerings are forthcoming, and custom-designed trainings are available on EMU’s campus or at your location.

EMS Averages 82.5% Tuition Scholarships for 2023 Admits

Students admitted to EMS master’s programs in 2023 were awarded, on average, scholarships covering 82.5% of their tuition. Thanks to generous donors, applicants can receive up to 100% tuition scholarships on the basis of merit and financial need. Plus, now that all EMS courses are available virtually, EMS is seeing an increase in attendance from students outside of Virginia and beyond the U.S. EMS’s Zoom technology and online learning management system make our synchronous learning dynamic and formative. Apply now or recommend EMS to someone you know! Visit emu.seminary/admissions/grad

Statement of Purpose

Eastern Mennonite Seminary prepares servants of Christ to minister together locally and globally. In response to God’s gracious call, we invite students to embody and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God’s Spirit as wise interpreters, mature practitioners, discerning communicators, and transformational leaders.

- ▶ **Susan Schultz Huxman**, president
 - ▶ **Daniel Ott**, seminary dean
 - ▶ **Sarah Ann Bixler**, associate dean
- emu.edu/seminary
540-432-4260**

Conflict Transformation and Trauma Resilience Workshops

Equipping pastors and lay leaders on campus and online

emu.edu/seminary/workshops



*EMU prepares students to serve
and lead in a global context*

SPRING 2024

CENTRAL DISTRICT MENNONITE CONFERENCE

EMU ANNUAL REPORT

Greetings to our friends from President Huxman at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU)!

We are thankful for your support in prayer, advocacy, financial gifts, and sending us students who are fulfilling their call in all our educational programming. We are fortunate to have an impactful contingent of support from churches, agencies and visionary individuals as represented by our current students, loyal alumni, trustees, faculty and staff who call communities within this conference their home.

The 2023-2024 academic year has given us much, for which we are grateful. Highlights from this year are many, including:

- We have expanded programming and student access in our seminary (EMS) and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (CJP) thanks to donor support and major Lily Foundation grants. These combined efforts allow us to hire instructors and advisors, make it easier and more affordable for students, and to launch new programming, such as the continuing education program, Shalom Academy, in early January.
- We have launched our first ever comprehensive philanthropic campaign: “Forward Together, 2023-2028” after a third-party feasibility study indicated that a reservoir of goodwill from our loyal supporters would support a \$40M campaign with joy. This will be our largest campaign for people, programs and facilities.
- We have celebrated a new women’s networking and philanthropic group: “[Royal Women for EMU](#).” At the inaugural kick off, we honored 18 pioneering women from EMS, EMC, and EMU as part of a larger initiative to support diversity, equity and inclusion at EMU.
- The PBS Viewpoint Series with Dennis Quaid has been so impressed with our diversity, equity and inclusion work that they came to record a documentary on our campus in October.

As highlighted in our new strategic plan, “Pathways of Promise,” this is our moment to position EMU as a premier faith-inspired peace and justice university (see our “[Reaffirmation of EMU as a Peace and Justice University](#)” on the context of the Palestine-Israel atrocities.)

This is our challenge: to make a radical difference in educating more “bridge-builders” in our world today.

Psalm 119 gives us direction in navigating our polarizing times: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*” Our mission sets forth the ultimate “pathway of promise”—to follow Jesus, a pathway of enduring light well-marked as a lamp onto our feet.

In gratitude,

Susan Schultz Huxman, Ph.D.
President, EMU

How can EMU serve you?

Contact the church relations office to schedule the president or a faculty guest speaker:
540-432-4200 or
ChurchRelations@emu.edu

Central District Conference Connections to EMU

Students

Spring semester 2024 has six undergraduate students and one seminary enrolled from the Central District Mennonite Conference.

Giving

Central District churches gave \$2,500 to the Seminary Annual Fund, \$1,000 to the University Fund, and over \$59,200 in matching church grants to their students during the year ending June 2023.

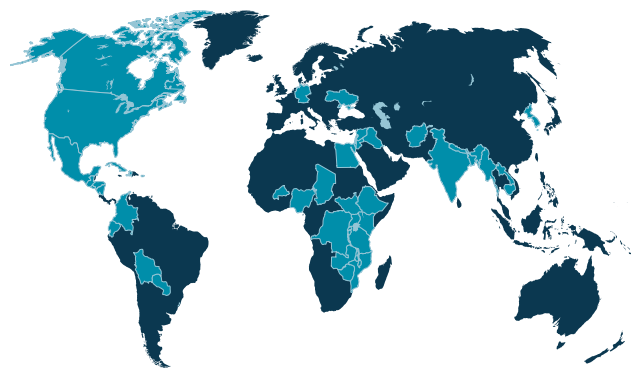
- ▶ **Susan Schultz Huxman**,
president
- ▶ **Kirk Shisler**, *vice president for advancement*
- ▶ **Braydon Hoover**, *associate vice president of advancement*
- ▶ **Mary Jensen**, *vice president for enrollment and strategic growth*
- ▶ **Luke Litwiller**, *director of undergrad admissions*

Our Vision

We will open new pathways of access and achievement for all students who aspire to grow as unifying leaders equipped with intercultural competence, oriented toward peace and justice, and rooted in an active faith modeled on the life and teachings of Jesus.

2024 report for Central District Conference

MCC U.S. and MCC Great Lakes
(574) 534.4133 • GreatLakes@mcc.org • mcc.org



45
countries

393
partners

508
projects



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through MCC-supported Women Situation Room groups, people like Melanie Mafinga are trained to resolve conflicts, mediate and prevent violence. (MCC/Fairpicture photo/Justin Makangara)

MCC and Central District Conference connections

- Congregations and individuals from Central District Conference play important roles in MCC relief sales, thrift shops, My Coins Count fundraisers, material resources drives and meat canning.
- Various CDC congregations hosted MCC speakers, either virtually or in person.
- Thank you to the families from Central District Conference churches who host International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) participants.
- Bluffton University students volunteered with the Appalachia Build (formerly SWAP) home repair program in Elkhorn City, Kentucky.

“In MCC, peace is at the root of what we do. Our vision is God’s shalom for all people.”

-Eric Kurtz

Comforter Bashes throughout the Great Lakes region bring together people of all ages, abilities and faith traditions to knot comforters and fellowship with one another. Participants work together to combine handmade comforter tops, warm batting and sturdy backing

fabric into warm, durable and beautiful comforters. The hands-on project is one way that MCC supporters are putting their faith into action. Each handmade comforter is unique and provides not only warmth but also a tangible message to people that their needs are not forgotten.



MCC’s 2024 guiding scripture

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 (NIV)

MCC works in 45 countries thanks to strong partnerships, not only with organizations on the ground but also with supporters like you.

You’re helping to provide food, bedding and hygiene items to families in Gaza. In Mexico, your support helps farmers learn new agricultural techniques so they can stay on their land. And in Kentucky, you are helping to provide safe, warm and dry housing through MCC Appalachia Build (formerly SWAP).

We are grateful for each of you and the role that you play. Whether you donate financially, pray for MCC, volunteer at an MCC thrift shop, pack kits, knot comforters, can meat or bid on items at a relief sale, we appreciate you. You are sharing God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

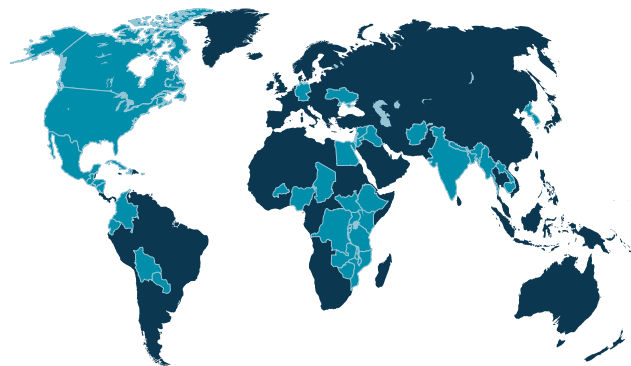
With thanksgiving,

Eric Kurtz, MCC Great Lakes executive director
Peter Martin, MCC Great Lakes Board representative for Central District Conference

Informe 2024 para la Conferencia del Distrito Central

CCM EE.UU. y CCM Great Lakes

(574) 534.4133 • GreatLakes@mcc.org • mcc.org



45

países

393

asociados

508

proyectos



En la República Democrática del Congo, a través de los grupos de mujeres, Women Situation Room, apoyados por el CCM, personas como Melanie Mafinga reciben formación para resolver conflictos, mediar y prevenir la violencia. (MCC/ Fairpicture photo/ Justin Makangara)

Escritura guía del CCM para 2024

Que gobierne en sus corazones la paz de Cristo, a la cual fueron llamados en un solo cuerpo. Y sean agradecidos. **Colosenses 3:15 NVI**

El CCM trabaja en 45 países gracias a una asociación sólida, no sólo con organizaciones locales, sino también con colaboradores como usted.

Usted está ayudando a proporcionar alimentos, ropa de cama y artículos de higiene a familias en Gaza. En México, su apoyo ayuda a los agricultores a aprender nuevas técnicas agrícolas para que puedan permanecer en sus tierras. Y en Kentucky, usted está ayudando a proporcionar viviendas seguras, cálidas y secas a través de “MCC Appalachia Build” (antes SWAP).

Estamos agradecidos por cada uno de ustedes y por el papel que desempeñan. Si usted dona financieramente, ora por el CCM, es voluntario en una tienda de segunda mano del CCM, empaca kits, anuda colchas, enlata carne o hace una oferta por artículos en una venta para ayuda humanitaria, le apreciamos. Están compartiendo el amor y la compasión de Dios por todos en el nombre de Cristo.

Con agradecimiento,
Eric Kurtz, *director ejecutivo del CCM Great Lakes*
Peter Martin, *representante de la Junta directiva de CCM Great Lakes*

Conexiones entre el CCM y la Conferencia del Distrito Central

- Las congregaciones e individuos de la Conferencia del Distrito Central desempeñan un papel importante en las ventas de artículos de socorro del CCM, las tiendas de segunda mano, la recaudación de fondos “Mis monedas cuentan”, las campañas de recogida de recursos materiales y el enlatado de carne.
- Varias congregaciones del CDC (por sus ciclos en inglés) patrocinaron a oradores del CCM, ya sea de forma virtual o en persona.
- Gracias a las familias de las iglesias de la Conferencia del Distrito Central que hospedaron a participantes del Programa de Intercambio Internacional de Voluntarios (IVEP).
- Estudiantes de la Universidad de Bluffton trabajaron como voluntarios en el programa de reparación de viviendas Appalachia Build (antes SWAP) en Elkhorn City, Kentucky.

“En el MCC, la paz está en la raíz de lo que hacemos. Nuestra visión es el shalom de Dios para todas las personas.”

-Eric Kurtz

Los encuentros para coser colchas en la región de Great Lakes reúnen a personas de todas las edades, capacidades y tradiciones religiosas para coser colchas y fomentar el compañerismo. Los participantes trabajan juntos para unir partes de la colcha hechas a mano, guata caliente y tela resistente

para crear colchas calientes, duraderas y bonitas. Este proyecto práctico es una de las formas en que los donantes del CCM ponen su fe en acción. Cada colcha hecha a mano es única y proporciona no sólo calor sino también un mensaje tangible a la gente de que sus necesidades no están olvidadas.





2022-2023 MDS ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Ready...Set... Grow!



MDS volunteers served
53,583 days
helping
805 households
recover from disaster.



**"MDS volunteers are my village—
heaven sent."**

That's how Nicole Gillespie (pictured top left) described the loving hands that built a new home for her family in Crisfield, Maryland, a small town that experienced repeated flooding.

In 2023, MDS volunteers not only got people like Nicole home—they made them safer. With updated construction plans that meet a gold standard for severe weather endurance, MDS made great strides in disaster mitigation.

That means, as Nicole's husband Eddie put it: "When we walked in that door, when they gave us the key to that house, I could finally rest."

MDS also nurtured a vibrant group of youth volunteers, bringing an intergenerational wave of response across the US and Canada.

Joel Amstutz, a youth volunteer in Dawson Springs, Kentucky, reflected: "As MDS led us through each day, our faith was able to grow as we worked and talked with each other."

Volunteering changed countless lives and moved countless hearts toward a deeper commitment to service.

For all those volunteers who taught or learned construction skills, for those who prayed and worked together, for those who gave hours, days, and weeks of their time—**THANK YOU!**



7,290 volunteers
across Canada and the U.S.
gave their time, skills
and compassion to build
95 new homes,
complete
402 repairs,
finish
274 cleanups,
and build
7 new bridges
for households who
experienced a disaster.

This volunteer labor is a value of
**\$13.63 million USD/
\$18.54 million CAD***

All statistics from 8/1/2022 through 7/31/2023.
*Labor value based on a volunteer rate of \$31.80 USD/
hour. (www.independentsector.org)

Respond. Rebuild. Restore.



**Mennonite
Disaster
Service**

www.mds.org

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2023 has been full of exciting work and meaningful connections as the work of Mennonite Men continues to benefit our communities and congregations. Our three programs—JoinTrees, JoinMen, and JoinHands—continue to thrive as we invite men to grow, give and serve as followers of Jesus for God's shalom.

To learn more about our work, download resources, or contribute to our programs, visit mennonitemen.org.

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Mennonite Men

Engaging men to grow, give and serve.

JoinTrees

Planting trees to restore the earth

JoinTrees is our campaign to plant one million trees by 2030. This campaign targets climate change—an existential threat to life on our planet. By increasing tree and forest cover with this JoinTrees campaign, our goals are to help: (1) mitigate global warming, (2) serve climate justice, and (3) support vulnerable communities.

Our vision is a healthy, thriving planet where God's abundant life of shalom is enjoyed by all from generation to generation.

The largest project we funded this year was again in Baja Verapaz, Guatemala. Community members were extensively involved in planting and caring for these trees. In this project, 14,104

were reforestation seedlings on badly eroded land, 10,040 were agroforestry plantings, 9,479 were for living fences, 250 for maintaining soil on terraces, and 375 were fruit trees for a total of 34,248 trees.

We now have ten projects lined up to plant 133,585 trees. Most of our projects continue to be agroforestry projects in communities in Latin America and Africa. These agroforestry plantings not only sequester CO2 and help cool the planet but also help restore degraded land, protect intact forests, and support the livelihood of vulnerable communities impacted by climate changes.

To fund these projects, we need \$145,830. Once these projects are funded and completed, our total tree count will be 333,610—one third the way toward our goal of 1 million trees!



JoinHands

Sharing resources for new church buildings

JoinHands is our program for giving and grantmaking. Through our JoinHands Mennonite Church Building Program, we provide grants to help new congregations acquire their first church building. Mennonite Men has given over 2.3 million dollars to new congregations for this purpose.

We invite individuals and congregations to give to JoinHands. We especially ask churches pursuing building projects to give as a way of sharing resources and serving "fair balance" with congregations in need.

Our recent JoinHands grants assisted with church

projects in Burkina Faso and Columbia. One went to Iglesia Menonita Caminando En Esperanza in Bogota, Colombia. The other went to Kodení Evangelical Mennonite Church in Kodení, Burkina Faso. In this predominately Muslim context, Muslim youth helped with construction—illustrating Christians and Muslims living together in community.

Our board recently approved a JoinHands grant to assist the Omaha Chin Christian Church (Central Plains conference) with purchasing a used church building. This congregation is connected to a large population of Chin immigrants in Omaha and has a special ministry of assisting people navigate a challenging new life in North America and find a home in the Anabaptist family. We now need to raise funds to make this \$40,000 grant.



JoinMen

Gathering men and promoting their growth

JoinMen provides gatherings and resources from an Anabaptist perspective to promote healthy masculinity, Christian formation and community. We desire that all men find a place of belonging among men who are strong, loving and wise as we follow Jesus in building God's shalom.

Gatherings provide opportunities for men to join together and engage issues in community. More than an event, these experiences are also meant to encourage participants to be part of an ongoing men's group and growth process. A full list of gathering themes we offer can be found at

mennonitemen.org/joinmen.

We receive encouraging reports of individuals and groups using our new book *Living that Matters* (Herald Press, 2023). Here's a response from Chicago: "At Reba Place Church in Evanston, Illinois, a group of men gather once a month to encourage and pray for one another. At the core of our gatherings is the invaluable resource *Living that Matters: Honest Conversations for Men of Faith*. Many of us have a tendency to isolate and disengage, but the book has helped our group grow closer together because of the wisdom that draws us in every time."

We've led several gatherings based on our book and invite your congregation to host one in your community



Engaging men to grow, give and serve as followers of Jesus for God's shalom

El 2023 ha estado lleno de trabajo emocionante y de conexiones significativas mientras el trabajo de los ‘Mennonite Men’ (Hombres Menonitas) continúa beneficiando a nuestras comunidades y congregaciones. Nuestros tres programas—‘JoinTrees’ (UniendoÁrboles), ‘JoinMen’ (UniendoHombres) y ‘JoinHands’ (UniendoManos)—continúan prosperando mientras invitamos a los hombres a crecer, dar y servir como seguidores de Jesús para el shalom de Dios.

Para saber más sobre nuestro trabajo, descargar recursos o contribuir a nuestros programas, visite mennonitemen.org.

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Mennonite Men

Engaging men to grow, give and serve.

UniendoÁrboles

Plantar árboles para restaurar la Tierra



UniendoÁrboles es nuestra campaña para plantar un millón de árboles para el 2030. Esta campaña se centra en el cambio climático, una amenaza existencial para la vida en nuestro planeta. Al aumentar la cubierta arbórea y forestal con esta campaña de UniendoÁrboles, nuestros objetivos son ayudar a: (1) mitigar el calentamiento global, (2) servir a la justicia climática, y (3) apoyar a las comunidades vulnerables.

Nuestra visión es un planeta sano y próspero donde la abundante vida del shalom de Dios sea disfrutada por todos(as) de generación en generación.

El proyecto de mayor envergadura que financiamos este año se llevó a cabo de nuevo en Baja Verapaz (Guatemala). Las personas de la comunidad participaron activamente en la plantación y en el cuidado de estos árboles. En este proyecto, 14,104 eran plantas de semillero de reforestación en terrenos muy erosionados, 10,040 eran plantaciones

agroforestales, 9,479 eran para vallas vivas, 250 para mantener el suelo en terrazas y 375 eran árboles frutales, lo que hace un total de 34,248 árboles.

Ahora tenemos diez proyectos para plantar 133,585 árboles. La mayoría de nuestros proyectos siguen siendo agroforestales en comunidades de América Latina y África. Estas plantaciones agroforestales no solo capturan CO2 y ayudan a enfriar el planeta, sino que también contribuyen a restaurar tierras degradadas, proteger bosques intactos y apoyar los medios de subsistencia de comunidades vulnerables afectadas por el cambio climático.

Para financiar estos proyectos necesitamos 145.830 dólares. Una vez financiados y completados estos proyectos, nuestro número total de árboles será de 333,610, un tercio del camino hacia nuestro objetivo de un millón de árboles!

Uniendo Manos

Compartir recursos para la construcción de nuevas iglesias



UniendoManos es nuestro programa de donaciones y subvenciones. A través de nuestro Programa de Construcción de Iglesias Menonitas UniendoManos, proporcionamos subvenciones para ayudar a las nuevas congregaciones a adquirir su primer edificio de iglesia. Hombres Menonitas han donado más de 2.3 millones de dólares a nuevas congregaciones con este fin.

Invitamos a personas y a congregaciones a donar a UniendoManos. Especialmente pedimos a las iglesias que persiguen proyectos de construcción que den como una forma de compartir recursos y de servir un “equilibrio justo” con congregaciones necesitadas.

Nuestras recientes subvenciones de UniendoManos han ayudado a proyectos de iglesias en Burkina Faso y Colombia. Una se destinó a la Iglesia Menonita Caminando

en Esperanza de Bogotá (Colombia). La otra se destinó a la Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Kodení, en Burkina Faso. En este contexto predominantemente musulmán, los(as) jóvenes musulmanes(as) ayudaron en la construcción, demostrando así que las personas cristianas y musulmanas viven juntas en comunidad.

Nuestra junta recientemente aprobó una subvención de UniendoManos para ayudar a la Iglesia Cristiana de Omaha Chin (conferencia de Llanuras Centrales) a comprar un edificio usado para iglesia. Esta congregación está conectada a una gran población de inmigrantes chin en Omaha y tiene un ministerio especial de ayudar a las personas a navegar una nueva vida desafiante en América del Norte y para encontrar un hogar en la familia anabautista. Ahora, necesitamos recaudar fondos para realizar esta subvención de \$40,000.

Uniendo Hombres

Reuniendo a los hombres y promoviendo su crecimiento



UniendoHombres ofrece reuniones y recursos desde una perspectiva anabautista para promover la masculinidad sana, la formación cristiana y la comunidad. Deseamos que todos los hombres encuentren un lugar de pertenencia entre hombres fuertes, amorosos y sabios mientras seguimos a Jesús en la construcción del shalom de Dios.

Los encuentros ofrecen a los hombres la oportunidad de reunirse y de tratar temas en comunidad. Más que un evento, estas experiencias también pretenden animar a los participantes a continuamente formar parte de un grupo de hombres y de un proceso de crecimiento. En mennonitemen.org/joinmen encontrará una lista completa de los temas de los encuentros que ofrecemos.

Recibimos informes alentadores de personas y de grupos

que utilizan nuestro nuevo libro ‘Living that Matters’ (Vivir lo que Importa, Herald Press, 2023). A continuación, un comentario de Chicago: “En la Iglesia el Lugar de de Evanston, Illinois, un grupo de hombres se reúne una vez al mes para animarse y para orar unos por otros. El centro de nuestros encuentros es el inestimable recurso ‘Living that Matters: Honest Conversations for Men of Faith’ (Vivir lo que Importa: Conversaciones Sinceras para Hombres de Fe). Muchos de nosotros tenemos la tendencia a aislarnos y a desconectarnos, pero el libro ha ayudado a que nuestro grupo se una más gracias a la sabiduría que nos atrae siempre.”

Hemos dirigido varios encuentros basados en nuestro libro e invitamos a su congregación a organizar una en su comunidad.

Animar a los hombres a crecer, dar y servir como seguidores de Jesús para el shalom de Dios

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



Part V

Reference

**CONSTITUTION
of the
CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE**

(Who We Are)

Article I. Name and Purpose

The name of this organization shall be “Central District Conference,” an affiliation of congregations that covenant together in common life and mission. Central District Conference is a member conference of Mennonite Church USA.

The purpose of Central District Conference, a member conference of Mennonite Church USA, is to promote community among congregations, to serve as a resource for pastors and congregations, and to facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through which congregations and pastors may work.

Article II. Our Common Faith and Mission

Vision:

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world. *(Adopted November 15, 2003)*

Mission Statement

The mission of Central District Conference is to know Christ’s abundant love in who we are and how we live, and to answer God’s persistent call to share that love with one another and the world by:

- Promoting a Christ-like community of hospitality where all are welcome and where grace-filled relationships flourish, and patience and generosity are practiced,
- Calling and nurturing wise, dynamic and compassionate Anabaptist leadership,
- Supporting missional partnerships that make God’s reign visible and foster ministries of evangelism, peace, healing and hope.

KNOWING CHRIST’S LOVE . . . ANSWERING GOD’S CALL

As members of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), we are guided by the statement of faith as addressed in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995* and MC USA approved documents.

Article III. Membership

Section A: Expectations:

Every member congregation shall meet the following requirements:

- (a) It shall have a statement of purpose/faith in keeping with this constitution and vision of MC USA.
- (b) It shall have a viable strategy and leadership appropriate for the above purpose.
- (c) It shall demonstrate a commitment to become an established congregation in the community.
- (d) It shall have a definitive membership.

Conference expectations of congregations include regular participation in conference, giving and receiving counsel, providing regular financial support and willingness for members to serve in leadership positions.

Section B: Application for membership

A congregation which has made application to join the Conference and has met the above requirements and has been visited by a Conference representative(s) may be recommended by the Board of Directors to the Conference for membership. Congregations attain membership upon Conference delegate approval of the Board of Directors’ recommendation.

A group which desires to relate to the Conference, but does not yet meet the requirements, or does not desire

congregational status, is encouraged to participate in conference activities, but does not have voting privileges.

Section C: Change or Withdrawal

1. *Changing Conference relationship:* When a CDC congregation wishes to alter conference membership within MC USA, the CDC Conference Minister and Board of Directors will process with that congregation on the basis of MC USA Guidelines.
2. *Ending Conference relationship:* If a congregation wishes to end membership in CDC and MC USA, the Conference Minister, in consultation with the Board of Directors, will establish with the congregation the appropriate steps that provide for giving and receiving counsel, for communication within the congregation and with the congregations of CDC, and for delegate recognition of the congregation's decision to leave the Conference.

Article IV: Amendments

Section A: Amendment

This constitution may be amended at any regular meeting of the Conference by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast. Notice and a copy of such proposed amendment shall be given to the congregation at least 30 days before the time of meeting.

Section B: Review

This document shall be reviewed every five years.

Article V: Purposes and Limitations of Corporate Authority

Section A: Purposes

Central District Conference (the Corporation) is organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes in accordance with section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or a corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue law, referred to below as the "Code"). More specifically, the Corporation, as a subordinate organization of Mennonite Church USA, is organized to promote community among congregations, to serve as a resource for pastors and congregations, and to facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through which congregations and pastors may work.

Section B: Limitations of Corporate Authority

- A. The Corporation, being organized exclusively for religious purposes, may make distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Code.
- B. No part of the net earnings of Corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the Corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article 5 above.
- C. No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.
- D. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the Corporation shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (1) by a corporation exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Code or (2) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Code.
- E. Upon dissolution of the Corporation, the Board of Directors shall, after paying or making provision for the payment of all of the liabilities of the Corporation, dispose of all of the assets of the Corporation, exclusively for the purposes of the Corporation in such manner, or to such organization or organizations organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes, as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Code, as the Board of Directors shall determine. Any such assets not so disposed of shall be disposed of by the appropriate court of law of the county in which the principal office of the Corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for exempt purposes.

BYLAWS OF CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE

(How We Are Organized)

Bylaw 1. Delegate Assembly

Section A: Meetings

Conference shall meet in regular session annually in response to invitation from congregations or as arranged by the Board of Directors. Special meetings may be called by the Board of Directors upon thirty days' notice.

All meetings shall be conducted in accordance with generally accepted parliamentary procedure.

Section B: Delegates, Voting and Floor Privileges

1. Representation and Voting: Every member congregation of the Conference shall have the right to be represented by one vote for every thirty members or fractional part of that number, with a minimum of two delegates from each congregation. In addition to the above delegates, every member congregation is encouraged to appoint one high school age youth delegate who is an active participant of the congregation and youth group. This will be an additional voting delegate.
2. Delegate Forms: Proper delegate forms shall be sent to all member congregations by the Conference administrator, and these forms shall be returned to the Conference administrator designating all delegates before or by the opening session of the annual meeting.
3. Floor Privileges: Any member of a constituent congregation present at Conference sessions may participate in discussion on the conference floor. Other guests present are welcome to join open discussion in the spirit of Christian love and mutual helpfulness.

Section C: Annual Reports

All boards, committees, appointed positions, Conference ministry staff, and the Treasurer shall present written reports of their work to the Conference at the regular annual meeting.

Section D: Gifts Discernment Committee, Nominations, Elections and Appointments

1. Gifts Discernment Committee: This committee shall consist of six members appointed by the Board of Directors. Two shall be appointed each year for a term of three years. The Conference Minister shall be an ex-officio member of the committee. The committee shall prepare a slate of available positions for presentation to delegates at the annual meeting after it has been approved by the Board of Directors. The committee shall assist the Board of Directors and other committees as requested to make appointments, both within the conference and for denominational roles.
2. Nominations/Elected Positions: A studied effort shall be made to maintain a proper continuity in the overall organization of the Conference in its various aspects and at the same time to effect a reasonable rotation of personnel. Nominations should be made with sensitivity and balance with regard to the makeup of the conference. Two successive terms for elected positions is the usual maximum. No one shall be elected to more than one standing committee at the same time.
3. Appointments: For vacated positions needing to be filled between annual meetings, the Board of Directors shall appoint persons, who will serve the remainder of the term. Persons appointed to complete a vacated term are eligible to be elected to two full terms.

Section E: Resolutions Committee

This committee shall consist of two or more members appointed by the Board of Directors. One member shall be appointed each year for a term of three years. The committee shall seek to determine the most salient matters on which, or to which, the Conference should speak; then formulate and submit a proposed statement of the Conference position in relation thereto.

Section G: Conference Year

The conference year shall begin with the close of the annual meeting and extend through the annual meeting the following year. All elected positions shall be governed by the conference year. The fiscal year begins July 1 and extends through June 30 of the following year.

Bylaw 2. Conference Leadership and Structure

Section A: Incorporation and Officers.

Central District Conference of the Mennonite Church USA, is a corporation now existing and incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. The purpose of Central District Conference is to promote community among congregations, to serve as a resource for pastors and congregations, and to facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through which congregations and pastors may work.

Section B: Legal Authorities and Responsibilities.

1. Said Conference in its corporate capacity shall have the power to hold title to property, receive and hold intangibles in all forms, dispose of properties when the interests of the Conference are served by doing so, and have such powers and privileges granted under the General Not-For-Profit Corporation Act of the State of Illinois, as amended from time to time.
2. All conveyances of real estate shall be executed at the direction of the corporation by the president and attested by the secretary, and when the corporate seal has been attached thereto any such conveyance shall be sufficient to convey title to corporation property without further authorization.
3. The Corporation will not participate in "activities in question" as determined by the Internal Revenue Service, specifically:
 - Providing housing through a partnership, joint venture or similar arrangement with any entity that is not described in IRC 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4);
 - Functioning as a title-holding organization described in IRC 501(c)(2) or 501(c)(25);
 - Participating in gaming as its primary activity;
 - Credit counseling as a primary function;
 - Operating donor advised funds;
 - Functioning primarily for the benefit of fundraisers;
 - Being involved in down-payment assistance;
 - Functioning as a private foundation;
 - Being organized and operated in a foreign country.

Section C: Officers of Conference. The officers of the Conference shall consist of president, president-elect, secretary and treasurer.

1. Duties
 - a. The president shall preside at all meetings of the Conference, Board of Directors, Leadership Council and any specially called meetings.
 - b. The president-elect shall perform the duties of the president in the absence or upon request of the latter.
 - c. The secretary shall see that a correct record of all meetings and proceedings is kept and that conference reports and minutes are published in such manner as the Conference may direct.
 - d. The treasurer shall oversee the operational funds of the Conference and see that necessary payments are made on behalf of the Conference.
2. Elections and terms of office. The election of officers shall be by ballot at the regular meeting of Conference. A two-thirds majority of all delegates present shall decide. A president-elect shall be elected every two years, and upon completion of a two-year term of office as such shall automatically become the president for two years. The secretary and treasurer shall be elected for terms of three years. All officers shall take office at the close of the annual meeting at which elected and shall remain in office until their successors take office. (For tenure of officers refer to Bylaw 1, Section D.2.)

Section D: The Board of Directors. The affairs of Central District Conference shall be managed by a Board of Directors which shall consist of the officers of the Conference and three Members-at-Large. The Conference officers shall serve in their various capacities as the respective officers of the Board of Directors.

1. Duties. The duties of the Board of Directors shall include but shall not be limited to the following:
 - a. It shall serve as custodians, or investors, of surplus or reserve funds which may accrue to Conference committees or auxiliaries, until such funds may be needed for the furtherance or expansion of the work of the committee or auxiliary concerned.
 - b. It shall meet and act upon matters as needed between annual Conference sessions.
 - c. It shall have power to fill vacancies in the Conference organization or on committees and boards, such

- persons to serve the remainder of the unexpired term.
- d. It shall keep informed regarding the various phases of the work of the Conference and its auxiliary organizations with a view of correlating and facilitating those activities.
- e. It shall see that Conference finances are audited on a regular basis.
- f. It shall appoint the editor of the Conference publication, which shall be made available to all the congregations in the Conference. The Board of Directors shall have general supervision of the publication work of the Conference.
- g. It shall make appointments to churchwide and other bodies as needed, including delegates to the MC USA Assembly.
- h. It shall receive and review the reports of the activities of the Conference Minister.
- i. It shall encourage and monitor relationships with other conferences, especially those conferences with geographic overlap with CDC.
- j. It shall appoint a Historian who shall relate to the archival system of CDC and MC USA.
- 2. Elections and terms of office.
 - a. The three Members-at-Large are to be elected by the Conference, one each year for a term of three years.
 - b. See Section C. 2. for election and terms of office for the officers of the Conference.

Section E: Committees. The Ministerial, Missional Church, and Stewardship Committees provide leadership and resources to carry out the priorities and ministries of Central District Conference. These committees shall be elected or appointed in the manner and for the purposes hereinafter defined. Task groups may be appointed by these committees in such manner, for such purpose, and at such times as the Conference shall see fit. (For tenure of committee members refer to Bylaw 1, Section D.2.)

- 1. Ministerial Committee
 - a. Election. This committee shall consist of six members, at least three of whom shall be pastors. Two shall be elected each year for a term of three years. The Conference Ministry staff will serve as ex-officio member(s).
 - b. Duties.
 - (1) It shall be the duty of the Ministerial Committee to be available to churches and pastors in their church-pastor relationship, offering their counsel, support, and service as needed.
 - (2) The committee shall counsel with congregations seeking pastoral leadership with pastors called to serve congregations in the District. In cooperation with congregations they shall examine candidates for pastoral, chaplaincy, and missionary service, grant licenses, and perform ordinations (see *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* for procedures), and assist in a service marking the beginning of a person's ministry.
 - (3) The committee shall provide opportunities for personal growth and professional improvement for pastors.
 - (4) The committee shall give attention to the call and nurturing of Anabaptist leadership. It shall link with the MC USA Ministerial Leadership and Congregational Life Team.
- 2. Missional Church Committee
 - a. Election. This committee shall consist of seven members, two or three elected each year for three year terms. The Conference Ministry staff are ex-officio members. Individual committee members may have experience and expertise in various facets of congregational life, such as worship, nurture, evangelism, education, peace and justice. It will intentionally link with MC USA resources.
 - b. Duties.
 - (1) This committee will encourage use of denominational and conference resources, nurturing congregations in developing and mobilizing their missional potential.
 - (2) This committee will be alert to congregational needs and special interests, linking congregations to appropriate resources and to other congregations with similar interests.
 - (3) This committee will encourage missional partnerships.
- 3. Stewardship Committee
 - a. Appointment. This committee shall consist of the Treasurer (ex-officio), Conference Ministry staff (ex-officio), and additional members appointed by the Board of Directors. Additional members shall be

- appointed for four-year terms.
- b. Duties.
 - (1) Recommend financial policy and direction to the Board of Directors which includes: management of funds, bookkeeping, auditing procedures, salary levels, formulating the annual spending plan, and monitoring conference income and expenditures.
 - (2) Create and manage a long-range development plan.
 - (3) Develop and promote a vision of stewardship for the conference and link with denominational resources to meet that vision in the local congregations.

Section F: The Leadership Council. The Leadership Council shall be composed of the Board of Directors, the Ministerial Committee, the Missional Church Committee, and the Stewardship Committee.

Duties

- a. It shall meet periodically to provide discernment and give counsel to the Board of Directors and to each other on issues of life and faith in the Conference.
- b. The Board of Directors and chairs of the committees in the Leadership Council shall meet annually to assess the vision, mission, and goals of the Conference.

Bylaw 3. Conference Staff

Section A: Conference Minister

- 1. The Conference Minister shall be employed by the Board of Directors of the Conference, following consultation with chairpersons of committees and the pastors of the District. The Board of Directors shall determine a contract utilizing the guidelines set by MC USA. Subsequent renewals of the contract shall be the responsibility of the Board of Directors upon utilization of appropriate review procedures and such renewal shall be brought to the Conference for affirmation. The Conference Minister shall be responsible to the Conference through the Board of Directors and Ministerial Committee.
- 2. It shall be the duty of the Conference Minister to assist congregations in discerning and realizing their mission, and in securing pastors.
- 3. The Conference Minister shall serve as a representative of CDC to denominational and intra-conference meetings as requested by the Board of Directors.
- 4. The Conference Minister shall have general supervision of all conference staff.

Section B: Associate Conference Minister(s): The Board of Directors may employ Associate Conference Minister(s) to perform specified duties of the Conference Minister in certain capacities. The Associate Conference Minister(s) shall be employed in the same manner and as set out above for the Conference Minister.

Section C: Support Staff: Support staff may be employed as deemed necessary by the Board of Directors.

Bylaw 4: Conference Auxiliaries and Related Boards

Auxiliaries of the Conference are chapters of denominational organizations operating under their own organizational structure, which is approved by the Conference. Annual reports of such organizations shall be submitted to the Conference. Currently, such auxiliaries are Mennonite Men and Mennonite Women. In addition, CDC appoints board members to Chicago Mennonite Learning Center, MCC Great Lakes and Adriel School.

Section 1: Camp Friedenswald Board

A. Election.

- 1. The Camp Friedenswald Board shall consist, in part, of nine members elected by the Conference, three to be elected each year for a term of three years.
- 2. The Camp Friedenswald Board may also consist of an additional one to six at-large members, to be appointed by the Camp Friedenswald Board. At-large members shall serve a term of three years. All at-large appointments are to be approved by the Central District Conference Board of Directors, prior to their being asked to serve.

B. Duties

- 1. The Board shall be responsible for the care, maintenance, and development of the Camp

- Friedenswald property.
2. The Camp Friedenswald Board shall also formulate policies, plan overall program schedule, and appoint leaders to carry out the program.

Section 2: Bluffton University Trustees: CDC representatives to the Bluffton University Board of Trustees are elected by the Conference in accordance with the Bluffton University Board of Trustees policy and represent the university in the Conference and its constituent congregations.

Section A: Amendment

These bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting of the Conference by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast. Notice and a copy of such proposed amendment shall be given to the congregation at least 30 days before the time of meeting.

Section B: Review

This document shall be reviewed every five years.

Adopted June 2004

Updated June 2007

Updated June 2009

Updated June 2011

Updated June 2016

Policies and Procedures:

Membership Criteria

The CDC Board of Directors proposes the following criteria for all congregations seeking membership in CDC, namely that they shall:

- Keep Jesus Christ at the center of their faith and action
- Affirm commitment to congregational discernment that is biblically based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led
- Be guided by the Mennonite Church USA *Vision: Healing and Hope* and *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) [See CDC Constitution, Article II: Statement of Faith].
- Affirm the CDC statement on Conference Polity
- Meet the CDC constitutional requirements for membership (see Art. III, Section A)
(Includes being an established congregation with a definitive membership, participating regularly in conference, providing financial support, giving and receiving counsel, and willingness for members to serve in leadership positions).
- When applicable, follow MC USA guidelines for changing conference affiliation

Affirmed by delegates, June 2010

Task Group Formation Process

In response to special needs or interests Task Groups may be formed/created through an application process for the purpose of performing special duties and assignments. The purpose of task groups is to provide a venue for work that benefits and is shared among congregations within the conference.

****The application, including measurable goals will be approved by the Missional Church Committee.**

****A member of the Missional Church Committee will serve as a link between the Task Group, committee, and the Leadership Council of CDC.**

****The outcome of the work done by the task group will be shared with conference leadership and may be distributed among conference congregations.**

****If funds are requested, the Missional Church Committee will determine the means to procure funding needed, i.e., access funds through the Missional Fund, initiate fundraising.**

****Task Group assignments may run as long as needed to complete a task. If the assignment continues beyond three years, a renewal must be requested. The task group assignment will expire if no request for renewal is received.**

****Task Group members are encouraged to connect using technology of video (such as YouTube), telephone video**

conferencing (SKYPE) and internet using email, website links, etc, and other presentation methods such as Power Point.

Missional Church Committee

May 2010

Reign of God Grants

Since a key purpose of conference is to facilitate our work together in mission, the Missional Church Committee designed *Reign of God Grants* to encourage missional activity among congregations. This Missional Church Committee program will match (1-1) money raised at the grassroots level to give the extra financial boost necessary for a new, cooperative missional initiative between two or more congregations. A missional initiative is any activity capturing and honoring God's continuing creative energy in establishing God's reign in the world.

Grant proposals may be submitted at any time during the fiscal year. Proposals should be no more than three pages in length and may be submitted online, by fax, or by postal mail. Individual grants will range from \$500 to \$2,500 will be given. Our goal is to distribute \$5,000 annually.

Grants must be used for:

- Missional initiatives based in the Central District region of the United States by Central District Conference congregations,
- Missional initiatives related to worship, nurture, evangelism, education, peace and justice, and creation care,
- New initiatives, or significantly new additions to current programs. Operating funds for existing programs will not qualify.

Decisions for funding will be made by the Missional Church Committee at the regularly scheduled committee meeting following submission of the application and funds will be distributed after receiving information that the matching funds have been raised.

Missional Church Committee

February 2011

Updated December 2015

Planning for Annual Meetings

Staff members will meet to orient local coordinators and worship planners from hosting congregations in the region in which the annual meeting is held. The planning day includes a review of logistical details and an on-site facilities tour. Staff members also orient the local worship planners and help to begin the planning process. Planning is then turned over to the local coordinators and worship planners. Staff members collaborate with them throughout the planning process.

Affirmed by delegates, June 2016

Conflicts of Interest Policy

Section 1. Purpose. The purpose of the conflict of interest policy is to protect this tax-exempt Corporation's interest when it is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of an officer or director of the Corporation or might result in a possible excess benefit transaction. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable state and federal laws governing conflict of interest applicable to nonprofit and charitable organizations.

Section 2. Definitions.

- (a) **Interested Person.** Any director, principal, officer, or member of a committee with delegated powers from the Board of Directors, who has a direct or indirect financial interest, as defined below, is an interested person.
- (b) **Financial Interest.** A person has a financial interest if the person has, directly or indirectly, through business, investment, or family:
 - (i) An ownership or investment interest in any entity with which the Corporation has a transaction or arrangement;

- (ii) A compensation arrangement with the Corporation or with any entity or individual with which the Corporation has a transaction or arrangement; or
 - (iii) A potential ownership or investment interest in, or compensation arrangement with, any entity or individual with which the Corporation is negotiating a transaction or arrangement.
- Compensation includes direct and indirect remuneration as well as gifts or favors that are not insubstantial.

A financial interest is not necessarily a conflict of interest. Under Section 2, a person who has a financial interest may have a conflict of interest only if the appropriate Board of Directors or committee decides that a conflict of interest exists.

Section 3. Procedures.

- (a) Duty to Disclose. In connection with any actual or possible conflict of interest, an interested person must disclose the existence of the financial interest and be given the opportunity to disclose all material facts to the Board of Directors and members of committees with delegated powers from the Board of Directors considering the proposed transaction or arrangement.
- (b) Determining Whether a Conflict of Interest Exists. After disclosure of the financial interest and all material facts, and after any discussion with the interest person, he/she shall leave the Board of Directors or committee meeting while the determination of a conflict of interest is disclosed and voted upon. The remaining Board of Directors or committee members shall decide if a conflict of interest exists.
- (c) Procedure for Addressing the Conflict of Interest.
 - (i) An interested person may make a presentation at a Board of Directors or committee meeting, but after the presentation, he/she shall leave the meeting during the discussion of, and the vote on, the transaction or arrangement involving the possible conflict of interest.
 - (ii) The chairperson of the Board of Directors or committee shall, if appropriate, appoint a disinterested person or committee to investigate alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement.
 - (iii) After exercising due diligence, the Board of Directors or committee shall determine whether the Corporation can obtain with reasonable efforts a more advantageous transaction or arrangement from a person or entity that would not give rise to a conflict of interest.
 - (iv) If a more advantageous transaction or arrangement is not reasonably possible under circumstances not producing a conflict of interest, the Board of Directors or committee shall determine by a majority vote of the disinterested Board of Directors whether the transaction or arrangement is in the Corporation's best interest, for its own benefit, and whether it is fair and reasonable. In conformity with the above determination, it shall make its decision as to whether to enter into the transaction or arrangement.
- (d) Violations of the Conflicts of Interest Policy.
 - (i) If the Board of Directors or committee has reasonable cause to believe a member has failed to disclose actual or possible conflicts of interest, it shall inform the member of the basis for such belief and afford the member an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclosure.
 - (ii) If, after hearing the member's response and after making further investigation as warranted by the circumstances, the Board of directors or committee determines the member has failed to disclose an actual or possible conflict of interest, it shall take appropriate disciplinary and corrective action.

Section 4. Records of Proceedings. The minutes of the Board of Directors and all committees with delegated powers from the Board of Directors shall contain:

- (a) The names of the persons who disclosed or otherwise were found to have a financial interest in connection with an actual or possible conflict of interest was present, and the Board of Directors' or committee's decision as to whether a conflict of interest in fact existed.
- (b) The names of the persons who were present for discussions and votes relating to the transaction or arrangement, the content of the discussion, including any alternatives to the proposed transaction or arrangement, and a record of any votes taken in connection with the proceedings.

Section 5. Compensation.

- (a) A voting member of the Board of Directors who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the Corporation for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation.
- (b) A voting member of any committee whose jurisdiction includes compensation matters and who receives compensation matters and who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the Corporation for services is precluded from voting on matters pertaining to that member's compensation.

- (c) No voting member of the Board of Directors or any committee whose jurisdiction includes compensation matters and who receives compensation, directly or indirectly, from the Corporation, either individually or collectively, is prohibited from providing information to any committee regarding compensation.

Section 6. Annual Statements. Each director, principal officer and member of a committee with delegated powers from the Board of Directors shall annually sign a statement which affirms such person:

- (a) Has received a copy of the conflicts of interest policy;
- (b) Has read and understands the policy;
- (c) Has agreed to comply with the policy; and
- (d) Understands the Corporation is charitable and in order to maintain its federal tax exemption it must engage primarily in activities which accomplish one or more of its tax-exempt purposes.

Section 7. Periodic Reviews. To ensure the Organization operates in a manner consistent with charitable purposes and does not engage in activities that could jeopardize its tax-exempt status, periodic reviews shall be conducted. The periodic reviews shall, at a minimum, include the following subjects:

- (a) Whether compensation arrangements and benefits are reasonable, based on competent survey information, and the result of arm's length bargaining.
- (b) Whether partnerships, joint ventures, and arrangements with management organizations conform to the Corporation's written policies, are properly recorded, reflect reasonable investment or payments for goods and services, further charitable purposes and do not result in inurement, impermissible private benefit or in an excess benefit transaction.

Section 8. Use of Outside Experts. When conducting the periodic reviews as provided for in Section 7 above, the Corporation may, but need not, use outside advisors. If the outside experts are used, their use shall not relieve the Board of Directors of its responsibility for ensuring periodic reviews are conducted.



Central District Conference

OF MENNONITE CHURCH USA

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CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE POLITY:

History and Current Understanding

Report of the Polity Articulation Task Force

(Accepted by the CDC Board of Directors January 23, 1999)

I. WHY WE NEED TO BE AND WANT TO BE A CONFERENCE

Conference for the congregations in Central District is something like a family of adult sisters and brothers. We love each other and are concerned about each other. We want to help each other but we do not feel a need to control each other. We share a common faith heritage and commitment, as well as a desire for common mission. Being together helps us strengthen those commitments, continue discovering God in significant ways, and define what it means for our walk as Jesus' disciples and Anabaptist Mennonites today.

For us conference is a place for fellowship, for discussion, and for mutual counseling as we seek to hear what the Spirit is saying to us about what it means to follow Christ. It is a place where relationships are vital. Conference is also a means for organizing so that we can work together in mission and church planting, for providing resources such as Camp Friedenswald and Bluffton College, for help in choosing and supporting pastoral leadership, and for keeping us responsive to the needs in the world around us.

Although our conference is part of what church is and does, it is not analogous to or a substitute for our congregations. It is in our congregations that we commit ourselves to participation as members of the body of Christ, a commitment which encompasses our total lives. The congregations' commitment to conference is different and more specific, defined by what we have come to understand the purpose of conference to be.

We confess we have often failed at being our best as conference. We talk of being family, but have sometimes failed in incorporating new members as full participants in the family. We talk of mutual accountability but have often failed to responsibly give and receive counsel, hindering the work of God's Spirit among us. We talk of unity but disunity has sometimes disrupted our conference efforts in witness, mission, and service. At times we have been left with a sense of scatteredness and weakened in our ability as a group to proclaim important understandings of faith and in our witness to Christ in the broader public arena. Yet conference continues to be very important, enhancing and facilitating God's work among us so that God's healing and hope will flow through us to the world.

II. THE FORMAL CONGREGATION-CONFERENCE RELATIONSHIP

Article II of our Central District Conference constitution defines the purpose of our conference as follows:

1. To promote community among member churches in our commitment to Christ.
2. To serve as a resource for, and to offer guidance to, pastors and congregations in matters of faith and life.
3. To facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through efforts in mission, evangelism, church planting, Christian education, nurture, and peacemaking.

Our conference, then, is intended to be a resource: to promote, serve, offer, and facilitate. Conference is congregations working *together*, it is not a separate body *over* congregations. Conference is formed by congregations coming together voluntarily for specific purposes. The constitution (Article IX) describes the steps which a congregation takes to join the conference and also notes that congregations may choose to leave the conference. The constitution does not grant the conference authority to remove a congregation from membership.

III. OUR HISTORY AS A CONFERENCE

According to Harold S. Bender, writing in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, congregational autonomy was the form of church government for virtually all groups in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition until the 19th century, when some conferences in North America began to develop “into authoritative ecclesiastical bodies with power over the local congregation and ministers.” (Vol. I, p. 669)

The roots of our own Central District Conference lie in the formation of the General Conference in 1860. The Central District Conference was organized in 1957 with the merger of the Central Conference Mennonite Church (organized in 1908) and the Middle District Conference (organized in 1888). These conferences carried on the Anabaptist tradition of congregational autonomy while enabling congregations to come together for fellowship and mutual encouragement and to organize for work which congregations could do best in cooperation with each other. These conferences did not simply evolve, but were deliberately organized for specific objectives. A major objective was the inclusion of all who shared the same purpose and wanted to walk together following Christ.

Walking Together in Faith, our conference history, speaks directly to the congregation - conference relationship and to the purposes for which conference was formed. Writing about the formation of the Central District Conference, conference historian Steve Estes observes, “each group [Middle District Conference and Central Conference] shared an essential commitment to the congregation as the central focus of church life — an independent congregationalism with the conference as a place for working together toward common ministry goals in Christian fellowship (and not as the locus of authority for the church).” (p. 8)

A mistaken assumption has been that Central District Conference polity developed in reaction to more authoritative practices in some other Mennonite conferences. This assumption is often based on the rather large number of Central District leaders who transferred to the Central Conference and Middle District Conference in the first half of this century from these other Mennonite conferences where, in some cases, they had been the objects of what they considered to have been harsh discipline.

The historical record shows that these leaders came to us long after our polity had been decided. They came to us precisely because we had a congregational autonomy clearly in place. It is probably fair to say, however, that many of our attitudes toward church discipline, particularly “harsh discipline,” were influenced significantly by the coming of these leaders. In that sense, the attitudes toward discipline in many of our congregations today may be a reaction to practices found in other Mennonite bodies.

IV. THE AUTHORITY OF CONFERENCE

The authority of Central District Conference lies in our coming together to seek God’s will and embrace God’s ultimate authority in our lives. As congregations in relationship, we do this seriously, humbly, and prayerfully, and then agree to share our understanding with each other in conference. The authority comes, or emerges, as our conference decisions are recognized as the will of God. It is not coercive, does not threaten, and comes without sanctions.

Conference statements reflecting the majority position on issues are to be taken seriously and studied carefully and prayerfully. At the same time we also humbly recognize that a majority can be mistaken and a minority may be nearer the mind of God.

We also understand that this kind of authority means that everyone within the conference has the responsibility both to give and receive counsel honestly and clearly. Unless we are engaged in this way, our conference will not discover authority as a reflection of God’s ultimate authority and we will find ourselves going in many different individualistic directions.

V. DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLING IN CENTRAL DISTRICT

We believe that *discipline*, as that is usually understood (sanctions), belongs in the congregation and is not a function of conference. Discipline is, after all, part of discipling and care which the church, the family of God, gives to each Christian. As such it needs to be done in the setting where the person has made a membership commitment, is best known, and the situation understood. That is the local congregation.

The relationship between conference and congregation is not the same as the relationship between the congregation and its individual members. When Paul speaks of the body of Christ, it is a body of which individuals (I Corinthians 12:27) are members, not a conference of which congregations are members.

Along with the congregations, the conference participates in the universal Christian mission of forming disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). The conference *disciples* by providing opportunities for people to come together and seek the meaning of discipleship in our time and by providing resources for helping us to actually walk as disciples.

VI. THE CONFERENCE ROLE IN PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

We consider the role of conference in the selection and credentialing of pastoral leadership to be very important. Our conference ministers and Ministerial Committee play a vital role in the call, credentialing, and ongoing accountability (and discipline, when necessary) of pastoral leadership. We recognize the heavy responsibility this places upon the Ministerial Committee and conference ministers.

We also see pastoral mentoring and pastor-peer groups as essential ways of giving and receiving counsel, of strengthening our conference as a family, and of discipling all of us.

VII. IN CONCLUSION

The relationship of conference to congregations in resourcing and mutual discernment is very important in Central District. It also calls us to engage each other responsibly. Every person in Central District Conference is called upon to actively seek God's will, to listen to the Holy Spirit, and to share what we have heard with our brothers and sisters in our congregations and in the wider conference. In Central District we are not passive followers. We are all called and invited to take responsibility, together with our sisters and brothers, to seek God's will on what it means concretely for us to be disciples of Jesus today.

We understand this individual responsibility, this call to mutual accountability — difficult as it may be — to be at the heart of Anabaptism. This is what baptism on confession of faith means. The Anabaptists rejected the idea of church as a traditional community which relied on tradition and the authority of traditional leaders. The church is a voluntary community which each person enters on the basis of his or her own individual decision and confession of faith — an individual, responsible, adult decision, which calls us into mutual relationship with each other. The Anabaptists believed that this is what the New Testament clearly teaches.

We face the future transition with some uncertainty, but also with anticipation, believing that, as we continue walking together in faith as responsible disciples, our Lord will continue to transform us in ways wonderful and new.

Respectfully submitted:

Task Force Members

Robert Ramseyer, Chair
Rich Bucher
Janeen Bertsche Johnson
Lynn Liechty
Elmer Neufeld
Jane Roeschley

Observer-Participants

Willis Sutter, Illinois Mennonite Conference
David Sutter, Indiana-Michigan Menn. Conference
Allen G. Rutter, Ohio Mennonite Conference

Staff

Lloyd L. Miller
Carol M. Morales

December 1998

Central District Conference Membership Criteria

All congregations seeking membership in CDC shall:

- Keep Jesus Christ at the center of their faith and action
- Affirm commitment to congregational discernment that is biblically based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led
- Be guided by the Mennonite Church USA *Vision: Healing and Hope* and *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) [See CDC Constitution, Article III: Statement of Faith].
- Affirm the CDC statement on Conference Polity
- Meet the CDC constitutional requirements for membership (see Art. IX, sections 1 and 2)
(Includes being an established congregation with a definitive membership, participating regularly in conference, providing financial support, giving and receiving counsel, and willingness for members to serve in leadership positions).
- When applicable, follow MC USA guidelines for changing conference affiliation

Affirmed by delegates/June 2010



A conference of Mennonite Church USA

Mission Statement:

The mission of Central District Conference is to know Christ's abundant love in who we are and how we live, and to answer God's persistent call to share that love with one another and the world by:

- ▶ Promoting a Christ-like community of hospitality where all are welcome and where grace-filled relationships flourish, and patience and generosity are practiced
- ▶ Calling and nurturing wise, dynamic and compassionate Anabaptist leadership
- ▶ Supporting missional partnerships that make God's reign visible and fostering ministries of evangelism, peace, healing and hope.

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE. . .ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

—Luke 10:27

CDC Core Values:

As Anabaptist Christians who received God's grace we affirm the following core values:

- ▶ Christ-centeredness through worship, discipleship and prophetic witness
- ▶ Sharing the good news of Jesus through a lifestyle which includes simple living, non-violence, service, evangelism, peacemaking, and justice
- ▶ Faithfulness to the way of Jesus through community discernment of Scripture by the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- ▶ Trust in congregational discernment
- ▶ Creating healthy and healing relationships within and among congregations and conferences
- ▶ Stewardship of God's gifts and resources
- ▶ Dismantling of racism, economic disparities and gender and disability biases.
- ▶ Nurturing and celebrating the faith of all ages within diverse contexts
- ▶ Trained and capable Anabaptist ministers and lay leaders
- ▶ Openness and commitment to learning from others throughout the world.

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

--CDC Vision Statement



CDC Core Program Strategies:

Support congregations by:

- ▶ Fostering 'grace, joy and peace' within and among congregations of CDC
- ▶ Facilitating and providing resources which empower congregations and promote missional partnerships
- ▶ Encouraging the call and development of Anabaptist leadership
- ▶ Providing resources in the placement and care of pastors
- ▶ Ministering in times of congregational transition and/or conflict
- ▶ Cultivating the Anabaptist vision as expressed in our confession of faith
- ▶ Acting as a liaison with the agencies and leadership groups of MC USA
- ▶ Effective communication flow within the conference and with MC USA conferences and agencies

CDC Critical Success Factors:

- ▶ Robust congregations
- ▶ New Anabaptist outreach ministries and/or congregations within CDC
- ▶ Leadership development among all ages
- ▶ Generous financial stewardship
- ▶ Nurture and care of pastors
- ▶ Increased involvement of young adults
- ▶ Shared CDC/MC USA identity
- ▶ Vital Camp Friedenswald ministry
- ▶ Viable Anabaptist educational institutions

DOING TOGETHER WHAT WE CANNOT DO ALONE AS INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATIONS

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

—Matthew 28:19-20 a

For more information about CDC, visit our website at www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net

Delegate Expectations

Title: Central District Conference Delegate

Function

Acting on behalf of members of their respective congregations in any meetings of the conference, delegates determine major policy issues, evaluate the work of the Board of Directors, and discern the voice of the Spirit in the midst of the conference.

Responsibilities and Duties

1. Prepare in advance of conference meetings.*
 - a. Read carefully all the materials distributed to delegates before conference meetings.
 - b. Seek clarification from the Board of Directors on materials or statements that are not understood.
 - c. Ask for the advice and opinions of other persons in your congregation or the conference about policy issues for Central District Conference.
 - d. Formulate your opinions in advance based on input from others, prayerful discernment, and your own best thinking.
2. Participate actively in the Annual Meeting.
 - a. Be present and on time for each session.
 - b. Listen carefully to input from the moderator, conference leaders, and other delegates.
 - c. Participate assertively and intelligently in deliberations, respecting the needs of others to speak and be heard as well as your own.
 - d. Work cooperatively with other delegates to discern the voice of the Spirit in the conference, and to articulate God's desired future for Central District Conference.
 - e. Offer suggestions on ways to improve the various programs and services of Central District Conference.
 - f. Experience the conference sessions as worshipful work that honors God.
3. Serve as a conduit for information between conference sessions.
 - a. Receive and respond to requests for information and counsel from the Board of Directors.
 - b. Register new ideas, advice and suggestions focused on improving the outcomes and effectiveness of Central District Conference.
 - c. Suggest qualified candidates to the Gifts Discernment Committee to fill delegate-elected positions.
4. Communicate to congregation regarding conference decisions and activities.
 - a. Report back to your congregation the highlights and important issues discussed at annual meeting sessions or specially called delegate meetings.
 - b. Share other conference information distributed to delegates between annual meeting sessions.
5. Provide for continuity with newly appointed delegates.
 - a. Pass along past information of interest to the next delegate before the end of term.
 - b. Provide assistance as needed to orient newly appointed delegates to their work.

Qualifications

1. Active participation in a member congregation of Central District Conference.
2. A commitment to discerning God's desired future for Central District Conference.
3. Interest in dealing with systems, values, and vision.
4. Willingness to make policy decisions in the best interests of the whole conference.
5. Personal commitment of time and necessary resources to attend each conference meeting for a minimum of two years.

Congregational Responsibilities to Delegates

1. Appoint delegates immediately after the annual meeting in June, asking them to serve for the next two years.
2. Provide discernment in the delegate selection process to appoint capable and interested participants as their delegates.
3. Properly orient delegates regarding their role and responsibilities.
4. Assure that delegates are selected and delegate forms are filed with the conference office on a timely basis to permit their participation in annual meeting sessions.
5. Provide economic support of delegate attendance at conference gatherings as congregational finances permit.
6. Provide adequate venues and support for delegates to report back to the congregation on conference matters.

*Conference meetings include the annual meeting held the fourth weekend of June and any other specially called meetings.

Note: Central District Conference does not necessarily expect delegates to be the same people who serve as delegates to the General Assembly of MC USA.

The function of delegate representation as outlined in the Central District Conference Bylaws Bylaw 1, Section B is as follows:

Section B: Delegates, Voting and Floor Privileges

1. Representation and Voting: Every member congregation of the Conference shall have the right to be represented by one vote for every thirty members or fractional part of that number, with a minimum of two delegates from each congregation. In addition to the above delegates, every member congregation is encouraged to appoint one high school age youth delegate who is an active participant of the congregation and youth group. This will be an additional voting delegate.
2. Delegate Forms: Proper delegate forms shall be sent to all member congregations by the Conference administrator, and these forms shall be returned to the Conference administrator designating all delegates before or by the opening session of the annual meeting.
3. Floor Privileges: Any member of a constituent congregation present at Conference sessions may participate in discussion on the conference floor. Other guests present are welcome to join open discussion in the spirit of Christian love and mutual helpfulness.

Adopted by the Board of Directors, February 6, 2004

Developing resolutions for Central District Conference

Purpose of resolutions

Resolutions are tools of the church intended to:

- **Educate** – Resolutions can provide information about issues facing the church and can help our congregations and members better understand viewpoints and experiences beyond their current awareness.
- **Build consensus** – While it is not necessary for us to arrive at unanimous approval in order to pass a resolution, careful work toward common understandings and language can build unity in the church. Resolutions will not be considered binding on members and congregations of Central District Conference unless identified as having that intent from the beginning of the process.
- **Provide a conference understanding, while acknowledging dissenting voices** – Resolutions offer church members as well as those beyond our denomination a better understanding of our conference's positions. When we are not united in our viewpoints, resolutions can name both our areas of agreement and areas of differing views, in hopes of fostering better understanding and ongoing discernment.
- **Provide a foundation for member advocacy to government** – Rather than viewing the primary purpose of resolutions as statements our conference or denomination sends to the government on our behalf, resolutions can be more effective as resources for individuals and congregations as they address legislative bodies.

The role of the Resolutions Committee

At each Annual Meeting, a Resolutions Committee appointed by the Board of Directors has the role and authority to receive and edit ideas for resolutions. A proposal given to the Resolutions Committee should come from a congregation(s) with enough time allowed for processing by congregations as outlined below.

When it is important to respond to a situation of more immediacy, some aspects of this preferred approach might not be appropriate. In these times, the Resolutions Committee may present resolutions for delegate discernment without going through a congregational study process. Such resolutions must be received by the Resolutions Committee by the end of the worship service on the first day of the Annual Meeting. However, if it is determined that delegates are significantly divided by an issue, the resolution may be tabled until more study and discernment are possible.

Preferred process for developing resolutions

The Resolutions Committee, after consultation as needed with the framers of the original resolution, will discern which resolutions should be developed for future consideration, which resolutions should be dealt with during the current Annual Meeting, and which perspectives should be shared with the Board of Directors for their awareness and discernment.

Suggested format for resolutions

We recommend that resolutions be crafted with the following theological framework:

- **Faith** – what we believe and affirm.
- **Hope** – our vision of God's intention for members, congregations, conferences, our denomination, and/or the world.
- **Love** – what compassion, justice, and righteousness require of us.

This framework may not serve the purposes of all resolutions, but where possible, the use of this framework can help keep the focus on God's work in our world and in our midst.

In order to best accomplish the purpose described above, we are committed to:

1. **Begin with a careful study process involving congregations** – Major issues will be processed best if study documents are developed and distributed – *before* resolutions are crafted.
2. **Create a safe space for all voices to be heard** – Honest discernment will not shut off differing viewpoints.
3. **Seek to understand the stories behind our differing viewpoints** – Rather than arguing positions, we will search for common ground through hearing how we have come to our various perspectives.
4. **Involve significant delegate discussion in groups** – We will commit adequate time for hearing each other's viewpoints and giving feedback to the whole delegate body.
5. **Allow for segmented consideration** – If delegates agree on most parts of a resolution but not on a particular part, the Board of Directors will have the option of testing delegate response on a section-by-section basis.
6. **Set a high threshold for adoption** – The more important we consider a decision to be, the higher our level of agreement should be. If a simple majority vote does not seem appropriate, the Board of Directors will suggest a percentage needed to adopt a particular resolution.

*Adapted from "Developing Resolutions for Mennonite Church USA"
Approved by the Board of Directors, May 11, 2007*

**Expectations for Credentialed Leaders Regarding
Healthy Boundaries Training
Central District Conference Ministerial Committee
Approved September 21, 2018**

Background:

Credentialed clergy throughout MC USA are responsible for participating in a Healthy Boundaries Training. This training identifies the complexity of the relationships we have in our ministries and provides essential understandings and practical ways to manage these relational and ethical boundaries with integrity and faithfulness. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance our ministries through tending to appropriate, safe and healthy boundaries.

A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership provides the theological and biblical foundation for how Mennonite Church USA and Central District Conference understand credentialed leadership in the church. Specifically, it states,

The congregation and the person ordained enter a covenant of a mutual accountability, support, respect and care. The person covenants to live a life that has moral integrity, to be a faithful steward of the gospel, to lead with humility, to respect others, and to grow in ministry. The congregation covenants to pray for the ordained person, to give and receive counsel, to support the person's leadership ministry, and to recognize the authority of the office into which the pastor has been ordained. (p.20)

The Ministerial Committee of the Central District Conference has identified *Healthy Boundaries Training* as an essential training for all credentialed leaders actively serving in ministry. *Healthy Boundaries Training* provides tools, practices and examples for how “accountability, support, respect and care” can be authentically lived out as ministering individuals.

Expectations:

It is the expectation of the CDC Ministerial Committee that all credentialed leaders actively serving in ministry receive *Healthy Boundaries Training*.

1. All newly credentialed leaders will complete *Healthy Boundaries Training* within one year of their credential date (licensed or ordained).
2. After an initial *Healthy Boundaries Training* course, all credentialed leaders will complete a refresher course within three years of their initial training and every three years thereafter.
3. Should a credentialed leader be unable to complete the above training expectations within the timeframe given, the credentialed leader may request an extension of no more than one year in order to complete the training.
4. Should a credentialed leader not complete the training expectations outlined above, their credential shall be considered suspended for up to one additional year. At the end of that year, if the credentialed leader has not completed the training, their license shall be terminated. Credentialed leaders are aware that such termination of their credential may have employment consequences as well.

Definitions:

Actively Serving- A credentialed leader is considered “actively serving” in ministry if they are currently providing leadership (paid or volunteer) in a church or other organization that either requires a credential for their position or if the ministering person expects to utilize the privileges of their credential to serve their community. (Example: A chaplain may not be required by their employer to hold a credential for their continued employment but the chaplain wishes to maintain their credential as active and considers their place of employment as their place of ministry.)

Credentialed- As defined on pages 43-44 of *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*

Credential Date- The date of the public credentialing service in which the credentialed leader was licensed or ordained.

Healthy Boundaries Training- This is the specific name for a training offered by *Faith Trust Institute*. CDC relies on several individuals who have been trained by *Faith Trust Institute* to provide training to credentialed leaders. The *Healthy Boundaries 101- Fundamental's* course provides the basic guidelines and expectations by which other trainings will be considered as fulfilling the requirement. A *Request for Recognition of Alternative Training for Healthy Boundaries* form is available to credentialed leaders who would like the ministerial committee to consider other trainings as sufficient for this requirement. *Healthy Boundaries Training 101* will address the following primary topics:

- Christian Biblical and Theological Foundations for Maintaining Boundaries
- Boundary Basics for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers
- Dating, Friendships, and Dual Relationships
- The Pulpit, Transference, Hugging and Touch, Intimacy
- Preserving Boundaries: Personal and Professional Health
- Understanding Cultural Differences Related to Boundaries

Refresher Course- This can include participation in at least three hours of the *Healthy Boundaries 101* course, participation in *Healthy Boundaries 201*, or other continuing education of at least three hours that addresses the primary topics identified above.

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE of MENNONITE CHURCH USA

CODE OF ETHICS FOR MINISTERS

A. Ministerial Sexual Ethics

1. Ministers are representatives of God and the church, and as such are to be agents of healing and redemption. They are aware that sexual exploitation or abuse of spouse, family members, colleagues, congregational members, employees or counselees is an abuse of trust, an abuse of power and an abuse of the authority of a pastoral position. They accept their responsibility to define and maintain appropriate boundaries within their ministerial relationships.
2. Ministers are aware that their personal relationships and lives must also reflect healthy morals and sexuality. Spouse or child abuse, domestic violence, use of pornography, or other forms of immorality may also lead to discipline.
3. Ministers are aware that discipline for sexual misconduct and immorality may involve the loss of both their ministerial credentials and their vocational status.
4. Ministers are aware of and willing to abide by church policies and disciplinary procedures to address sexual misconduct including *Pastoral Sexual Abuse Policies and Procedures* which is available on the MC USA website; <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct/>.
5. Ministers accept responsibility to call each other to account and to exercise biblical responsibility to confront colleagues concerning perceptions of inappropriate sexual relationships.
6. Ministers are aware of their calling as servants of God under the lordship of Jesus Christ, and from that they accept their responsibility for and accountability to people entrusted to their care.
7. Ministers accept the obligation to disclose information regarding previous sexual misconduct for which they have been called to account prior to formal candidacy for a new ministry position.

B. Other Ethical Standards

1. Ministers are aware of the harm that may be caused to themselves and others by engaging in addictive behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, and use of pornography. Ministers accept responsibility to seek help and receive counsel regarding such addictions.
2. Ministers will comply with ethical and legal standards regarding congregational finances.
3. Ministers are expected to be truthful when representing their education, training, experience, and ministerial performance.
4. Ministers are expected to keep and maintain strict confidentiality, unless that confidentiality will result in physical harm to a child and in the case of other threats that mandate reporting.
5. In addition to the above affirmations, ministers are expected to have read and comprehended Section IV, Ethics in Ministry, in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* (MennoMedia, 2017), *Expectations for Credentialed Leaders Regarding Healthy Boundaries Training* (CDC Ministerial Committee September 21, 2018).

**As a minister of Jesus Christ and as a representative of the church within its office of ministry,
I accept and subscribe to these affirmations.**

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Witness: _____

Central District Conference Procedures for Pastoral Transitions, Credentialing Leaders and Maintaining Credentials

Affirmed by CDC Ministerial Committee in June 2020, updated Oct. 21, 2021

The mission of Central District Conference is to know Christ's abundant love in who we are and how we live, and to answer God's persistent call to share that love with one another and the world.

The CDC Mission Statement also includes the following charge, "Calling and nurturing wise, dynamic and compassionate Anabaptist leadership." The stewardship of this mission is accomplished through relationships of trust, mutual accountability, excellent communication and vital resourcing at all stages of ministerial leadership. *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* serves as the primary polity document in all areas of pastoral leadership and credentialing. The following shall serve as guidance to the conference minister and ministerial committee as they seek to fulfill the CDC mission.

Transitions in Pastoral Leadership

- I. Resourcing Congregational Leadership
 - A. When a resignation or retirement of a pastor is announced, the Conference Minister (CM) and congregational leadership discuss options and opportunities. CM is available for counsel throughout the transitional period. Clarify who the point of contact is in the congregation.
 - B. Emphasis shall be placed on *ending well* for both the congregation and pastor. An Alban Institute book, Saying Goodbye by Edwin White is a good resource. CM encourages congregations to conduct an exit interview with the exiting pastor. (Guidance for exit interviews is available on the MC USA website. <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/pastor-congregation-relations/>) CM encourages congregations to have a ritual of "releasing the pastor" on last Sunday.
 - C. CM talks about developing a "separation agreement" between congregation and exiting pastor, especially when the pastor remains in the community. CM provides samples of "separation agreement's used in other congregations.
 - D. The CM encourages congregations to consider transitional pastoral leadership in some situations. (See *Intentional Interim Pastoral Ministry* on MC USA website.)
 - E. CM directs congregational leadership to the MC USA website for resources regarding pastoral transitions.
 - F. CM is a resource to congregational leadership as a search committee is formed.
- II. Resourcing the Pastor
 - A. When a pastor announces their resignation, the CM maintains relationship with the exiting pastor throughout the remainder of their ministry in the congregation.
 - B. Emphasis shall be on ending well. Say "good-bye" in healthy ways. Celebrate achievements. Be honest about disappointments. Tend difficult relationships. Continue to fulfill responsibilities. An Alban Institute book, Saying Goodbye by Edwin White is a good resource.
 - C. The CM is available to assist with negotiations of the separation agreement and/or financial negotiations if needed.

- III. Resourcing Congregational Search Committees
 - A. The CM typically meets with the search committee twice:
 - 1. To orient the search committee using orientation materials provided by both the denomination and the conference. (Orientation documents are followed.)
 - 2. To present MLIs.
 - B. The CM remains available for counsel throughout the search process.

Engaging with Potential Pastoral Candidates

- I. Initial Interview conducted by the Conference Minister
 - A. When a candidate contacts the CM seeking a ministry position within CDC or when the CM learns of a potential candidate, the CM will conduct an interview, preferably in person, to explore the following:
 - 1. what openings are available and/or what openings the candidate is interested in
 - 2. explore the candidate's self-understanding of their call to ministry
 - 3. explore the candidate's education and experiences
 - 4. explore the candidate's sense of giftedness and areas of ministry the candidate finds most fulfilling or energizing
 - 5. explore areas of desired growth or perceived lack of giftedness
 - 6. explore why the candidate desires to be considered in the CDC
 - 7. explore familiarity with MC USA credentialing process and CDC polity
 - 8. if the candidate is already employed, explore the reasons for a desired change
 - 9. ask if the candidate has any questions about CDC or the candidating process
 - B. All candidates will be informed that they cannot be considered for a position until their MLI and references are received by the CM from the MC USA Leadership Development Office. The CM will explain the MLI process if the candidate is not familiar with the process.
 - C. Candidates are informed that once they say "yes" to being a candidate of choice, they are to inform any other congregation that they are in conversation with that they must end that exploration.
 - D. The CM will explain the credentialing process
- II. MLI Process
 - A. If a potential candidate is not familiar with the MLI process, the CM will explain it to the individual. Explain that only candidates who have a current MLI will be considered for a ministry placement.
 - B. Potential candidates will be asked to update any MLIs older than 2 years.
 - C. Explain that it typically takes 6 weeks to complete the MLI process.
 - D. If the CM is asked to serve as a reference for the candidate, the CM will conduct an interview as described above, exploring any additional areas as needed to complete the MLI reference.
 - E. If the candidate has already served in another conference of MC USA, the CM will contact the conference minister where the candidate has most recently served.

- III. Sharing MLIs with search committees
 - A. Typically a potential candidate is contacted by the CM before their MLI is shared with a search committee in order to determine a candidate's openness to being considered for a position.
 - B. There are also times when it may make sense to share an MLI first with a search committee to determine the level of their interest in a candidate.
 - C. Candidates are told that their names will be held with confidence within the search committee.
 - D. Congregational search committees have the option to run additional background checks as they desire.
 - E. The CM will inform candidates, who have had MLIs submitted to a search committee, when their names are no longer being considered by a congregation.
 - F. The search committee chair will contact candidates whom they have interviewed but who are no longer being considered to inform them of their decision. The CM is available to the candidates for a follow-up conversation.

The Credentialing Process (See Section III of *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* for more detailed guidance.)

- I. Licensing toward Ordination
 - A. The licensing process is initiated when a congregation sends a written notice to CDC requesting licensing. When a congregation calls a new pastor, that call can serve as the official request to begin the licensing process.
 - B. If a current MLI (within the last 2 years) is not on file, the candidate completes an MLI.
 - C. Prior to a licensing interview, the CM will provide an orientation to new pastors. (See "New Clergy Orientation" below.)
 - D. If the candidate is employed outside of the congregation (chaplain, professor, etc.), the employer shall also send a letter of support for the candidate. The letter shall include a brief summary of the candidate's ministry responsibilities.
 - E. The MLI and any additional supporting documents are sent to all members of the Ministerial Committee before a scheduled interview.
 - F. All members of the ministerial committee are invited to participate in the interview. A minimum of three members of the Ministerial Committee plus the conference minister interview the candidate. Questions for the candidate are based around MC USA's Core Competencies. Committee members not present for the interview may offer questions to the CM in advance of the interview.
 - G. 1 ½ hours is assumed for the ordination interview. The ministerial committee members present will determine the outcome of the interview. If agreement is not reached, a simple majority vote will suffice. Should there be a tie, the conference minister will break the tie. It is also an option not to decide at the time of the interview if further information is needed.
 - H. Minutes of the interview are shared with the rest of the ministerial committee and a hard copy is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
 - I. The CM writes a letter informing the pastor and the congregation of the ministerial committee's decision regarding licensing. A copy is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.

- J. A signed and witnessed *Code of Ethics* form from the candidate is required. Copies are provided to the candidate and the moderator of the congregation. The original is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
- K. A pastoral mentor is assigned to each minister for two years. Their assessment of the candidate's readiness for ordination is requested when that time comes. The pastor and mentor are expected to meet every 4-6 weeks for conversation about ministry.
- L. The conference minister will participate in the licensing/installation service in the congregation. In the event of difficult scheduling conflicts, a member of the Ministerial Committee may participate in the service.
- M. A Certificate of License, embossed with the CDC seal, will be presented to the pastor. A copy of the certificate will be placed in their personnel file.
- N. The pastor's status is updated on MennoData.

II. Ordination

- A. The ordination process begins when a congregational leader communicates their desire to ordain a licensed person in their congregation. The CM will communicate with the congregational leader and provide them with the MC USA *Congregational Discernment for Ordination* to help congregations discern readiness for ordination.
- B. The CM will meet with the ordination candidate and explain the process which includes providing a current MLI. The candidate will also be given the "ordination prep questionnaire."
- C. The congregation sends a written request to CDC requesting ordination.
- D. If the candidate is employed outside of the congregation (chaplain, professor, etc.), the employer shall also send a letter of support for the candidate. The letter shall include a brief summary of the candidate's ministry responsibilities.
- E. The candidate's mentor provides a written letter of support for the candidate.
- F. The ordination candidate sends in written responses to the ordination prep questionnaire (CDC and MC USA).
- G. Prior to the interview, the CM provides the ministerial committee with the congregation's letter of request, the mentor's letter of support, the candidate's responses to the questions, the MLI and any other supporting documents. All members of the ministerial committee are invited to participate in the interview. A minimum of three members of the Ministerial Committee plus the conference minister interview the candidate. Committee members not present for the interview may offer questions to the CM in advance of the interview.
- H. As much as possible, a representative from the congregation attends the ordination interview, primarily to speak to the congregation's process for determining readiness for ordination.
- I. 1 ½ hours is assumed for the ordination interview. The ministerial committee members present will typically determine the outcome of the interview. If agreement is not reached, a simple majority vote will suffice. Should there be a tie, the conference minister will break the tie. It is also an option not to decide at the time of the interview if further information is needed.

- J. The CM writes a letter informing the pastor and the congregation of the ministerial committee's decision regarding ordination.
 - K. A signed and witnessed *Code of Ethics* form from the candidate is required. Copies are then sent to the candidate and the moderator of the congregation. The original is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
 - L. Minutes of the interview are shared with the rest of the ministerial committee and a hard copy is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
 - M. The conference minister will participate in the ordination service in the congregation.
 - N. A Certificate of Ordination, embossed with the CDC seal, will be presented to the pastor. A copy of the certificate will be placed in their personnel file.
 - O. The pastor's status is updated on MennoData.
- III. Dual Conference Congregations: We are committed to working with IMC, IMMC, and Ohio Conference in credentialing processes for dual-conference congregations, adapting as needed, so that candidates do not need to submit two sets of written responses or be interviewed twice. Refer to *Outline of Common Assumptions Regarding Mid-States "Preferred Resource Provider" Relationships for Pastoral Searches* and *Mid-States MC-USA Area Conference Statement on Congregational Dual Conference Affiliation*.
- IV. Installation/Commissioning
- A. When a pastor begins a new ministry in a congregation, an installation service is conducted by the CM. If the pastor is also being licensed, the installation and licensing services are typically conducted as part of the same ceremony. Rarely, there may be occasions when a pastor is first installed and then, at a later date, licensed.
 - B. Commissioning is the term used when an interim or transitional pastor begins a new assignment in a congregation.
 - C. A signed and witnessed *Code of Ethics* form from the pastor is required. Copies are then sent to the pastor and the moderator of the congregation. The original is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
- V. Transferring *Active* or *Active Without Charge* Credentials:
- A. When a credentialed person with an ordination credential from another conference is being considered by a CDC congregation or other ministry, the CM will contact the sending conference leadership. The CM will inquire about the standing of the candidate's credential and inquire about anything else that would be helpful to know as the candidate is being considered.
 - B. A current (within two years) MLI is required for anyone transferring their credential to CDC if they are remaining in active ministry. The MLI is shared with the Ministerial Committee and feedback provided to the CM. A formal interview can be requested by the CM or Ministerial Committee.
 - C. Credentialed leaders are expected to talk with the pastor of the congregation they will be attending and discuss the transfer of their credential. This is to determine

the local congregation's understanding and expectations regarding credentialed leaders within the congregation.

- D. If the candidate is employed outside of the congregation (chaplain, professor, etc.), the employer shall also send a letter of support for the candidate. The letter shall include a brief summary of the candidate's ministry responsibilities.
 - E. As soon as possible after a credentialed individual new to CDC is called by a CDC congregation or other ministry, several members of the Ministerial Committee and the conference minister will have a get-acquainted conversation with the new person. They will encourage participation in conference events and especially Pastor Peer meetings and resourcing opportunities. The CM will conduct an abbreviated "orientation" as outlined below in "New Clergy Orientation" and receive a "New Clergy Orientation Packet."
 - F. A signed and witnessed *Code of Ethics* form from the candidate is required. Copies are then provided to the candidate and the moderator of the congregation. The original is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
 - G. For pastors of congregations, the conference minister will participate in an installation service as close to the beginning of their new ministry as possible.
 - H. The CM will request the transfer of the pastor's credential.
- VI. Transferring Credentials that are *Inactive or Retired*
- A. The CM will contact the sending conference leadership. The CM will inquire about the standing of the candidate's credential and inquire about anything else that would be helpful to know as the candidate is being considered.
 - B. The CM will have a conversation with the credentialed leader, preferably in person, to become acquainted and to provide a brief orientation about CDC and answer questions about CDC.
 - C. The credentialed leader is expected to talk with the pastor of the congregation and discuss the transfer of their credential. This is to determine the local congregation's understanding and expectations regarding credentialed leaders within the congregation.
 - D. A signed and witnessed Code of Ethics form from the clergy is required. Copies are then provided to the clergy and the pastor or moderator of the congregation. The original is placed in the clergy's personnel file at the CDC office.
 - E. Once the credentialed leader is a member of the CDC congregation, the credentialed leader, with the support of the pastor, requests that CDC initiate a transfer of their credential.
 - F. The CM requests the transfer.
 - G. If the credentialed leader wishes to become "active," an updated MLI is required.

New Clergy Orientation

The orientation shall last approximately two hours and include:

- A. Presentation of the "New Clergy Orientation Packet" which consists of:
 - 1. Most recent CDC Annual Meeting Report Book and CDC Directory
 - 2. *CDC At-a-Glance*
 - 3. List of Spiritual Directors- Website; <https://mennosdn.org/>
 - 4. *CDC Code of Ethics*

5. CDC *Annual Clergy Review* form
6. CDC *Healthy Boundaries Policy*
7. CDC *Personnel File Policy and Procedures*
8. CDC *Maintaining Credentials in Good Standing*
9. *Six Core Competencies* of MC USA ministerial leadership
10. Information about Camp Friedenswald
11. Information about Bluffton University
12. Information about AMBS including *Journey*

B. Communicating the expectation that the candidate be familiar with:

1. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*
2. *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*
3. *CDC At-a-Glance*
4. The Central District Conference Polity (In Report Book)
5. CDC *Identity Document* (In Report Book)
6. CDC *Code of Ethics* (must be signed by time of installation/licensing)
7. CDC *Annual Clergy Review* form
8. MC USA *Pastoral Sexual Abuse Policies and Procedures*
9. CDC *Healthy Boundaries Policy*
10. CDC *Personnel File Policy and Procedures*
11. CDC *Maintaining Credentials in Good Standing*
12. *Six Core Competencies* of MC USA ministerial leadership

C. Discussion of the MC USA Mentoring expectations and potential mentors

D. Discussion of Pastor Peer opportunities and expectations

E. Discussion of Annual Meetings and Regional Gatherings

F. Description of the CDC organizational structure

G. Information on the Transition into Ministry program (TiM)

H. Encouragement to connect with a spiritual director

I. Opportunity to ask any questions

Maintaining Credentials in Good Standing

I. Congregational Pastors

- A. Pastors will maintain compliance with the CDC *Code of Ethics*.
- B. Pastors will follow the Healthy Boundaries Policy.
- C. Pastors will complete the *Annual Clergy Review* form.
- D. Pastors are expected to build peer relationships with other CDC pastors and participate in either a local or online pastor peer group as frequently as is possible. Recognizing that this is difficult for part-time pastors, they are encouraged to relate to other Mennonite clergy in ways that enhance their ministry.
- E. Pastors are strongly encouraged to participate in CDC Annual Meetings and one Regional Gathering.

- F. Pastors are encouraged to develop a relationship with a spiritual director and maintain spiritual practices and disciplines that enhance one's life with God.
- G. Pastors are expected to be life-long learners, participate in continuing education opportunities regularly, and read books, periodicals and other media that provide ongoing ministry growth.
- H. Annually, CDC staff will review the MC USA clergy roster (MennoData report) and any questions regarding the status of the credential will be clarified.
- I. Pastors are free to contact the CM or a member of the ministerial committee for support, discernment, a listening ear and encouragement.

II. Non-pastor clergy

- A. Clergy will maintain active membership in a CDC congregation. If regular participation in the CDC congregation of membership is not possible due to geographical distance, regular participation in another congregation is expected.
- B. Clergy will maintain compliance with the CDC *Code of Ethics*.
- C. Clergy will follow the Healthy Boundaries Policy.
- D. Clergy will complete the *Annual Clergy Review* form.
- E. Clergy are invited to participate in local and online pastor peer groups as time allows.
- F. Clergy are encouraged to participate in peer relationships with other clergy in similar ministry settings.
- J. Clergy are encouraged to develop a relationship with a spiritual director and maintain spiritual practices and disciplines that enhance one's life with God.
- G. Clergy are encouraged to participate in CDC Annual Meetings and one Regional Gathering.
- H. Clergy are expected to be life-long learners, participate in continuing education opportunities regularly, and read books, periodicals and other media that provide ongoing ministry growth.
- I. Annually, CDC staff will review the MC USA clergy roster (MennoData report) and any questions regarding the status of the credential will be clarified.
- J. Clergy are free to contact the CM or a member of the ministerial committee for support, discernment, a listening ear and encouragement.

Resourcing of Credentialed Leaders

- I. The CDC ministerial committee will continually assess what kinds of resourcing events are beneficial to the credentialed clergy and seek to facilitate participation in such events.
- II. The CM will pass along information to clergy about resourcing events.
- III. The ministerial committee will seek to provide financial support to clergy for whom continuing education or professional support resources are limited.
- IV. The ministerial committee will develop and maintain a directory of professional resources for pastors facing difficult circumstances in their family or place of ministry.

Reviews of Pastors: Congregations are encouraged to use the materials and guidance available on the MC USA website regarding regular pastor reviews.

Investigations of Pastoral Misconduct or Abuse: The MC USA *Pastoral Sexual Abuse Policies and Procedures* will be used whenever an accusation of pastoral sexual abuse is brought against a credentialed leader. The CDC ministerial committee will:

- I. Identify and train contact persons
- II. Identify and train investigators
- III. Provide periodic training and refreshers for CDC Board, staff and ministerial committee members regarding these policies and procedures.

Credential Reviews:

- I. In matters of reported ethical or polity violations that do not meet the definition of sexual abuse, the ministerial committee may conduct a credential review to determine if the violation occurred and, if so, what appropriate response to give.
- II. At the February 22, 2018 meeting of the ministerial committee, it was determined that an automatic credential review would not be necessary when a pastor performs a same-sex wedding unless a complaint were raised by a CDC member or if it was known that the pastor did this without the blessing and support of the congregation.

A Record Retention Policy for Credential Files was approved by the CDC Ministerial Committee on October 15, 2020.

Guidance on Communication of Ministerial Misconduct Situations was adopted by the CDC Ministerial Committee on August 19, 2021

**Summary - Ongoing Work Toward Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Reconciliation
within Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA**
from the CDC Missional Church Committee's *Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation Task Group*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, the Missional Church Committee of Central District Conference (CDC) charged a task group to develop provocations for fostering the ongoing work of racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation within the conference. This group was appointed and met during 2019, and submitted Provocations and a Resource List in early 2020.

Task Group Structure: five white people charged with primary responsibility of undoing white supremacy and two persons of color who participated in meetings as much as they elected to, in an accountability capacity to the white members.

Process: the task group met throughout the calendar year of 2019 and discussed resources and challenges to sustain anti-racist work within the Christian context of CDC.

Provocations: the task group has organized its provocations by level of conference, including targeted prompts for integrating sustained anti-racist work into the heart of the Christian life at the individual, congregational, and conference level. They fall into categories of “knowing, being, and doing.”

Resources: the task group offers resources to engage CDC people asking different questions and engaging different aspects of anti-racist work in their own contexts. These resources are not exhaustive and will likely need to be updated frequently as new resources emerge and contexts continue to shift. They are in response to requests for such resources from both the Missional Church Committee and individual CDC members over the past year.

Next Steps: task groups are a time-limited, appointed venture of CDC Committees. The Missional Church Committee and the leadership of Central District Conference are invited to consider the Provocations submitted by the task group, and to commit to on-going sustained anti-racist work as a key expression of the gospel in our broken world.

Questions may be directed to Task Group chair and Missional Church Committee member, Kiva Nice-Webb.

Three Provocations for Ongoing Work Toward Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Reconciliation within Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA

from the CDC Missional Church Committee's *Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation Task Group*

Introduction and context

In 2018, the Missional Church Committee of Central District Conference (CDC) charged a task group to develop provocations for fostering the ongoing work of racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation within the conference. This task group was made up of five white people — one from the Missional Church Committee and four from throughout CDC — in addition to two persons of color who participated in meetings as much as they elected to, in an accountability capacity. This structure was intended to put the primary responsibility of undoing white supremacy on white people while acknowledging the importance of accountability to people of color.

Over the course of our time as a task group in 2019, we have heard from various CDC members about their individual and collective efforts to educate themselves about racism and systemic oppression, to build relationships across differences and to act for justice. We want to affirm the engagement with this work that is taking place and already has taken place among individuals, small groups, congregations, and CDC leadership groups. To build on this, we offer CDC the following three “provocations”; they are intended to inspire attentiveness to growth in racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation and ultimately to result in more action for justice within and beyond Central District Conference.

Ultimately, our growth in racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation results from our **commitment to continually take “the next step”** in three areas: **knowing, being and doing**.

- Examples of **knowing** include choosing to educate ourselves about perspectives, life experiences and realities different from our own; studying our local, regional, national, and international history from the perspective of those who have been systematically oppressed; and deepening our understanding of white supremacy and systemic oppression.
- Examples of **being** include cultivating awareness of our own (often unconscious) biases; developing appreciation for other cultural ways of being in addition to our own; understanding the power dynamics that are at play in our daily interactions; and prayerfully seeking to transform our attitudes so that we truly love our neighbor as ourselves and see each person as created in the image of God.
- Examples of **doing** include pursuing intercultural competence training and skill-building; developing mutual relationships across differences; and prayerfully seeking opportunities to act for God's peace (physical, mental, spiritual, and relational well being) in our interpersonal relationships and communities and to speak out against systemic oppression.

Each of these areas is essential to our growth, and we need to actively tend to all three of them to experience real and lasting transformation in the journey of dismantling white supremacy.

Here are ways we envision this work being carried out across CDC

1) Provocation for CDC leaders and leadership groups

While reconciliation is a gift given by God, our work is to engage fully in ending the system of white supremacy. At the conference level, we envision:

- CDC's leadership prayerfully commits time, resources, and budgeted funds toward continual "next steps" in areas of knowing, being, and doing regarding racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation for its staff members and leadership groups — making this topic a regular agenda item in meetings of the various leadership groups and setting concrete goals for engagement and growth. CDC leaders share about their efforts at conference meetings and gatherings across the wider Mennonite Church.
 - An existing example is how CDC's Missional Church Committee has committed to working through the Intercultural Development Inventory as a group.
- CDC members from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds are appointed to leadership groups and have power within the leadership structure.
- CDC leaders provide incentives and resources for congregations to discern and carry out "next steps" in these areas, encouraging collaboration wherever possible to help increase accountability.
 - For example, additional "Reign of God"-type grants could be made available to congregations that partner in a joint educational or advocacy effort regarding racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation; recipients could share with the wider conference about their learnings.
- CDC leaders create incentives and space for credentialed leaders to discern and carry out "next steps" — individually and in their congregations — perhaps building these regular conversations into the context of existing pastor-peer meetings or mentoring relationships.
 - Ministerial committee: include personal and theological reflection on and demonstrate on-going commitment to anti-racist work as a component of the credentialing process
- CDC leaders offer crowdsourcing channels through which CDC members and congregations can resource each other.
 - For example, a shared editable list of resources (linked to the CDC website and linked to from conference newsletters) could provide an accessible space where people could add resources, learnings and experiences they'd like to share with conference leadership groups and fellow congregations. These could be presented in a breakout group at an Annual Meeting.

2) Provocation for CDC congregations

Isaiah 1:10-20 reminds us that unless worship leads to enacting justice, it is meaningless. Our individual and collective relationship with God is inseparable from our relationship with each other and all of creation. At the congregational level, we envision:

- CDC congregations prayerfully commit time, resources, and budgeted funds toward continual "next steps" in areas of knowing, being, and doing regarding racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation for their congregants, employees, and leadership groups — making this topic a regular agenda item in meetings of the various leadership groups and setting concrete goals for engagement and growth.
- People from underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds are appointed to leadership roles/groups in congregations and have power within the leadership structure.
- CDC congregations devote time and attention to these topics in worship, second hour themes, Sunday school curriculum (both adult and youth/children), small groups, etc., providing incentives and resources for their congregants to discern and carry out their own "next steps" in these areas and encouraging collaboration wherever possible.
 - An "appreciative inquiry"-type process of recognizing where intercultural connections are already being made and where growth and learning are already happening can be a

place to start if groups feel stuck; they can then consider together how to deepen or build upon what is already there.

- For example, a congregation could partner with another congregation to bring a resource person in for a shared intercultural competence training, or to learn about systemic oppression in their regional history together.
- CDC congregations create opportunities for stories of these “next steps” to be shared during worship (and potentially with fellow CDC congregations in other settings).

3) Provocation for individual members of CDC congregations

Because of the ubiquitous nature of racism and white supremacy, dismantling them requires that each of us challenge them actively. At the individual level, we envision:

- Members of CDC congregations take responsibility for and engage fully in their own growth and continual “next steps” in areas of knowing, being, and doing regarding racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation — through prayer, repentance and openness to transformation, and by intentionally committing time, energy and resources to this work and to building relationships across differences.
 - An “appreciative inquiry”-type process of taking stock of where you are already making intercultural connections and what you have already learned about racism and oppression can be a place to start if an individual does not know where to begin or continue; then consider how to deepen or build upon what is already there.
- Members of CDC congregations prayerfully seek out partners for collaboration and accountability in this work (within and beyond their congregations), giving attention to fostering a culture of vulnerability, openness and honesty in which the range of emotions and thoughts that accompany this confronting work can be shared.
 - Our personal growth is cultivated in beloved and mutual community where we can engage fully, make mistakes or accidentally say a racist thing, get called on it, work through shame to enable repentance — claiming the unconditional love of Christ for each of us — and then keep pursuing God’s peace (physical, mental, spiritual and relational well being) for each person. Through naming our shared ownership of systemic oppression, we can begin to break destructive patterns of avoidance, inferiority or superiority, and blame.

Conclusion

“The purpose of Central District Conference, a member conference of Mennonite Church USA, is to promote community among congregations, to serve as a resource for pastors and congregations, and to facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through which congregations and pastors may work” (Article I, Bylaws).

In considering how to encourage CDC in its work toward racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation, our task group has focused on the importance of recognizing, exposing, and dismantling the oppressive systems that uphold white supremacy. We want to name that our Mennonite worship and charity has historically not only ignored or been oblivious to root causes of injustices, but also has upheld these injustices both locally and internationally.

We must continually ask: As a conference of Mennonite Church USA, and by extension Mennonite World Conference, are we as CDC leaders, congregations and individuals either dismantling or

reinforcing white-supremacy-related issues of mass incarceration, police brutality, environmental racism, the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, and the ongoing slow violence of racism in which we are individually and institutionally complicit?

We urge CDC leaders to engage the work of our provocations above — as they correspond with the purpose of CDC — with commitments of time, attention, and funding to demonstrate that the work of racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation is indeed a priority for CDC (... and not only to file this report away!). The members of the task force also recognize and are committed to the above provocations as our individual work. We look forward to the Missional Church Committee's response to these provocations.

Respectfully submitted,

CDC Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation Task Group (2020)

Kiva Nice-Webb (chair), Brian Sauder, Annette Brill Bergstresser, Charles Bontrager, Sandy Miller

Accountability members: Cyneatha Millsaps, Isaac Villegas

Resource List for Ongoing Work Toward Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Reconciliation
within Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA
from the CDC Missional Church Committee's *Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation Task Group*

Introduction

This list is by no means complete; it is a sampling of ways to take “next steps” in the areas of knowing, being and doing in the work of racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation. Online and library searches for anti-racism and/or anti-discrimination resources will also yield bountiful results for your consideration. These resources would lend themselves well for both individual and group study.

Books

- ***An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*** by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (Beacon, 2015)
- ***An African American and Latinx History of the United States*** by Paul Ortiz (Beacon, 2018)
- ***Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Journeying Toward Wholeness*** by Joseph Barndt (Fortress, 2011)
- ***Between the World and Me*** by Ta-Nehisi Coates (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)
- ***Enter the River: Healing Steps from White Privilege Toward Racial Reconciliation*** by Jody Miller Shearer (Herald, 1994)
- ***How to be Black*** by Baratunde Thurston (Harper, 2012)
- ***It's the Little Things: Everyday Interactions That Anger, Annoy and Divide the Races*** by Lena Williams (Harcourt, 2000)
- ***Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*** by Bryan Stevenson (Spiegel & Grau, 2015)
- ***Let's Get Real: What People of Color Can't Say and Whites Won't Ask about Racism*** by Lee Mun Wah (Stir Fry Seminars, 2011)
- ***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness***, anniversary edition, by Michelle Alexander (New Press, 2020); resources and study guides available at newjimcrow.com
- ***Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism*** by Drew G.I. Hart (Herald, 2016)
- ***White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*** by Robin DiAngelo (Beacon, 2018)

Videos

- **PBS Frontline: A Class Divided** (March 1985): The day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, a teacher in a small town in Iowa tried a daring classroom experiment. She decided to treat children with blue eyes as superior to children with brown eyes. Frontline explores what those children learned about discrimination and how it still affects them:
www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/class-divided
Teachers guide: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/divided
- **Race: The Power of An Illusion**: Award-winning documentary series by California Newsreel: contains episodes on The Difference Between Us; The Story We Tell; The House We Live In:
www.racepowerofanillusion.org/
Accompanying resources: newsreel.org/video/RACE-THE-POWER-OF-AN-ILLUSION
- **A Time for Burning** (1966, 58 min): Features an all-white Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska, as their young pastor tries to get the congregation to reach out to their fellow black Lutherans. Commissioned by the Lutheran Church in America and nominated as Best Documentary Feature in the 1967 Academy Awards: archive.org/details/atimeforburning
- **Jesus Wasn't White**: Mennonite Mission Network resource; discussion questions appear in text below video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOzU4qFfT3M&feature=emb_logo
- **The Future of Race in America**: Michelle Alexander at TEDx Columbus:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hgw

- **What Would You Do? The Bike Thief:** Discussion starter about racial profiling:
www.thesociologicalcinema.com/videos/racial-profiling-the-bike-thief

Articles/handouts/discussion starters

- Look for opportunities to learn about your local and regional history, especially from the perspective of non-white peoples.
 - Which indigenous peoples called the land home which you now occupy?
 - Which stories are the ones people didn't grow up hearing?
 - Which things did people avoid talking about?
 - An example of this type of work: **"Portrait of a Sundown Town: Coming to terms with racism in a 'Mennonite' community,"** in *Mennonite World Review*, Jan. 10, 2014, by Dan Shenk of Faith Mennonite Church, a CDC congregation:
www.mennoworld.org/archived/2014/1/20/portrait-sundown-town/
- **"Escaping the Web of White Supremacy: Our Most Urgent Task in the Work of Character Formation,"** in *The Cresset* (Advent-Christmas 2019, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 2, pp. 4-8) by Richard T. Hughes:
thecresset.org/2019/Advent/Hughes_A19.html
- **"Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"** by Peggy McIntosh:
www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf
- **Diversity training discussion handouts** from StirFry Seminars / Lee Mun Wah in categories such as Exploring the Roots of Our Disconnections; Ways to Reconnect and Rebuild Trust; Mindful Techniques That Create Community. Examples include "21 Ways to Stop a Conversation About Diversity," "Unhealthy Ways of Communicating," and "The Art of Listening":
www.stirfryseminars.com/resources/handouts.php
- Teachingtolerance.org: **"My Family Journey"**: <https://www.tolerance.org/lesson/my-family-journey>

Consultants or experience-based learning

- **Intercultural competence consulting** through Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) with Nekeisha Alayna Alexis, M.A.: ambs.edu/invite
- **Work in Progress Choral Ensemble** of Mennonite Mission Network: This group is available to lead worship, preach, teach and provide contextualized workshops about diversity and holistic witness:
www.mennonitemission.net/about/staff/Work%20in%20Progress%20Ensemble
- **Trail of Death: A Pilgrimage of Remembrance, Lament and Transformation**, a biennial summer course of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary that traces the route of the 1838 forced removal by the U.S. military of about 850 Potawatomi people from their ancestral homeland in northern Indiana to present-day Osawatomie, Kansas; likely to be held next in the summer of 2021; one can participate in the learning tour just as a trip, without academic credit: ambs.edu/trailofdeath
- **Sankofa: A Journey Toward Racial Righteousness** of the Evangelical Covenant Church, an intentional, cross-racial prayer journey that seeks to assist disciples of Christ on their move toward a righteous response to the social ills related to racism:
covchurch.org/justice/racial-righteousness/sankofa/
- **The Ongoing White Supremacy of Our Everyday Lives: Consider, Confront, Change**, a symposium organized by Rainbow Mennonite Church, a Western District Conference congregation in Kansas City, Kansas, in 2018. While this event is past, it can serve as a model for congregations who would consider organizing events like this in CDC: rainbowmennonite.org/symposium/

Outline of Common Assumptions Regarding Mid-States “Preferred Resource Provider” Relationships for Pastoral Searches

Objectives:

- Simplify the process of pastoral search for dual conference congregations
- Limit conference duplication of resources in pastoral searches
- Mutually supporting the relationship of each conference to the congregation

At beginning of search, both conferences:

- Assure that the congregation is aware of the PRP process
- Encourage congregation to choose one conference as “preferred resource provider” [PRP] for conducting the search
- Reinforce that the integrity of two separate, equal conference relationships with the congregation remain intact though working through a single conference

During the search, the PRP will periodically report back to the other conference minister:

- At least quarterly if the search takes an extended time period
- Promptly if difficulties or problems surface during the search
- At the point a preferred candidate is identified:
 - Who it is
 - When the congregation will meet with the candidate
 - When the vote is scheduled
 - Whether the call is issued and if so, if accepted

Once acceptance occurs, the PRP status ends and the process becomes equally collaborative, which includes the two conferences, candidate, and congregation jointly determining:

- Dates for credentialing interviews
- Dates for installation

Note: Different conferences may have different processes and expectations for how the scheduling of these meetings occurs. It may require in some cases one of the conferences adjusting normal practice to make the process equally collaborative. Whenever a dual conference congregation search is underway, the credentialing groups of both conferences need to make sure they are familiar with the process of the other conference to avoid misunderstanding.

February 12, 2008

Mid-States MC USA Area Conference Statement on Congregational Dual Conference Affiliation

When Mennonite Church USA formed in 2002, approximately 51 congregations chose to retain pre-existing affiliation with more than one area conference. During the subsequent six years, many of these congregations ceased their dual affiliation, either through new area conference formation (Mountain States) or by choosing single affiliation. Currently, only 26 congregations in MC USA retain this status. Twenty-one of the 26 are located in the mid-states region; all 21 of these affiliate with Central District Conference and either Illinois Mennonite Conference (9), Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (7), or Ohio Mennonite Conference (5).

Regarding dual affiliation, Mennonite Church USA Membership Guidelines (Part II, Section 11) indicate that:

“Congregations will hold membership in only one area conference. Where dual affiliation of a congregation with more than one conference already exists and it is perceived to be in the best interests of the congregation and their conference at this time, dual conference membership may be retained as long as mutually agreed upon. We also recognize that certain congregations may find it beneficial to maintain ties to other denominational bodies.” (Adopted July 5, 2001)

This position is affirmed in the Bylaws of the Mennonite Church USA (Article III, Section 3a: 2003).

More recently, in looking to the future of our denomination, the Executive Director of MC USA reported to the Constituency Leadership Council that “the long term intention is for congregations to hold membership in only one area conference.” [Distributed “Highlights” of the CLC gathering at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, March 6-8, 2006.]

Given these denominational perspectives, the four mid-states area conferences jointly encourage and support dual conference congregations in their own discernment processes as they consider, when ready, what conference affiliation would enable them to best carry out the ministries they find themselves in or feel called to develop. Although some may wish to retain dual affiliation at this time, others may find that single affiliation can free them in their missional calling and enable stronger, mutually beneficial relationships with their area conference of choice. When engaged in this discernment process, we ask congregations to inform and work with both conferences regarding their deliberations.

Should a dual conference congregation decide to affiliate solely with one area conference, we will respect and support their participation in the conference of their choosing. Regardless of affiliation, we encourage all of our congregations to pursue ongoing fellowship, mission cell formation, and other missional collaboration with congregations of other area conferences. We also welcome continued attendance at each of our area conference gatherings by congregations affiliated with other area conferences. We are together called to build God’s Kingdom as God leads, and a congregation’s choice of which area conference will formally connect them to MC USA need not impact their relationship with other congregations.

In saying this, we recognize the varied circumstances that originally led these congregations to obtain dual affiliation, and we celebrate the vision for unity and spirit of collaboration these congregations have embodied. Some are dual because of the church planting process used at the time, and some chose to be dual with the goal of including Mennonites of diverse backgrounds and ultimately of bringing two denominations together. Two (Lima Mennonite and Mennonite Church of Normal) chose to be dual because two singly affiliated congregations merged to form a new congregation.

Although we remain committed to collaboration and fellowship among our conferences and congregations, as conference leaders we are not currently addressing larger questions of conference merger. We recognize that over time, as our area conferences and congregations follow God’s call to missional transformation of our world, God may also transform our structures and forms—in God’s time the mid-states region will undoubtedly look very different. In the meantime, we encourage our congregations to also devote their energy to God’s missional call.

September 18, 2007

Central District Conference

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference

Illinois Mennonite Conference

Ohio Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA



Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

"Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:3), as both individual members and the body of Christ, we pledge that we shall:

In Thought

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Accept conflict | 1. Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our life in the church. <i>Romans 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19; 15:1-7</i> |
| Affirm hope | 2. Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict, we can work through to growth. <i>Ephesians 4:15-16</i> |
| Commit to prayer | 3. Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution (no prayers or my success or for the other to change but to find a joint way). <i>James 5:16</i> |

In Action

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Go to the other... | 4. Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism. * <i>Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20</i> |
| ...in the spirit of humility | 5. Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Place the problem between us at neither doorstep and own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out the others'. <i>Galatians 6:1-5</i> |
| Be quick to listen | 6. Listen carefully, summarize and check out what is heard before responding. Seek as much to understand as to be understood. <i>James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13</i> |
| Be slow to judge | 7. Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats and act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way. <i>Romans 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26</i> |
| Be willing to negotiate | 8. Work through the disagreements constructively. <i>Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify issues, interests, and needs of both (rather than take positions).• Generate a variety of options for meeting both parties' needs (rather than defending one's own way).• Evaluate options by how they meet the needs and satisfy the interests of all sides (not one side's values).• Collaborate in working out a joint solution (so both sides gain, both grow and win).• Cooperate with the emerging agreement (accept the possible, not demand your ideal).• Reward each other for each step forward, toward agreement (celebrate mutuality). |

In Life

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Be steadfast in love | 9. Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love. <i>Colossians 3:12-15</i> |
| Be open to mediation | 10. Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use those with gifts and training in mediation in the larger church. <i>Philippians 4:1-3</i> |
| Trust the community | 11. We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation or from the broader church. <i>Acts 15</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In one-to-one or small group disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate.• In congregational, conference district or denominational disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate or implementing constitutional decision-making processes, insuring that they are done in the spirit of these guidelines, and abiding by whatever decision is made. |
| Be the body of Christ | 12. Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than resort to the courts of law. <i>1 Corinthians 6:1-6</i> |

*Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between. Mennonite Church USA (adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church Triannual Session and Mennonite Church General Assembly, Wichita, KS July 1995)

Christians are not immune to conflict. We face it in our homes and churches, in our neighborhoods and work places. Wherever we interact with other people, we experience conflict.

Too often conflict becomes destructive, because we try to avoid it, or because we don't know how to face it well. But we can make it an opportunity to grow, to become more faithful to Jesus, to model Christ-like love for one another.

To work constructively with conflict, we need skills. "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" outlines approaches to conflict that will help us live out our calling to be Christian peacemakers.

Biblical Foundation

The Bible guides us to seek reconciliation when we disagree. Scripture teaches us that conflict can be an arena for God's revelation.

- Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel. Through Christ we are reconciled to God, who gives us the ministry of reconciliation. *Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20*
- Reconciliation with others in the church is a prelude to genuine worship. *Matthew 5:23-24*
- Jesus describes a process for addressing conflict and restoring relationships in the church. *Matthew 18:15-22*
- Groups in the early church came together to talk about their differences, to seek the Spirit's leading as they worked for consensus. *Acts 6:1-6; Acts 15:1-3*
- The church needs each person's gifts and perspectives; no one has a corner on truth. *1 Corinthians 12-14*
- God's chosen ones are to bear with one another, to forgive each other and to clothe themselves "with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." *Colossians 3:12-17*
- We are to grow in unity and maturity by speaking the truth in love. *Ephesians 4:1-16*
- God calls us to act and speak with respect for each other despite differences of culture or conviction. *Romans 14:1-7; James 1:19; John 7:51; Ephesians 4:25-32; Matthew 7:1-5; 1 Peter 3: 8, 16*
- God's people do not seek the absence of conflict but the presence of shalom, a peace based on justice. *Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 58; Matthew 23:23-24; Luke 4:18-19*

Adopting the Guidelines

We encourage congregations, area conferences, church boards and agencies to adopt the guidelines for agreeing and disagreeing in love, and to use them. The process you use to consider adopting the guidelines can itself be a model for working through differences together.

Design a process to study the guidelines and decide whether to adopt them. Your written process design could include these pieces:

- A. Define the issue: Should our group adopt these guidelines?
- B. Identify goals: To enhance our commitment and ability to deal constructively with conflict. (Add your goals.)
- C. Clarify steps and timeline:
 1. Approve the process design. The appropriate decision-making body acts to do this.
 2. Study the guidelines and the biblical foundations.
 - a. Offer a Sunday school class on conflict resolution skills for congregations.
 - b. Invite an outside resource person to present a Saturday workshop on the topic.
 - c. Encourage committees and small groups to study the guidelines.
 3. Talk together about using the guidelines.
 - a. Discuss ways to use the guidelines in your context.
 - b. Integrate the guidelines into constitutions, bylaws, personnel policies.
 - c. Note concerns that arise and work to resolve them.

4. Implement the decision rule (see below).

D. State the decision rule: Identify who will make the decision, and how it will be made

Using the Guidelines

After your group has adopted the guidelines, you can:

- Display the "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" poster in rooms where committees meet.
- Include training on the guidelines in new member classes or orientation sessions.
- Use reconciliation and conflict resolution as a focus for worship from time to time.
- Include articles in your newsletter about the guidelines and your experience with them.
- Appoint a process observer for your meetings, to monitor your group's use of the guidelines.
- Every year evaluate how your group is working with conflict.

Several Cautions

The guidelines should not be used as a substitute for the proper exercise of authority. When laws have been broken or people abused, mediation would only be appropriate at later stages, when offenders have taken responsibility for their actions and victims are requesting face-to-face meetings as a step toward their own healing.

The guidelines may inform disciplinary or grievance procedures, but they are not intended to be a substitute for such procedures. In cross-cultural settings, the guidelines should be adapted to fit the context.

The guidelines were primarily adopted to help parties in conflict, not as instructions for groups pursuing God's will in matters of church practice or theology. For such purposes, it is recommended that groups seek additional guidance in processes of Biblical/communal discernment.

Some Basic Principles

In interpersonal and group conflicts, people can take many of the steps identified in the guidelines without the help of an impartial third party. But when conflict escalates and the principal parties cannot resolve it by negotiating together, they should seek outside help.

In mediation, disputing parties come to their own agreement with the assistance of an objective third party. Those serving as mediators should be trained; attempting to mediate a dispute without having the necessary skills can make matters worse. Trained mediators can help people come to agreement on issues and also aid in healing broken relationships.

If mediation fails to resolve a dispute, arbitration could be sought. The disputing parties would agree in advance to abide by whatever decision the arbitrators make. The arbitrators listen to each party's case, consult with each other, and agree on a win-win decision that attempts to address the interests of all the parties.

For more information, contact:

Mennonite Church USA

Jason Boone, Coordinating Minister of Peace and Justice Support Network
Peace@MennoniteUSA.org;
Toll-free 866-866-2872; www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace

Lombard Mennonite Peace Center—101 W. 22nd Street, Suite 206,
Lombard, IL 60148; 630-627-0507; Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org
www.LMPeaceCenter.org

Guidelines for Biblical/Communal Discernment

Commended by the Executive Board for use in settings across Mennonite Church USA

What is Biblical/Communal Discernment?

Discernment is a means by which people of faith come to understand God's will. It is one way to practice the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: "May your kingdom come, and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). It is a process by which believers . . .

- ✚ anticipate God's presence,
- ✚ seek for God's guidance, and
- ✚ listen for God's call.

In both Old and New Testaments, the people of God sought out those who were wise and discerning among them. The church as described in the New Testament calls the people of God to come together for discernment *as a fellowship of believers*. Jesus promised to be present among even two or three believers gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20).

As Anabaptist Christians, we believe that *we make our best decisions when we gather in the name of Jesus around the Word of God, prayerfully seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit for our shared life in the world*. That is why we call it Biblical/Communal Discernment. Such discernment involves

- ✚ the intent to live faithfully in the world
- ✚ critical reflection on important matters of faith and life
- ✚ obedience to God's will as revealed in scripture.

Discernment is one of the functions of a congregation when it gathers for worship or fellowship (see Rom. 12:2, 1 Cor. 6:1-9; 12:8-10, Heb. 5:14, and Phil. 1:10). Groups may seek to discern God's will on a wide range of questions, from the broadest issues of moral and ethical behavior to very specific practical decisions in the life of an individual or group.

Who can use a Biblical/Communal Discernment process?

Any Christ-centered community may engage in Biblical/Communal Discernment. Congregations often serve as the best place for believers to give and receive counsel on matters of discernment. However, Mennonite Church USA encourages small groups, leadership teams, committees, task forces, and boards at all levels in the church to engage in Biblical/Communal Discernment as appropriate. The group must agree on the best process for making significant decisions. The nature of the process and the outcome will be shaped by the group's level of authority and responsibility, as well as its relationship with others who have an important stake in the decision.

Communal Discernment works best in small groups that have come to know and trust one another. The larger the group, the greater will be the challenge for coming to a satisfactory group decision. Therefore, if the group is larger than twenty persons, it is helpful to divide into smaller groups. We recommend the use of table groups or circle processes where everyone can readily see and hear each other.

When a large group divides into subgroups, a group facilitator is needed for the large group as well as the smaller groups. These facilitators must work together to assure that all participants have the same information at hand, along with clear instructions. At appropriate times, the smaller groups should report their process to the larger group. Matters of importance to everyone should be posted for all to see. If and when a facilitator seeks to make a statement on behalf of the whole, it must be readily available to all participants.

Why do we use Biblical/Communal Discernment?

We engage in Biblical/Communal Discernment as a form of worshipful work, seeking to make decisions that align with God's work in the world. To truly demonstrate our allegiance to the reign of God, the church must sometimes stand as a contrast society. In other words, we must make decisions which reflect our commitment to God and scripture rather than the prevailing culture. It requires careful discernment to determine the best way to live "in the world," yet not "of the world." In this way, communal processes can provide guidance and protection for believers in an individualistic, pluralistic society.

When is Biblical/Communal Discernment most helpful?¹

Not all matters call for the same level of discernment. Certain group processes work better than others, depending on the decision to be made. For example:

Biblical/Communal Discernment may be most helpful when

- ✎ Dealing with significant matters that affect the whole body
- ✎ A sizeable minority or range of views is present
- ✎ More voices or ideas need to be included
- ✎ Sufficient time is available to explore more options and build consensus
- ✎ A diversity of cultural backgrounds is present
- ✎ Persistent and substantial differences exist
- ✎ Facing a question that defies simple answers

Parliamentary procedure may be most helpful when

- ✎ Dealing with routine organizational matters
- ✎ An issue has near or full consensus
- ✎ Clear alternatives have been identified and further discussion is not likely to surface more options
- ✎ Delaying a decision is not a good option
- ✎ Participants are comfortable with parliamentary procedure
- ✎ The group is willing to accept majority rule when a common direction cannot be found.

Some believe that the parliamentary procedures defined in *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised (RONR)* are antithetical to discernment, but that is not accurate.² The intent of *RONR* is a carefully structured discernment of ideas. There are various methods for using discernment available within *RONR*. One can be as simple as the moderator beginning a discussion by only taking questions until everyone has the information they need to proceed. Section 52 of *RONR*

describes two processes, “committee of the whole” and “informal consideration,” that can allow for a wider discussion. “Aids to the Crystallization of Opinion”³ establishes small breakout groups with appointed moderators. Input from the small groups may be reported directly to the body after it has reconvened or it may be conveyed to a committee that attempts to report a consolidated response to the body. A more formal procedure that allows for considering multiple options is “Filling Blanks.”⁴ This process allows the body to view all the options at one time. *Robert’s Rules of Order* and discernment can be partners when church bodies come together to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit.

What are the essential elements for Biblical/Communal Discernment?

To truly function as a community of faith, we must be committed to God and to each other. Good group discernment is enhanced by a common commitment to Jesus Christ as the center of our faith, community as the center of our lives, and reconciliation as the center of our work.

A good group discernment process requires the same kind of mutual respect and caring regard for each other that builds any community of faith. The many “One Another” appeals of scripture give instructions for building up the body of Christ. Many of these appeals are deeply familiar—“love one another,” “bear one another’s burdens,” “be kind and compassionate to one another,” “bear with one another and forgive each other.” Most importantly, group discernment requires a willingness to give up one’s own personal preferences for the good of whole.

In order to truly hear God in the midst of the group, individuals must be experienced in listening for God in their personal lives. Personal discernment is learned over time as one engages in spiritual disciplines and practices that help one to notice God’s work in the world—in oneself as well as in others. The quality and depth of communal discernment depends on the spiritual maturity and discernment capacity of the individuals that make up the group. It also depends on the group members’ familiarity with and understanding of scripture. The true message in scripture is learned over time as individuals persist and delight in reading, studying, and meditating on the scriptures.⁵ Some individuals are particularly gifted by God’s Spirit to be prophetic—seeing and/or hearing messages from God. Others have a particular gift from God for discernment of spirits (Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10). Such individuals do well to submit their sense of God’s direction for the group to discern together.

Another basic element in Communal Discernment is the willingness to give and receive counsel as members of the body of Christ, expressed in a spirit of cooperation or collaboration with the others in the group. Many groups benefit from the use of a written covenant which names the commitments that group members are willing to make to one another as part of the process.

Good group discernment processes also benefit from good facilitation, or leadership, in at least two designated roles:

Facilitator: Depending on the setting, this individual might be designated as a moderator, a clerk, or even a “discernmentarian.” The facilitator holds the group accountable to its covenant, guides the group process, calls for prayer as appropriate, and identifies the emerging direction.

Recorder: The recorder keeps a record of comments, suggested options, emerging direction or “trial balloons,” and the final decision that is made by a group. This material must generally be available in ways that all can see, such as a chalkboard, newsprint, screen projection, or electronic post.

Perhaps the necessary element that is most difficult to find is sufficient meeting time. Yet when time is too limited, it can diminish the completeness and effectiveness of a discernment process. The movement of the Spirit cannot be manipulated or controlled, and it often takes more time than groups envision to discern God’s will at a deep level. But when groups take sufficient time to make a good decision, it generally takes less time to implement the decision. This is particularly true when the decision to be made is complex, involving a diversity of stakeholders with strong differences of opinion.

What are the steps in Biblical/Communal Discernment?

In its simplest form, Biblical/Communal Discernment means that we gather in the name of Jesus, seek God’s guidance through prayer and scripture, and then discern God’s will together. Those simple steps will be considered in more detail as follows.

I. Gather in the Name of Jesus

A. Build community. The stronger the relationships among the group that is gathered for discernment, the better they can make communal decisions. When people gather who hardly know each other, they must give attention to building relationships. For example, they should use name tags, introduce themselves to each other, and share about their lives. The group facilitator can help group members as individuals, not just in the roles or positions that they carry. By taking time to help participants know each other’s interests and concerns, they can help them move to a deeper level of group participation.

B. Adopt a group covenant. A written covenant can help group members to understand the commitments that help the group to do its best work. Taking enough time to discuss the covenant can help the group to avoid misunderstandings that can arise when people come with conflicting assumptions about what is expected. We urge groups to make at least the following commitments:

- ✚ to assume the best intentions of all persons who participate in the group
- ✚ to pray for one another and the group leaders
- ✚ to be patient and kind
- ✚ to speak honestly and directly
- ✚ to practice humility and be willing to change or be corrected
- ✚ to listen actively and carefully
- ✚ to respect the views of those who may not agree with the majority
- ✚ to respect the wisdom of the larger group

C. Agree on the matter for discernment. Since groups can easily be distracted by a discussion of many things, it is helpful to clarify the specific decision to be made. This should generally be done by a person or group appointed for this task. Sometimes, the

matter for discernment may be put in the form of a question, such as “What is God’s will for our congregation regarding the needs of undocumented immigrants in our community?” In this case, the goal of group discernment would be to generate different options, and come to a decision.

At other times, the matter for discernment may be stated in the form of a proposal. If so, it should be stated as a simple declarative sentence that represents a change from the status quo, such as: “God is calling our congregation to help sponsor a new community outreach to meet the needs of recent immigrants.” In this case, the goal of group discernment would be to affirm, deny, or “improve” the proposal for acceptance. In some cases, groups may come to the conclusion that it is not the right time to make the decision, and choose to drop the matter.

II. Seek God’s Guidance Through Prayer and Scripture

- A. Pray together.** Since prayer is an essential element of the discernment process, the facilitator should call the group to prayer not only at the beginning of the meeting but throughout the process. Prayer and silence can help group members refocus when they get sidetracked or overly committed to personal aims. Prayer is a way to assure that our focus remains on discovering God’s will, not achieving individual desires.
- B. Let go.** Most group members bring to the group process their personal needs, desires, wounds, interests, and preferences or convictions regarding the outcome of the group decision. They may also bring spiritual issues such as broken relationships, besetting sins, and resentment towards God. Depending on the strength of these “personal agendas,” they can block that individual’s ability to sense or flow with the Spirit’s leading in the group. Even though these “personal agendas” may remain hidden to the group, they may prevent the group from being able to have a fruitful and open-handed discussion. For this reason, it is helpful for group members to seek a “holy indifference” to everything but God’s will. That was the attitude expressed by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Similarly, the Apostle Paul urged the Philippians to pray that the Spirit would give him sufficient courage to face whatever was in store for him, whether to live or to die (Philippians 1:19-25).

It may be helpful for group members to write down on paper any concerns that might block their ability to listen to God or others, and then to place that paper into an offering basket or at the foot of a cross as a ritual act of worship.

- C. Reflect on scripture.** We acknowledge Scripture as the authoritative source and standard for distinguishing truth from error, for discerning good from evil, and for guiding prayer and worship.⁶ Therefore, we believe that scripture should guide our decision making on important matters. Reflection on scripture can help us to align our thoughts with those of the Spirit who inspired the writing of scripture.

The group may choose to designate one or more scriptures for individual study in preparation for the group meeting. Again, during the discernment process, it is helpful to

allow times for both individual and group reflection on scriptures that specifically relate to the matter for discernment. Or they could reflect on an overarching theme that runs through many scriptures, such as God's love for the poor and oppressed. Dwelling in the Word is a particular approach to Scripture. It is designed to help groups engage with the same scripture in multiple settings over time. People are encouraged to listen to the reading of a passage of scripture in the manner of *Lectio Divina*, share their insights with each other in dyads, and then report to larger groups what they heard someone else say. It aims to enhance our listening to both God and others, for the purpose of learning about God's mission in the world.

- D. Share information.** In order to properly engage in a discussion about the matter for discernment, groups need to have sufficient background. In most cases, it is necessary for a designated leader or facilitation group to consider all of the information that the group must have in hand to make a good decision, and how it should be distributed. If the issue is complex and involves many stakeholders, the facilitation group must represent a sufficient range of perspectives to enable them to anticipate the questions and concerns that will be expressed in the larger group.

Since individuals grasp information in different ways, it is helpful to share information orally as well as in written form, and to allow plenty of time for questions of clarification. Participants often feel most comfortable sharing their initial questions and concerns in small groups, with perhaps as few as two or three persons. The questions that arise in smaller settings may signal the need for additional information to be provided for everyone.

- E. Listen to each other.** Listening to each other does not happen in only one step of a larger process; it is an essential part of the entire discernment process. Careful listening will strengthen relationships from the time when participants introduce themselves to each other, to the time that they make a final decision. The goal of a discernment process is to make sure everyone has a chance to be heard, even though some will have more to share than others.

The role of listening is highlighted during this step because it is the time when group members move toward direct engagement with each other on the matter for discernment. To assure that everyone has a chance to speak, facilitators may choose to use a circle process⁷ or similar means. The facilitator may also call for times of prayer, silence, or meditation on scripture during this step in the process. If the discerning group is larger than 20 persons, this is a time to use smaller groups to enable everyone's perspective to be heard.

III. Discern God's Will Together

- A. Consider the options for discernment.** After participants have sufficient clarity on the matter for discernment, the group may be ready to explore specific options for a decision. If the matter for discernment was stated as a proposal, participants will do well to consider both the cons and the pros of accepting the proposal. The separation of the

discussion into cons and pros assures that everyone has adequate opportunity to explore all good reasons for one side of the issue at a time. Otherwise, the discussion can be divisive, turning the discernment process into a debate between members of the group who argue from opposite sides of the issue. Further, experience has shown that it is helpful to consider together all of the reasons *against* accepting a proposal before considering the reasons *for* accepting the proposal. Negative reasons can easily lead to strong negative feelings or aggressive behavior, so it is important to provide an opportunity to release those feelings in an atmosphere of careful listening and opportunity to ask questions for clarification. After all of the reasons for *not* accepting the proposal are posted for all to see, the group can then generate a comprehensive list of reasons to adopt the proposal. At this stage, the group must not debate the merits of any of the reasons. It is simply a time to list them for all to see.

If the matter for discernment was written as a question, the group can begin by brainstorming various ways to answer the question. Sometimes it is helpful to begin with small groups of two or three, so individuals can feel free to share their ideas. These small groups can then choose which ideas should be posted for all to see. When the list of ideas for responding to the question for discernment is complete, the group may be ready to weigh the options for moving forward together.

- B. Weigh the options.** If the group has been considering a proposal, now is the time to weigh the list of cons and pros. It is important to take adequate time for prayer and individual reflection on the cons and pros before entering a group discussion.

If the matter for discernment was written as a question, the groups can begin to weigh the various ideas on the brainstorming list. It is helpful for groups to consider the good in each idea, seeking for the ones with the greatest merit in the eyes of all. Depending on the desired outcomes of the discernment process, it may be sufficient to end the process once the participants have identified the ideas with the strongest merit. However, if the group intends to come to a decision on the very best idea to implement as a group, they would do well to state the decision as a proposal in a simple declarative sentence. They could then test the proposal by weighing the cons and pros as outlined above.

- C. Seek consensus on a decision.** There are a number of ways for a facilitator to enable participants to weigh the options and come to a decision. Groups may use various means to read the emerging consensus of a group. For example, when a “trial balloon” is launched, some groups use a three-finger exercise to show the level of support for an emerging solution: Three fingers raised means strong support for the proposed solution, two fingers means partial support or a willingness to live with it, and one finger stands for an unwillingness to support it. Some groups use various colored cards to indicate essentially the same dispositions as the above.

Consensus is the goal of Communal Discernment in most groups, although they seldom reach complete unanimity on a matter. Consensus means that the group has listened carefully to all voices, majority and minority together, and sought the unity of the Spirit. Consensus is reached when the group has come to a common mind on a matter, or when

those who dissent have indicated a readiness to accept the group decision, even though it may not represent their preference. A statement of consensus may acknowledge minority points of view.

However, the goal of Biblical/Communal Discernment goes beyond group consensus. It reaches for the joyous convergence of our desires with our sense of God's will. It longs for the sense of God's presence and power among us, showing the way forward. It aspires to arrive at the outcome expressed in Acts 15:28: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...."

The quality of a good discernment process is tested over time, as it often leads to a settled sense of peace, consolation by the Holy Spirit, and the flowing of God's healing and hope from us to the world.

Additional resources:

1. Barton, Ruth Haley. Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups, Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2012.
2. Curtiss, Victoria G. Guidelines for Communal Discernment, Louisville, Kentucky: Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.
3. Fendall, Lon, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop. Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making, Newberg, Oregon: Barclay Press, 2007.
4. Glick, Sally Weaver. In Tune with God: The Art of Congregational Discernment. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Faith and Life Resources, 2004.
5. Morris, Danny E. and Charles M. Olsen. Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church, Nashville, Tennessee: Upper Room Books, 1997.
6. Stutzman, Ervin R. Discerning God's Will Together: Biblical Interpretation in the Free Church Tradition, Telford, Pennsylvania: Cascadia Publishing House, 2013.

Notes

¹ The majority of the following two lists are drawn from Victoria G. Curtiss in *Guidelines for Communal Discernment* produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, which extends permission for adaptation of the material.

² Ibid. pp. 9-10 This paragraph is taken in its entirety from *Guidelines for Discernment* by Victoria G. Curtiss.

³ Robert, op. cit. pp. 524-25.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 155-60

⁵ See page 22, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*

⁶ See page 21, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*

⁷ A Circle Process involves a Talking Stick or similar method, where participants pass a stick or other object around the circle, and only the one who has the stick in hand can speak. Participants are given the freedom to "pass" on the first round, knowing they will have the first opportunity to speak after the stick has made its way around the entire circle the first time.

Ervin R. Stutzman
Executive Director
Mennonite Church USA
May 1, 2013
Updated June 5, 2015

Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, 1995

Mennonite Church USA

Summary Statement

1. We believe that **God** exists and is pleased with all who draw near by faith. We worship the one holy and loving God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally. God has created all things visible and invisible, has brought salvation and new life to humanity through Jesus Christ, and continues to sustain the church and all things until the end of the age.
2. We believe in **Jesus Christ**, the Word of God become flesh. He is the Savior of the world, who has delivered us from the dominion of sin and reconciled us to God by his death on a cross. He was declared to be Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. He is the head of the church, the exalted Lord, the Lamb who was slain, coming again to reign with God in glory.
3. We believe in the **Holy Spirit**, the eternal Spirit of God, who dwelled in Jesus Christ, who empowers the church, who is the source of our life in Christ, and who is poured out on those who believe as the guarantee of redemption.
4. We believe that all **Scripture** is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit for instruction in salvation and training in righteousness. We accept the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life. Led by the Holy Spirit in the church, we interpret Scripture in harmony with Jesus Christ.
5. We believe that God has **created the heavens and the earth** and all that is in them, and that God preserves and renews what has been made. All creation has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. The world has been created good because God is good and provides all that is needed for life.
6. We believe that God has **created human beings** in the divine image. God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation.
7. We confess that, beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity has disobeyed God, given way to the tempter, and chosen to **sin**. All have fallen short of the Creator's intent, marred the image of God in which they were created, disrupted order in the world, and limited their love for others. Because of sin, humanity has been given over to the enslaving powers of evil and death.
8. We believe that, through Jesus Christ, God offers **salvation** from sin and a new way of life. We receive God's salvation when we repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community. We place our faith in God that, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, we may be saved from sin to follow Christ and to know the fullness of salvation.
9. We believe that the **church** is the assembly of those who have accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church's glorious hope. It is the new society established and sustained by the Holy Spirit.
10. We believe that the **mission** of the church is to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded.
11. We believe that the **baptism** of believers with water is a sign of their cleansing from sin. Baptism is also a pledge before the church of their covenant with God to walk in the way of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers are baptized into Christ and his body by the Spirit, water, and blood.
12. We believe that the **Lord's Supper** is a sign by which the church thankfully remembers the new covenant which Jesus established by his death. In this communion meal, the church renews its covenant with God and with each other and participates in the life and death of Jesus Christ, until he comes.

13. We believe that in **washing the feet** of his disciples, Jesus calls us to serve one another in love as he did. Thus we acknowledge our frequent need of cleansing, renew our willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer our lives in humble service and sacrificial love.

14. We practice **discipline** in the church as a sign of God's offer of transforming grace. Discipline is intended to liberate erring brothers and sisters from sin, and to restore them to a right relationship with God and to fellowship in the church. The practice of discipline gives integrity to the church's witness in the world.

15. We believe that **ministry** is a continuation of the work of Christ, who gives gifts through the Holy Spirit to all believers and empowers them for service in the church and in the world. We also believe that God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices. All who minister are accountable to God and to the community of faith.

16. We believe that the church of Jesus Christ is **one body** with many members, ordered in such a way that, through the one Spirit, believers may be built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

17. We believe that Jesus Christ calls us to **discipleship**, to take up our cross and follow him. Through the gift of God's saving grace, we are empowered to be disciples of Jesus, filled with his Spirit, following his teachings and his path through suffering to new life. As we are faithful to his way, we become conformed to Christ and separated from the evil in the world.

18. We believe that to be a disciple of Jesus is to know **life in the Spirit**. As the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ takes shape in us, we grow in the image of Christ and in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit is active in individual and in communal worship, leading us deeper into the experience of God.

19. We believe that God intends human life to begin in **families** and to be blessed through families. Even more, God desires all people to become part of the church, God's family. As single and married members of the church family give and receive nurture and healing, families can grow toward the wholeness that God intends. We are called to chastity and to loving faithfulness in marriage.

20. We commit ourselves to tell the **truth**, to give a simple yes or no, and to avoid the swearing of oaths.

21. We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls the church to live in faithful **stewardship** of all that God has entrusted to us, and to participate now in the rest and justice which God has promised.

22. We believe that **peace** is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God's peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world. Led by the Holy Spirit, we follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation, and practicing nonresistance, even in the face of violence and warfare.

23. We believe that the church is God's holy nation, called to give full allegiance to Christ its head and to witness to every **nation, government, and society** about God's saving love.

24. We place our hope in the **reign of God** and its fulfillment in the day when Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. He will gather his church, which is already living under the reign of God. We await God's final victory, the end of this present age of struggle, the resurrection of the dead, and a new heaven and a new earth. There the people of God will reign with Christ in justice, righteousness, and peace for ever and ever.

Adopted by the delegates of Mennonite Church General Assembly, and of the General Conference Mennonite Church Triennial Session, July 28, 1995, Wichita, Kansas. [Mennonite Church USA](#), formed by the merger of these two groups, has adopted this confession as its statement of faith. Copyright © 1995 by Herald Press Scottdale PA 15683. Used by permission. Order print copies of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, and *Summary Statement, Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, From [Herald Press](#), Scottdale, Pa. [Worship resources](#) based on this confession, and [translations](#) are also available.



Renewed Commitments for MC USA

A Living Document for the Journey Forward Process¹

God invites us to experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation. We yearn to know and share in the mystery of God's unending love.

We confess that sin fragments our wholeness and strains our relationships with God, each other and the world. Confronted with the misuses of power in our lives, communities and institutions, we seek to tell the truth and repent.

The Holy Spirit beckons us toward the restoration of all things in Christ. God continually calls us beloved.

² On this journey together, we commit to:

Follow Jesus

As an Anabaptist community of the living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost.³

Witness to God's peace

We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms, and in all places.⁴

Experience transformation

The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.⁵

¹ *Journey Forward* refers to a two-year process of church-wide discernment growing out of the Future Church Summit held in Orlando in 2017. JF has two primary documents for church use: this living document and an interactive study guide. The feedback gathered from congregations, conferences, constituency groups and church agencies will shape future improvements to this document in preparation for delegate engagement in Kansas City in 2019.

² Genesis 1, Psalm 24:1, Luke 15:11-31, John 3:16-17, Ephesians 3:19, Romans 5:8

³ 2 Kings 23:1-3, Isaiah 61:1-2, Mark 8:34, Luke 4:17-19, Ephesians 4:1-6, Hebrews 1:1-4

⁴ Isaiah 9:6, Micah 6:6-8, Matthew 5:38-48, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Ephesians 4:32

⁵ Psalm 133:1, John 14:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Ephesians 3:10, Revelation 7:9

Transitional Pastor Policy

Mennonite Church USA¹

Rationale and Objectives

There has been a growing recognition of the value of transitional pastor ministry in congregations throughout Mennonite Church USA. At the same time, there has been an increasing shortage of qualified transitional pastors. To encourage existing transitional pastors to continue and to add significantly to their ranks, attention needs to be given to:

1. The establishment of common practices in transitional pastor ministry in Mennonite congregations;
2. Addressing employment issues peculiar to transitional pastors;
3. Working relationships between transitional pastors and conferences, among conferences, and between conferences and Mennonite Church USA.

Definitions

Transitional pastors (sometimes referred to as intentional interim pastors), serve congregations during interim times, typically between long-term pastors or lead pastors. They are specialists who provide leadership that enables a congregation to work at focused agenda which results in healing, clarifying identity, discerning new vision, and setting a fresh tone for the next long-term pastor/s. Transitional pastors see that normal pastoral ministry continues through their own efforts and through empowering others to assist so that they have adequate time to devote to transitional objectives. Transitional pastors may come into conflicted settings or follow a long-term pastor that has been highly respected and loved.

Interim pastors provide maintenance pastoral ministry in congregations that have chosen to begin searching for long term leadership immediately after a pastor has announced a resignation or has left, or is on a sabbatical. The interim pastor is not expected to provide leadership focused on self-study and vision work.

1. Common practices

A. Qualifications

1) Emotional maturity

Transitional pastors have an opportunity to model healthy pastoral ministry performance in specific areas: being self-differentiated—a non-anxious presence, practicing healthy self-care, exiting, avoiding over-functioning, enabling the congregation to make crucial decisions without interjecting personal preferences.

2) Theological orientation

In situations of theological conflict, transitional pastors have a unique opportunity to clarify what it means to be Anabaptist/Mennonite in ecclesiology, and facilitate healthy congregational decisions regarding theological identity and ecclesiological understandings.

3) Specialized training

- a) Specialized training in transitional ministry is encouraged. Recommended opportunities include Interim Ministry Network's training, Mennonite Church USA training, and certification through a regional support group and supervision.
- b) Due to the shortage of trained transitional pastors, new transitional pastors without specialized training or experience are encouraged to pursue training during an interim assignment.
- c) All transitional pastors are minimally required, when logistically possible, to participate in quarterly educational and support programs (similar to those in northern Indiana, Ohio Mennonite Conference and Franconia Conference).

B. Context and Calling

1) Length of transitional pastor assignments

The length of an interim period is determined by congregational objectives. The majority range from 12-24 months. Interim periods longer than two years are not advisable, and should only happen when specific objectives warrant it.

2) Non-availability for long term candidate status

All transitional pastors are required to explain the rationale for non-availability for long term candidate status during the negotiation phase, and to include in their employment contract a statement similar to the following: *The transitional pastor will not be considered as a candidate for long term pastoral leadership in this congregation.*

3) Timing and role of the transitional pastor in the search process

- a) Congregations are best served when they wait to begin their pastoral search process until several other items have been addressed. These include, at a minimum, work at grief, healing and reconciliation, but ideally also include clarification of the congregation's vision. The pastoral search usually occurs in the last half or third of the transitional period. Embarking on the search process before that point is counterproductive for accomplishing objectives for the transitional period.
- b) If adequate education and consultation about the search *process* is provided by the conference, the transitional pastor's role is usually limited to reminding the search committee to communicate adequately with the congregation. In cases where this resource is not provided, the transitional pastor should provide *process* education and consultation to the search committee. The transitional pastor should not be involved in providing or evaluating candidate profiles. The transitional pastor should not attend candidate interviews or candidate presentation weekends.

C. Church Membership and Ministerial Credentials

- 1) Transitional pastors (as well as spouse and family where applicable) are encouraged to select one local congregation in which to maintain long term membership. (This is similar to the practice of many international missionaries.) The transitional pastor's ministerial credential will remain lodged in the conference with which the transitional pastor's home congregation is affiliated.
- 2) The conference minister(s) of the transitional pastor's home conference is responsible to oversee *long term pastoral care* of the transitional pastor, e.g. sabbatical planning, vocational direction, ministerial ethics, etc.
- 3) Responsibility for addressing issues of pastoral misconduct would be assumed by the home conference in close relationship with the conference where the accusations are made.
- 4) The ministerial credential would be recognized by (but not transferred to) the conference the transitional pastor is currently serving. The ministerial leadership of the current conference is responsible for oversight of *short term pastoral care* of the transitional pastor: illness, crises, support for ministry, etc. The congregation in which the transitional pastor is serving will provide associate membership status for the transitional pastor.

D. Supervision and Accountability

- 1) The transitional pastor is encouraged to respect and fully participate in the supervision and accountability structures in place in each congregation being served.

- 99 2) In addition to accountability in the local congregation, the transitional pastor is expected to
100 identify and/or clarify supervision and accountability relationships within the conference
101 structure in which the transitional pastor is currently serving.
102 3) The area conference being served by the transitional pastor is encouraged to provide a
103 coaching relationship or a transitional pastor peer support group to help the transitional
104 pastor navigate the resources and culture of the conference.
105 4) The participation of transitional pastors in current conference functions and relationships is
106 valuable to the congregation being served, the transitional pastor, and the conference.
107 However, the transitional pastor is constantly challenged by time limitations and sometimes
108 might, in consultation with congregational and conference leadership, need to make unique
109 arrangements to meet this need. In maintaining adequate support levels, he/she is
110 sometimes not able to attend all conference and ecumenical pastors groups.
111

112 2. Employment issues peculiar to transitional pastors

113 A. Salary

114 The complete Mennonite Church USA guidelines will be followed for salary calculations. In
115 addition, the congregation being served will continue salary and benefits for one month beyond
116 the conclusion of the transitional period in recognition of the irregular nature and higher
117 intensity level of this particular kind of ministry. This practice will provide time for
118 regeneration and retooling for the transitional pastor before taking on the next assignment. In
119 situations of great complexity or intense conflict which call for exceptional emotional and
120 physical effort, congregations are encouraged to compensate accordingly by exceeding
121 Mennonite Church USA salary guidelines, or regeneration or sabbatical recommendations. In
122 these settings, conference ministers will advocate on behalf of the transitional pastor.
123

124 B. Benefits

- 125 1) Benefits shall include continuing education and retirement, as per Mennonite Church USA
126 guidelines. In addition:
127
128 2) *Vacation*: Mennonite Church USA guidelines for accumulated years in ministry will be
129 followed. The transitional pastor is generally encouraged to take short breaks of 3-7 days
130 duration rather than a long multiple-week break.
131
132 3) *Health Insurance*: Congregations and conferences are encouraged to be flexible in
133 insurance matters in recognition of the unique stressor dealing with health insurance places
134 on the transitional pastor and family. An additional month of insurance coverage will be
135 provided by the congregation at the end of the assignment. **For congregations with**
136 **Corinthian Plan coverage see 3b. below**
137

138 Other Health Insurance Options:

- 139 a. The transitional pastor could be considered employed ministry staff of his/her home
140 conference. This would insure that coverage is as seamless as possible for the
141 transitional pastor, and would avoid underwriting that could occur in changing insurance
142 providers. The home conference could invoice the cost of insurance to a) the
143 congregation where serving, or b) when the transitional pastor is between assignments,
144 directly to the transitional pastor.
145
146 b. Most Corinthian Plan participants have the option to continue their medical coverage for
147 an additional 18 months after congregational employment is completed, through
148 Continuation of Coverage. (Pastors who are Medicare eligible or enrolled in Medicare

are not eligible for Continuation.) The process for Continuation is: The congregation must cancel Corinthian Plan coverage by submitting a completed Cancellation Form to Everence when the pastor ends employment (best to submit cancellation in advance of actual date), and then Continuation will be offered directly to the pastor. If the pastor elects Continuation they will be directly invoiced until their next assignment begins, they begin other coverage, become eligible for Medicare, or the maximum period of Continuation (18 months) is reached, whichever is earliest (if the pastor does not elect Continuation, medical coverage will end on the last day of the month in which the pastor ends employment). If the new congregation is participating with The Corinthian Plan, then coverage can be transferred to the new assignment. Otherwise, the pastor on Continuation may choose to remain on Continuation until they begin other coverage/is Medicare eligible, or the 18 month maximum for Continuation ends. Congregations will cover the cost of one month of insurance premium for Continuation of Coverage under The Corinthian Plan or coverage under another plan-after the congregational assignment is completed for the Transitional Pastor.

- 4) *Sabbatical*: In addition to the salary and benefit extension that covers regeneration time between assignments, congregations served by a transitional pastor will provide an amount equal to one month of regular salary for each 12 months of ministry, or fraction thereof, and prorated accordingly. Unused years toward a sabbatical in a long term congregation do not accrue when such a pastor becomes an II/T pastor, but years do accrue when an II/T pastor moves to the next assignment. This money will be placed in a sabbatical fund to be held in trust by the area conference office for that particular transitional pastor. The funds will be available for a sabbatical after several transitional assignments, based on actual accumulated service of 4 years. The home credentialing area conference will issue a 1099 for tax reporting purposes at the end of the tax year when sabbatical fund monies are disbursed to a transitional pastor. Sabbatical planning is to be done by the transitional pastor in consultation with the conference minister where his/her credential is held. In situations where these monies are not fully vested or claimed, the monies shall be forwarded to the Transitional Pastor Fund, referred to in item 3, B, 5 below.

5) *Expense Coverage*:

- a) Congregations are encouraged to recognize that above budget expenses will often be incurred during a transitional period for such items as curricular supplies, consultants' fees, specialized training, etc.
- b) Transitional pastors are expected to attend conference and denominational meetings, as are long-term pastors. The congregation will cover the expenses of attendance.
- c) In addition to travel costs of carrying out the pastoral duties, there are times when the transitional pastor will need to travel longer distances from home in order to carry out the assignment and incur additional travel/lodging expense. The receiving congregation should assume responsibility for these extra expenses.
- d) When a long distance commuting situation emerges, the congregation being served by the transitional pastor will assume responsibility for seeing that everything possible is done to limit commuting stressors. A transitional pastor should not incur financial liabilities for lodging or commuting costs, and should have a realistic work schedule that allows adequate time at home with family.

3. Conference Responsibilities

A. Employment Negotiations

Conference leaders will serve in an advocacy role for the transitional pastor in salary and benefit negotiations. In situations where congregation/conference relationships are strained, conference leaders will advocate for the transitional pastor. When advocacy is absent, the transitional pastor needs to utilize her/his own resources to educate the congregation on the transition process. Conferences will encourage congregations to realize that interim periods are not the time to attempt to save financial resources by understaffing, since that results in transitional pastors devoting an inordinate amount of time to routine pastoral tasks.

B. Inter Conference Cooperation

Cooperating conferences are encouraged to communicate freely with each other so as to maximize stewardship of the limited availability of transitional pastors. This includes the following understandings:

- 1) Conferences may **contact** transitional pastors in other conferences regarding potential assignments.
- 2) Conferences will keep each other informed, upon request, of **availability dates** of their transitional pastors.
- 3) **Credential** recognition: see p. 2.
- 4) Conferences, in consultation with the transitional pastors group, will **establish criteria** to determine who is qualified to be included in a list of recommended transitional pastors.

Possible criteria:

- a) completion of a training experience deemed adequate by the conference minister in consultation with the transitional pastors group.
- b) completion of Interim Ministry Network's basic training or a year of supervised transitional ministry experience along with quarterly transitional pastors group participation which results in a recommendation by the supervisor who is an experienced/trained transitional pastor;
- c) regular participation in a transitional pastors support group;
- d) a commitment to continue in transitional pastor ministry, vis-à-vis using transitional ministry as an entry point into regular pastoral ministry or as a means of income between long term assignments.

4. Development and Promotion

1) Constituency Education

Transitional pastors, their support groups, conferences and the denomination are encouraged to make constituency education a priority through seminars and other conference and denominational venues. This includes helping congregations acknowledge the wisdom in seeking objective, outside counsel as a matter of basic congregational health at all times. Congregations are usually not the best judge in discerning their need regarding a transitional pastor or interim pastor assignment.

2) Recruitment

Transitional pastors, their support groups, conference and denominational leaders are encouraged to develop a specific plan for recruitment to increase the ranks of qualified transitional pastors. This will include a strategy for utilizing bi-vocational transitional pastors.

3) Training

The Transitional Pastor Group will be encouraged to provide regional training opportunities. Conferences and the denomination will work cooperatively in funding, promoting and recruiting, potential candidates for transitional pastor training events.

- 248 4) The Transitional Pastor Management Group shall be composed of:
- 249 a. The director of denominational ministry or designee
- 250 b. Two (2) conference ministers
- 251 c. Two (2) transitional pastors

252 Terms for the conference ministers and transitional pastors will be three (3) years with eligibility

253 for an additional term for a total of six (6) years. This Group shall give a report at the annual area

254 conference ministers meeting.

255

256

257 **Expectations of Congregations Using Transitional Pastors**

258

- 259 1. It is often difficult for congregations to admit the need for specialized leadership during times
- 260 of transition, such as between long-term pastors or lead pastors, or during difficult periods of
- 261 congregational life. There is a sense that they can handle these periods on their own.
- 262 Therefore, it is very helpful, indeed imperative, that a congregation requests assistance during
- 263 these times.
- 264
- 265 2. Congregations are expected to consult often with their conference leaders, and utilize the
- 266 expertise of the Conference Minister. Keep the Conference Minister apprised of
- 267 developments within the congregation, progress made, and needs which arise. Your
- 268 Conference Minister wants to rejoice with you as progress is made.
- 269
- 270 3. The goal of a transitional period is to develop a focused agenda which speaks to the issues at
- 271 hand. This agenda is often developed with the transitional pastor, and the transitional pastor
- 272 will then give this agenda priority in his / her work. This agenda may include: working
- 273 through grief, healing of congregational hurts, clarifying the identity of the congregation,
- 274 discerning new vision, or setting a fresh tone for the next long-term pastor/s.
- 275
- 276 4. Be willing to work hard and to be very focused for an interim period of 12-24 months. This is
- 277 intended to be a temporary period, and the transitional pastor is not to be seen as the long-term
- 278 pastor.
- 279
- 280 5. Provide the budget necessary for the transitional pastor to bring in the needed resources to
- 281 work at the agenda. This includes an adequate salary, benefits, and expenses for the
- 282 transitional pastor, suggested to be, at a minimum, the guidelines of Mennonite Church USA.
- 283 Benefits shall include continuing education, vacation time, and retirement.
- 284
- 285 6. In addition to their salary, the congregation being served will set aside one month of additional
- 286 salary and benefits at the conclusion of the transitional period in recognition of the irregular
- 287 nature and higher intensity level of this particular kind of ministry.
- 288
- 289 7. Congregations and conferences are encouraged to be flexible in all such insurance matters in
- 290 recognition of the unique stressor dealing with health insurance places on the transitional
- 291 pastor and family. An additional month of insurance coverage will be provided by the
- 292 congregation at the end of the assignment.
- 293

294 [One possible way of dealing with medical insurance coverage is for the transitional pastor to

295 be considered employed ministry staff of his/her home conference. This would insure that

296 coverage is as seamless as possible for the transitional pastor, and would avoid underwriting

297 that could occur in changing insurance providers. The home conference could invoice the cost

of insurance to a) the congregation where serving, or b) when the transitional pastor is between assignments, directly to the transitional pastor.]

8. In addition to the salary and benefit extension that covers regeneration time between assignments, congregations served by a transitional pastor will provide an amount equal to one month of regular salary for each 12 months of ministry, or fraction thereof, and prorated accordingly. This money will be placed in a sabbatical fund to be held in trust by the transitional pastor's home conference office for that particular transitional pastor.
9. Congregations are encouraged to recognize that above budget expenses will often be incurred during a transitional period for such items as curricular supplies, consultants' fees, specialized training, etc.
10. Provide space and priority for the transitional pastor to consult with your Conference Minister and to attend conference events, appropriate churchwide meetings, and pastor-peer meetings. The congregation will cover the expenses of attendance.
11. When a long distance commuting situation emerges, the congregation being served by the transitional pastor will assume responsibility for seeing that everything possible is done to limit commuting stressors. A transitional pastor should not incur financial liabilities for lodging or commuting costs, and should have a realistic work schedule that allows adequate time at home with family.
12. Congregations need to realize that transitional periods are not the time to attempt to save financial resources by understaffing, since that results in the transitional pastor devoting an inordinate amount of time to routine pastoral tasks.
13. Be willing to postpone or delay the pastoral search process until adequate attention is given to the issues at hand. The transitional pastor will be able to assist this discernment, and suggest a process for the congregation during its search. The Conference Minister should be brought in for this process.
14. The transitional pastor will not transfer membership to your congregation. They may become associate members for the period they serve your congregation. The TP's ordination will remain with their home conference.

¹The Mid-States Conferences (IL, IN-MI, OH, and CDC) developed a prototype of this policy in 2008. Members of the task force were Cliff Brubaker, Gary Martin, Dan Miller, Larry Wilson, Lavon Welty, Sherm Kauffman, Tim Lichti, Wayne Nitzsche, Willie Kanagy, and Wayne Hochstetler (Chair).

The Task Force was formed at the initiative of the Leadership Meeting of the Mid-States Conferences on October 12, 2006. It met for the first time on January 22, 2007. This proposal was approved as revised at the January 28, 2008, meeting of the Mid-States Conferences. The proposal was presented and briefly processed at the December 2008 annual area church/conference ministers' meeting. With feedback from that meeting, a draft Mennonite Church USA policy was developed by Lee Lever, Director of Denominational Ministry, for discussion at the 2009 annual area church/conference ministers' meeting at AMBS. Conference ministers approved and adopted the policy with minor changes.

Minor edits were made by the Intentional Interim/Transitional Ministry Task Group (MC USA) in December, 2016: 2.A. Salary; 2.B.3.b Corinthian Plan; 2.B.4 Sabbaticals.

April 2017



Congregations Considering Leaving Current Conference or Mennonite Church USA

1. Withdrawal from Mennonite Church USA

- a. Process - Building on the Membership Guidelines which encourages mutual respect for one another when a relationship is ending we suggest the following steps:
 - i. Congregational leadership will share with conference leadership that they are considering leaving the Area Conference and Mennonite Church USA
 - ii. A conversation between congregational leaders and Area Conference leadership will happen before any decision has been made
 - iii. When a congregational decision is made, a letter stating this decision will be sent to the Area Conference office.
 - iv. The Area Conference office will notify Leadership Development that the congregation has officially left Mennonite Church USA
 - v. A public service of acknowledgement of the end of relationship
- b. Implications for credentialed leaders - Here are some basic understandings and steps to follow in these instances.
 - i. When a congregation leaves an area conference, that area conference will no longer hold and is no longer responsible for the credentials of persons associated with that congregation. This will include those serving within the congregation and those who are serving outside of the congregation.
 - ii. For archival reasons, the conference will enter documentation into the credentialed person's file and then transfer the credential to the Leadership Development Office. The credential will be considered by the denomination as "inactive" (A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership, p. 90).
 - iii. According to the Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership this credential is not valid for performing ministerial functions nor does Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have responsibility for the person holding an inactive.
 - iv. The congregation may recognize this credential as valid, but they should know that they are alone responsible for the credential.
 - v. When a congregation leaves a conference, the conference minister should communicate these understandings to the congregation and the person(s) whose credentials were formerly held by the conference. A copy of this communication should be sent to Leadership Development. (A sample letter is attached.)
 - vi. Record of the credential will remain in Leadership Development database for archival purposes.

- vii. If the congregation has no intention of remaining with Mennonite Church USA, the pastor's credentials are terminated effective with the date of departure.
 - a. If the pastor is not in agreement with the decision to leave, s/he is encouraged to join another Mennonite Church USA congregation.
 - b. If "a" is not an option, credential can be held with some continuing accountability plan in place. Length of such holding is indeterminate. (Office of Ministerial Leadership Office 2002ff)
- 2. Seeking to move to another conference within Mennonite Church USA
 - a. Process - The Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA has outlined the following process (Article III, 3.b of the Mennonite Church USA Bylaws and Membership Guidelines, Part II, No. 12).
 - i. A congregation is required to follow a process of discernment with their conference of origin before another conference may formally consider their application for membership.
 - a. Normally this process will require several meetings of the congregation's leaders with leaders of the conference they wish to leave (at least three meetings is suggested).
 - b. With their application for membership in the new conference the congregation will present a joint congregation/conference of origin statement to the receiving conference which states reasons why the congregation wants to change area conference affiliation
 - c. When the congregation/conference of origin meetings were held, with a summary of the discussion of the meetings
 - d. How or if this affects any other matters in the conference of origin
 - e. The matters that have been resolved in the congregation, Conference of origin relationship along with those that may remain unresolved
 - ii. In the event that a conference has taken disciplinary action that separates a congregation, and that congregation subsequently applies to another conference for membership, the conference to which the congregation applies for membership is required to follow a process of discernment with the congregation's conference of origin. The conference to which the congregation is making application for membership will initiate several meetings with the conference of origin to discuss the congregation's dismissal, and their application for membership into the receiving conference.
 - a. The conference of origin will supply the conference to which the congregation is making application, a written statement of reasons why and how they separated the congregation.
 - b. The receiving conference will supply a statement to the conference of origin explaining why, and on what time frame; they are considering accepting the congregation into membership.
 - iii. Both conferences will notify the Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA when either of these processes begins and will supply copies of the statements named above. The executive director reserves the right of

counsel throughout the process, but will respect the polity of Mennonite Church USA that rests final discretion of membership of congregations with area conferences (Bylaw Article IV, 2.a).

Adopted by Mennonite Church USA Executive Board, June 26, 2004

b. Implications for credentialed leaders

- i. When the intention of the congregation is to join another Mennonite Church USA Area Conference, the original area conference will hold the credential for up to one year while the congregation is in the process of transferring.
- ii. If the process of transferring to another conference takes longer than a year, the credential may be transferred to the Leadership Development Office.
- iii. During this transition process the pastor is expected to be in active relationship with the conference they are moving towards. The pastor will be accountable to the leadership of this conference during this exploratory phase.
- iv. If after two years, the congregation has not joined an area conference within Mennonite Church USA the credential will become inactive. According to the Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership this credential is not valid for performing ministerial functions nor does Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have responsibility for the person holding an inactive.

December 13, 2013

Leadership Development Office

Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann

This document is the result of looking at existing Mennonite Church USA documents, building on the Membership Guidelines and receiving input from Area Church/Conference Ministers' Meeting in Phoenix 2012.

(Today's date)

Dear *(credentialed minister and congregational name)*:

SUBJECT: CREDENTIAL STATUS OF *(CREDENTIAL MINISTER)*

This letter is to officially recognize your congregation's desire to leave *(said)* conference of Mennonite Church USA. This affects the credential our denomination holds for your pastor, *(name)*.

As a result of the congregation's choice to leave the conference and choosing not to be part of Mennonite Church USA, our area conference will no longer hold and is no longer responsible for the ministerial credentials of persons associated with your congregation. This includes those serving within the congregation and those who are serving outside of the congregation.

The credential of *(said minister)* is now considered invalid for performing ministerial functions and Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have no responsibility or liability for the actions of the person holding this invalid credential. Your congregation may recognize this credential as valid, but you should know that you alone are responsible and liable for the credential.

If the credential was in good standing *(you may want to comment case by case on this)* when the congregation left, the denomination will acknowledge and transfer the credential should another recognized credentialing body request it.

Sincerely,

(Conference Minister)

cc: Leadership Development, Mennonite Church USA

A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation

Current policies of Mennonite Church USA do *violence*¹ to **LGBTQIA** people by failing to affirm their full, God-given identities and by restricting their full participation in the life, ministries and rituals of the broader church. The rejection of LGBTQIA people by MC USA has silenced and denied ministry callings, torn apart families, forced parents to choose between their church and their child, and caused many LGBTQIA people to leave the church. In some cases, rejection by their faith community is a factor in LGBTQIA people self-harming or even dying by suicide.²

The 2001 Membership Guidelines, especially Section III,³ are the basis for many of these wounds, and also for harm done to the ministry and witness of our denomination and congregations. The Guidelines were not created for the benefit of LGBTQIA people. The Guidelines' purpose was to facilitate denominational integration, and, in the process, the church willingly offered up LGBTQIA people, their families, their congregations, and pastors as scapegoats for the sake of a false peace and unity.

The legacy of the 2001 Membership Guidelines is in direct contradiction to the vision and calling of MC USA; they have given us conflict and loss, not "healing and hope."⁴

Excluding LGBTQIA people from the church is a rejection of God's joyous delight in the diversity of creation and a denial of the Divine image and breath animating all humankind.⁵ It is unfaithful to the calling and ministry of Jesus who, as "the visible image of the invisible God" and the one through whom "God reconciled everything to God's self," offers radical hospitality to those traditionally despised and rejected by religious institutions and teaches that love is the fulfillment of the law.⁶ It is a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit who empowers LGBTQIA Christians to give and receive every gift in the body of Christ.

Excluding LGBTQIA people harms not only LGBTQIA people and *allies*, but it also harms the full body of Christ. Such exclusion is a rejection of the witness of individuals, congregations, and conferences who live out God's life-giving love in and through full affirmation of the lives of LGBTQIA people. It is a failure to realize the denominational vision of "healing and hope" and therefore restricts the life and mission of MC USA. It is a rejection of spiritual gifts that God longs to share through LGBTQIA people with the Mennonite church.

¹ Bolded, italicized words appear in the Glossary at the end of this document.

² For example, see Ron Adams, *The Rule of Love*, The Mennonite, Nov. 2013; also Roberta Showalter Kreider, *The Cost of Truth: Faith Stories of Mennonite and Brethren Leaders and Those Who Might Have Been*. 2004 Strategic Press.

³ Section III of the "Membership Guidelines" reads, in part, "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.;" and, "We hold the Saskatoon (1986) and Purdue (1987) statements describing homosexual, extramarital and premarital sexual activity as sin to be the teaching position of Mennonite Church USA;" and, "Pastors holding credentials in a conference of Mennonite Church USA may not perform a same-sex covenant ceremony."

⁴ MC USA Vision: Healing and Hope at <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/vision-for-healing-and-hope/>

⁵ Genesis 1-2

⁶ Colossians 1.15-20, Romans 13.8-10, NLT

In our denominational discussions about inclusion, many Mennonites have falsely claimed that LGBTQIA exclusion is necessary for MC USA to remain in fellowship with people of color. This tactic of pitting *marginalized groups* against each other falsely assumes uniformity of thought among and within diverse groups of people, even as it denies the existence of LGBTQIA people of color within the church.

Our calling as disciples of Jesus compels us to “[c]onfront the misuses of power in our... institutions” by “seek[ing] to tell the truth and repent.”⁷

Therefore, be it resolved that, as members of Mennonite Church USA committed to *truth-telling*, repentance, and transformation in the Way of Jesus:

We confess that:

- Our denomination’s policies, structures, practices, and theologies have excluded LGBTQIA persons from fully sanctioned participation in the denomination and have caused great *harm* to LGBTQIA Mennonites and their families.
- We have failed to offer the Good News of God’s “grace, joy and peace”⁸ to LGBTQIA Mennonites and their families.
- Our denomination and congregations are diminished in vitality and faithfulness by the loss of our siblings who have chosen to leave because of exclusionary practices and policies.
- We have not affirmed the full status and worth of LGBTQIA people as fully beloved by God.
- We have scapegoated people of color as the reason for discrimination against LGBTQIA people, and blamed LGBTQIA people for the loss of some people of color in the church.⁹
- LGBTQIA Mennonite people of color are virtually erased.
- We have not taken seriously “every human grouping [being] reconciled and united in the church.”¹⁰
- As a result of the polity implications of the Membership Guidelines Section III, we have driven wedges of mistrust between MC USA pastors and their congregations, and between congregations and conferences.

⁷ Renewed Commitments for MC USA, 2018

⁸ Mennonite Church USA *Vision: Healing and Hope*

⁹ Quoted from Advisory Group report p. 11. This scapegoating is one way that we name how Mennonite institutions have done and do violence to people in the church. While not the focus of this resolution, we hope that dealing honestly with one form of oppression in the church is also a call to engage more seriously with others, like White Supremacy.

¹⁰ Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 9

We commit to:

- **Rescind** the Membership Guidelines, Section III.¹¹
- Include LGBTQIA people and/or representative allies in the creation of any resource, document, or policy produced or distributed by the denomination that specifically affects LGBTQIA people.
- Require that the Executive Board consult with LGBTQIA leaders¹² to create an LGBTQIA constituency group with representation on the Constituency Leaders Council and/or other denomination-wide leadership groups.
- Provide denominational resources for individuals, congregations, and conferences to engage with repentance and reconciliation in their own contexts. Such resources should explore historic harms, encourage *truth-telling*, and address areas of *intersectionality*.
- Follow the leadership of LGBTQIA Mennonites to provide support and resources for LGBTQIA leaders in the church. This should involve investment of denominational time and money.
- Formalize and publicize policies for MC USA's Executive Board, staff, and church-wide program agencies that prohibit the use of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status as criteria to restrict a person's full participation in the ministries, activities, roles, and committees at the denominational level.
- Embody a theology that honors LGBTQIA people and relationships with all future MC USA theological statements, including but not limited to future revisions of *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*. When MC USA partners with other denominations or faith groups, its input into the process will advocate for this theology.

GLOSSARY

Allies - Within the context of the LGBTQIA community, allies are individuals who are not LGBTQIA (i.e., they are heterosexual and cisgender), but who support the LGBTQIA community. Being an ally means: sharing power, taking risks, taking responsibility, being open to the unknown, becoming part of addressing injustice, leveling the playing field, accepting differences, making allowances, and leading by action. It is important for an ally to join LGBTQIA persons in solidarity, and not play a patronizing role in the journey towards equality. [Definition adapted from *Safe Zone* (2016) by the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests.]

Harm - Here used broadly to mean the diminishment of physical, mental, and/or spiritual health as a result of beliefs, policies, and practices that reject the faithful witness of LGBTQIA people and their faith communities. Harm is related to *violence* (see definition below).

¹¹ This will effectively eliminate section III of the Guidelines. Sections I and II are part of the MC USA bylaws.

¹² Many LGBTQIA Mennonite leaders are affiliated with advocacy groups including Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests, Pink Menno, and Inclusive Mennonite Pastors.

Intersectionality - A lens that helps us understand the overlapping dimensions of identity, privilege, and oppression. A community whose theology and structures tend to intersectionality will recognize the interlocking nature of each person's identity markers (such as gender, sexual orientation, race, economic status, age, etc.) and how they are granted the space to belong and the power to thrive.

LGBTQIA - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The acronym is one generally accepted way of representing a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. Sometimes "queer" is used as an umbrella term for LGBTQIA.

Marginalized groups - Those who are denied access to institutional power because of one or more aspect/s of who they are. Because the dominant cultural norms in MC USA, as in wider U.S. culture, have been established by those who are predominantly white, heterosexual, cisgender, and male, marginalized groups in our context include Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, LGBTQIA people, and women.

Rescind - "take back, cancel" (*Merriam-Webster*). At the time of writing "A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation," MC USA leadership is proposing to "retire" the Membership Guidelines with little or no mention of the pain the Guidelines have caused. "Rescind" represents a stronger rejection of the painful legacy of the Membership Guidelines in the formation and life of our denomination.

Truth-telling - Following the practitioners of restorative and transformative justice, publicly telling the truth about harm is an essential step toward healing. Truth-telling centers the stories of those who have been harmed, reveals the impact of past actions, and opens the door to accountability and change.

Violence - Occurs when the actions of individuals, institutions, or structures of power intentionally or unintentionally hurt, damage, or destroy the value of an individual or a group. Exclusion is a threatening act that enforces the experience of othering -- treating some people in the church as essentially different and generally inferior -- and continues the cycle of marginalization. Othering and marginalization are forms of violence; they cause emotional, physical, and spiritual harm.

Submitted by Michael Crosby, Joanna Harader and Randy Spaulding, on behalf of the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors Leadership Team.

For Justice in the U.S. Criminal Legal System

Updated May 28, 2021

Summary

As a historic peace church, Mennonite Church USA is called to resist “injustice in all forms, and in all places.”¹ Many aspects of the current United States’ criminal legal system cause pain and suffering for many, especially poor people and people of color.

The U.S. criminal legal system, at its core, promotes violence and punishment, not reconciliation and peace. We hear this from the voices of those currently and formerly incarcerated, calling for justice; from their families, who yearn to be made whole; and from people of color, who are discriminated against and hurt by this system.² The violence of the U.S. criminal legal system will not, and cannot, bear the fruits of justice and peace.

A just world will only come through following the life and teachings of Jesus. For too long, we have ignored the teachings of Jesus as they apply to the criminal legal system. Jesus calls us to help the poor, the sick and the oppressed. “I was in prison and you visited me,” Jesus tells the righteous in Matthew 25:36. We confess that too often, we have ignored that call.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then, Jesus declares, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:18-21

As Christians, we are called to look to Jesus and the prophetic tradition of the Bible for our vision of justice. We, like every generation of the church before us, are called to do our part, empowered by the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, to advance God’s all-encompassing shalom, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹ MCUSA Renewed Commitments

² For more on the injustices of the U.S. criminal legal system, see Appendix A.

26

27 **Resolution**

28 We as a church body commit to confronting the injustice within the current U.S. criminal legal
29 system. There are many ways individual congregations, conferences, institutions and agencies of
30 the denomination can participate. We will call on them to report back to the delegate body at the
31 next biennial convention. The following are a starting place to begin this work together:
32

- 33 1. Learning about the injustices of the U.S. criminal legal system through conversations,
34 book groups, guest speakers and other means
- 35 2. Speaking with, and learning from, current and former prisoners, as well as others whom
36 the U.S. criminal legal system has harmed
- 37 3. Utilizing curricula addressing the injustices of the U.S. criminal legal system, such as
38 those developed by Mennonite Central Committee, MC USA, and Healing Communities
39 USA to guide local churches through discussions about the U.S. criminal legal system
40 and ways to help those hurt by it
- 41 4. Supporting the families of those who have been incarcerated
- 42 5. Learning about how our legal system has been shaped by racist assumptions and
43 committing to dismantle racism
- 44 6. Divesting from all private prisons, as an organization and as individuals within the church
- 45 7. Advocating for just treatment of people at all levels of the U.S. criminal legal system by
46 petitioning representatives at every level of government to enact necessary reforms
47 including ending cash bail, enacting policies mandating reductions in police violence,
48 ending mandatory minimum sentencing and others³
- 49 8. Continuing to call for a ban on the death penalty at the state and federal levels ⁴
- 50 9. Working for reform of the criminal legal system to promote accountability and
51 rehabilitation
- 52 10. Seeking out alternatives to the current legal system through restorative justice practices,
53 creating new systems of justice that reflect God's love and care for our world

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55 USA Executive Board staff and the Resolutions Committee):

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Appendix A

Policing

Policing originated to control various “threatening” peoples. In the Southern United States, many police forces were borne out of slave patrols, formed to maintain the institution of slavery. In the Northern states, Indian Constables controlled Native Americans, and in cities, such as St. Louis, Mo., police forces were formed to protect residents specifically from Native Americans.³

The racial elements of early police can still be seen today. When stopped by police, a person of color is more likely to have their vehicle searched.⁴ Body camera footage also shows police officers clearly interacting with Black community members differently than their white counterparts.⁵ The rate at which Black people are arrested is higher than white people for both juveniles and adults. Additionally, Black people are five times more likely than white people to be stopped by police without just cause.⁶ The statistics for death by police are alarming as well, as Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately impacted. While white people make up more than 60% of the population, they only make up about 41% of fatal police shootings. Black people make up 13.4% of the population but make up 22% of fatal police shootings.^{7 8}

³ Victor E Kappeler, “A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing,” A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing | Police Studies Online (Eastern Kentucky University, January 7, 2014), <https://plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/brief-history-slavery-and-origins-american-policing>.

⁴ Emma Pierson et al., “A Large-Scale Analysis of Racial Disparities in Police Stops Across the United States,” Nature Human Behavior, May 2020, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0858-1>.

⁵ Rob Voigt et al., “Language from Police Body Camera Footage Shows Racial Disparities in Officer Respect,” PNAS (National Academy of Sciences, June 20, 2017), <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/25/6521.short>.

⁶ “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet,” NAACP, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States,” Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>.

Police brutality is a well-documented phenomenon. Over the past five years, police officers have killed more than 5,000 people.⁹ These statistics do not include other forms of police brutality in which the victim lives, as these are harder to document. Additionally, police officers have become increasingly militarized, and the number of SWAT and other militarized units has increased. These units use weapons, body armor and vehicles designed for war. As these units grow in numbers, there has been no corresponding increase in officer safety or decrease in crime.¹⁰

Ultimately, many issues in policing are rooted in the fact that police in the United States have become overtasked and overburdened. Municipalities look to the police to handle issues of homelessness, mental health crises, food insecurity and addiction.¹¹ These issues are better addressed by increased funding for education,¹² social services, medicine, transportation infrastructure and other public works.¹³

Cash Bail

The cash bail system is one of the most fundamentally unjust tenets of the American legal system. The state charges a cash bail, which is either a standard amount for a particular offense, or an amount adjusted by a judge, trying to guarantee that the defendant will return for their trial or hearing. If they do show up, the bail money is returned; if they don't, it is forfeited to the government. This system creates a divide based on economic status and incarcerates people based on their economic status.¹⁴ Close to 90% of people being held in jails pre-trial are there because they cannot afford to pay the bail.¹⁵ Additionally, being held before sentencing raises the likelihood of being convicted.¹⁶ The idea of cash bail was to avoid people fleeing, but it has become about how much money you have instead of whether or not you will show up to court.¹⁷ Being held on bail can mean loss of job, housing and even custody of children before a person is

⁹ "The Other Epidemic: Fatal Police Shootings in the Time of COVID-19," American Civil Liberties Union, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/report/other-epidemic-fatal-police-shootings-time-covid-19>.

¹⁰ Nsikan Akpan, "Police Militarization Fails to Protect Officers and Targets Black Communities, Study Finds," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, August 21, 2018) <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/police-militarization-fails-to-protect-officers-and-targets-black-communitiesstudy-finds>.

¹¹ "What Police Are For: A Look Into Role Of The Police In Modern Society," NPR (NPR, June 10, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/10/874340093/what-police-are-for-a-look-into-role-of-the-police-in-modern-society>.

¹² Randi Hjalmarsson, Helena Holmlund, and Matthew J. Lindquist, "The Effect of Education on Criminal Convictions and Incarceration: Causal Evidence from Micro-Data," *The Economic Journal* 125, no. 587 (2015): pp. 1290-1326, <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12204>.

¹³ Daniel Sansfaçon, "Investing Wisely in Crime Prevention: International Experiences," *Investing Wisely in Crime Prevention: International Experiences* § (2000), pp. 1-15.

¹⁴ Stephanie Wykstra, "Bail Reform, Which Could Save Millions of Unconvicted People from Jail, Explained," *Vox* (Vox Media, October 17, 2018), <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/10/17/17955306/bail-reform-criminal-justice-inequality>.

¹⁵ Cherise Fanno Burdeen, "How Money Bail Traps the Poor," *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, April 12, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/the-dangerous-domino-effect-of-not-making-bail/477906/>

¹⁶ Udi Ofer, "We Can't End Mass Incarceration Without Ending Money Bail," American Civil Liberties Union (American Civil Liberties Union, July 9, 2018), <https://www.aclu.org/blog/smart-justice/we-cant-end-mass-incarceration-without-ending-money-bail?redirect=blog>

¹⁷ "Bail Reform," American Civil Liberties Union, 2015, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/smart-justice/bail-reform>.

proven to have committed a crime.¹⁸ Cash bail also disproportionately affects Black, Latinos and Native American people, as they are twice as likely to be held in jail for failing to post bond.¹⁹ These same groups also face higher bail rates than white people when charged with similar crimes.²⁰

Legal Counsel and Sentencing

The court system itself is also unjust. Ninety-four percent of prisoners do not stand trial, but instead are pressured into plea deals, forfeiting their chance to be proven innocent or guilty by a jury.²¹ The plea deal has become a way for the legal system to save time and money, at the expense of those being charged. People who have been charged are encouraged to take plea deals, with prosecutors threatening extraordinarily inflated charges if the case is taken to trial.

Additionally, mandatory sentencing laws have increased both the number of people incarcerated and the length of their incarceration.²² These include “three strikes” laws, which increase the length of sentence for the third offense, no matter the charge, and mandatory minimum sentencing laws, which force judges to impose certain sentences on specific crimes. Their stated goal was to reduce drug use, but they have generally failed to do so. Instead, these mandatory minimums increase the number of people in jail and are one of the major reasons why the U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world.²³

The death penalty is another area of problematic and unjust sentencing. Studies show that the death penalty is used in a racially biased way, as a defendant is more likely to be sentenced to death for killing a white person than for killing a non-white person.²⁴ MC USA has already resolved to oppose the injustice of the death penalty on numerous occasions.²⁵

¹⁸ Cherise Fanno Burdeen, “How Money Bail Traps the Poor,” The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, April 12, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/the-dangerous-domino-effect-of-not-making-bail/477906/>.

¹⁹ Stephen Demuth, “Racial and Ethnic Differences in Pretrial Release Decisions and Outcomes: A Comparison of Hispanic, Black and White Felony Arrestees*,” *Criminology* 41, no. 3 (August 2003): pp. 873-908, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2003.tb01007.x>.

²⁰ Cherise Fanno Burdeen, “How Money Bail Traps the Poor,” The Atlantic (Atlantic Media Company, April 12, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/the-dangerous-domino-effect-of-not-making-bail/477906/>.

²¹ Duffy Rice, Josie, Smith III. “The 94% - Plea Deals”. Justice in America (podcast). August 1, 2018. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-2-the-94-plea-deals/id1410847713?i=1000417011518>

²² James Cullen, “Sentencing Laws and How They Contribute to Mass Incarceration,” Brennan Center for Justice, October 5, 2018, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/sentencing-laws-and-how-they-contribute-mass-incarceration>.

²³ Rob Montz, “How Mandatory Minimums Helped Drive Mass Incarceration,” Vox (Vox Media, September 3, 2015), <https://www.vox.com/2015/9/3/9254545/mandatory-minimums-mass-incarceration>.

²⁴ “Race,” Death Penalty Information Center, June 21, 2019, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/race>. “Race and the Death Penalty,” American Civil Liberties Union, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/other/race-and-death-penalty>.

²⁵ “Response to the Federal Government Reinstating the Death Penalty,” Mennonite Church USA (Mennonite Church USA, July 26, 2019), <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/death-penalty-reinstatement-response/>. “A Resolution on The Death Penalty - 2001,” Mennonite Church USA (Mennonite Church USA, August 3, 2020), <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/a-resolution-on-the-death-penalty-2001/>.

Finally, a lack of access to legal counsel makes it difficult for those charged with crimes to prove their innocence or fight for a more just sentence.²⁶ Public defenders are overworked, and as a result, many of their clients are unable to receive the attention that they deserve.²⁷

Incarceration

The U.S. system of incarceration has many flaws. One of the most notable is the increasing use of private prisons, which are designed to profit from those serving time. These prisons do not save the government money.²⁸ Instead, they make money for their shareholders and help foster a culture of predatory legal action. Both private prisons and government-run prisons practice numerous inhumane policies.²⁹ Prisoners can be hired out to private companies that contract with the government, and the prisoners are often paid less than a dollar a day.³⁰

Additionally, the experience of living in a prison can be incredibly traumatic, and PTSD as a result of incarceration is not uncommon.³¹ Women are especially vulnerable, as they are more likely than men to experience both inmate-on-inmate and staff-on-inmate sexual violence.³² After being released, formerly incarcerated individuals are often excluded from public housing and considered ineligible for many jobs. In some states, they are barred from voting.

Incarceration hurts more than the person incarcerated. Eighty percent of women in jail are mothers, and the majority of them are their child's primary caretaker.³³ Visitation policies often discourage visits from families because of the cost of phone or video calls, limited visitation hours and diminished quality of contact.³⁴ In addition, parents often have difficulty regaining custody of children after they are released.³⁵ The effects of incarceration make it difficult for both the individual and their family to live full and healthy lives.

²⁶ Richard A. Oppel and Jugal K. Patel, "One Lawyer, 194 Felony Cases, and No Time," The New York Times (The New York Times, Jan. 31, 2019), www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/31/us/public-defender-case-loads.html.

²⁷ Richard A. Oppel and Jugal K. Patel, "One Lawyer, 194 Felony Cases, and No Time," The New York Times (The New York Times, Jan. 31, 2019), www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/31/us/public-defender-case-loads.html.

²⁸ Mika'il DeVeaux, "The Trauma of the Incarceration Experience," Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review 48 (2013): 257-277.

²⁹ "Prison Conditions," Equal Justice Initiative (Equal Justice Initiative, May 20, 2020), <https://eji.org/issues/prison-conditions/>.

³⁰ Whitney Bennis, "Prison Labor in America: How Is It Legal?" The Atlantic (The Atlantic, September 21, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/prison-labor-in-america/406177/>.

³¹ Mika'il DeVeaux, "The Trauma of the Incarceration Experience," Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review 48 (2013): 257-277.

³² Elizabeth Swavola, Kristine Riley, and Ram Subramanian, "Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform" (Vera Institute of Justice, 2016), pp. 6-34, https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/overlooked-women-and-jails-report/legacy_downloads/overlooked-women-in-jails-report-web.pdf.

³³ Aleks Kajstura, "Women's Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2017," October 17, 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/report/womens-mass-incarceration-whole-pie-2017>.

³⁴ Elizabeth Swavola, Kristine Riley, and Ram Subramanian, "Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform" (Vera Institute of Justice, 2016), pp. 6-34, https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/overlooked-women-and-jails-report/legacy_downloads/overlooked-women-in-jails-report-web.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

153 **Other Concerns**

154 These areas of concern – policing, cash bail, legal counsel and sentencing, and incarceration –
155 are – not the only injustices in the U.S. criminal legal system. Other concerns include the
156 criminalization and incarceration of immigrants, e-carceration, treatment of children accused of
157 crimes, and many others. These are significant tools of injustice that run counter to Jesus’ call,
158 and congregations and individuals within MC USA may wish to honor this resolution by
159 engaging one or more of the areas of concern not listed in this appendix.



Mennonite Church USA

Accessibility Resolution

(Updated May 21, 2021)

Introduction:

The purpose of this resolution is to help all members of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), including congregations, area conferences, agencies and constituency groups recognize and seek to remove the barriers to belonging in architecture, communications and attitudes that prevent individuals with disabilities from participating in church life; and to bring wholeness to the Body of Christ as those barriers are removed, and all people are fully integrated into the community of faith.

"Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful." 1 Corinthians 12:7, The Message.

Resolution:

As members of MC USA, we commit to growing as communities of grace, joy and peace without barriers so that God's healing and hope flow through all of us to the world regardless of ability.

This resolution affirms that people with disabilities are included within priorities expressed in MC USA Journey Forward:

- Experience and bear witness to the belovedness of all creation, acknowledging that all people are made in the image of God and are children of God.
- Follow Jesus: In his life and teaching, Jesus emphasized that God's reign includes all people, especially those who have been marginalized or excluded. As an Anabaptist community of the living word, we will listen carefully to the voices of people with disabilities, to better understand the fullness of God's love for us and the vision of God's reign through Jesus Christ.

- Witness to God's peace: We are called to extend God's holistic peace to all. We bear witness to Christ's gift of peace to the world by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all its forms and in all places.
- Experience transformation: The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love in unique ways. When our worship includes all people, the Spirit gathers the whole body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty and enables us to more fully embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel.

We, the members, congregations and organizations of MC USA, resolve to deepen our understanding of barriers for people with disabilities, to take action to make our community life and facilities accessible and welcoming to all, and to discern and affirm the gifts of each person for our common good.

Anabaptist Disabilities Network in collaboration with Mennonite Health Services (MHS) will support MC USA congregations, conferences and organizations to remove barriers to belonging for people with disabilities by:

- Providing assessment tools, such as the accessibility surveys offered by Congregational Accessibility Network. (Appendix 2)
- Offering events and resources for all ages to raise awareness and change attitudes about disability.
- Sharing and developing resources, including curriculum, for people with disabilities.
- Providing resources to congregations through congregational disability advocates.
- Consulting with congregations about addressing specific barriers.

Congregations can take action by:

- Assessing their own accessibility through an audit or inventory, and by periodically surveying their congregants to learn of any barriers to full community participation.
- Developing a plan to increase accessibility in some way(s). For example, motorized door openers or wheelchair ramps, assisted listening devices or hearing loops, large print worship materials, Sunday school classes that raise awareness and understanding.
- Calling a disability advocate or advocacy team charged with helping to assess accessibility, identify and remove barriers, share resources on disability, and call forth the gifts of people with disabilities in the congregation.

At all levels of the church, we commit to calling out and employing the leadership gifts of people with disabilities.

Accessibility Resolution: Appendix 1

Supplemental Information

Context

Faith communities in the U.S. are exempt from secular mandates in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, many Mennonite congregations lag behind secular society in making facilities and activities accessible and in integrating those with disabilities into their communities.

While celebrating the many steps Mennonites have taken to become more accessible to people with disabilities, architectural barriers persist, hindering the participation of persons with mobility challenges. Communication barriers persist, hindering the participation of those with differing visual, intellectual or hearing abilities. Attitudinal barriers persist, reflecting a lack of sensitivity and denying those with differing abilities dignity and access to spiritual nurture, friendship, freedom, membership, baptism, self-expression, service, and leadership equal to and balanced by the rights of others.

History

In 1983, the General Conference Mennonite Church General Assembly adopted a *Resolution Regarding Caring Community*, which pledged to continue to pay special attention to the needs of those with physical, emotional, and sensory disabilities, and to break down the barriers that have hindered their participation.

We interpret the 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* to include all people, including those with disabilities:

- At Pentecost, God began to pour out the Spirit on all flesh and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, all Christians are called to carry out their particular ministries (Article 3).
- God has created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, creating human beings in the divine image (Articles 5 and 6).
- All believers have been baptized in one Spirit into the one body of Christ, and the varieties of gifts and ministries in the church are all given for the common good (Article 9).
- The church's mission is to reconcile differing groups, creating one new humanity. The church is called to witness to people of every culture, ethnicity, or nationality (Article 10).

96 Definition

97 People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, emotional, intellectual, or
98 sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective
99 participation in society on an equal basis with others. (United Nations Convention on the
100 Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, December
101 2006).

102 Implementation Resources/Accountability

103 Following the approval of this resolution, Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADN) will provide
104 leadership to carry out the concepts and commitments in this resolution. We do this in
105 collaboration with Mennonite Church USA agencies, and related organizations that serve those
106 with differing abilities.

107 Resolution Process

108 Work on this resolution began in 2014. ADN recognizes the contribution of the following to this
109 resolution: Tim Burkholder, Christine Guth, Clare Krabill, Richard Aguirre, Sheila Stopher-Yoder
110 Jeanne Davies, Eldon Stoltzfus, Katherine Dickson, and Katie Smith.

111 At the invitation of Anabaptist Disabilities Network ("ADN"), four congregations, namely, Akron
112 Mennonite Church, Hesston Mennonite Church, Waterford Mennonite Church, and Berkey
113 Avenue Mennonite Fellowship endorsed this resolution and worked in collaboration with MHS to
114 bring it to Mennonite Church USA in 2021.

115

Accessibility Resolution: Appendix 2

Note: The Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN) was begun by Anabaptist Disabilities Network in 2007. In 2011, CAN became an independent organization with a mission to encourage congregations of all faiths to include persons with disabilities.



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Congregational Assessment Survey Form

Welcome to the **Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN)**! This survey form is intended to help your congregation assess its level of accessibility to persons with various disabilities, including mental illness, and to provide suggestions to increase your accessibility.



The **Congregational Assessment Survey** is at <http://www.canaccess.org>. You are encouraged to use this hard copy version to collect the information needed and then fill out the survey online. The online survey automatically registers and keeps track of your results, and you can return to update it at any time. In addition, the Assessment Survey automatically generates the CAN Accessibility Seal for use on your congregational website.

The **CAN Accessibility Seal** acknowledges and awards an emblem for congregations that meet certain criteria in any of the following accessibility categories:



Mobility. This indicates accessibility to the building and grounds including parking, entrances, restrooms, and worship space for wheelchair users and others.

Hearing and Language



Hearing – Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) and other aids are provided for persons who are hard of hearing.

Sign Language – Sign language interpretation is provided to enable communication between hearing persons and those who are deaf.



Vision – Visual aids are provided for persons who have low vision or are blind.



Support – The congregation supports inclusion of persons with disabilities through awareness-raising, education, support groups, and provision for individual differences in gifts, behavior, and learning style.



Mobility

Mobility accessibility means that anyone can use the congregational building and grounds. This means the congregation provides accessible parking leading to an accessible entrance, which, in turn, leads to an accessible worship area and preferably to at least one accessible classroom. Accessibility for wheelchair users has become the criteria of measurement for many areas of mobility accessibility. Also included in this section are questions related to hand mobility, particularly in the use of door handles and water faucets.

Congregations that earn the Mobility emblem meet the criteria outlined for **Parking, Entrance, Interior, Restrooms, and Worship Area**. Congregations are highly encouraged to meet the criteria for **Classrooms** and **Social/Gathering Area** as well.

Parking: Accessible parking spaces are provided. All accessible parking spaces have common features. Note the slight differences between **Van Accessible** spaces and **Car Accessible** spaces.

All Accessible parking spaces meet all of these criteria:

- ___ Each parking space has a level, stable surface.
- ___ Parking spaces are marked with an upright sign with the universal accessibility symbol clearly visible even when a vehicle is parked in the space.
- ___ Accessible parking spaces are at least 8 feet wide.
- ___ A path at least 36 inches wide leads from the parking space aisle to an accessible entrance. Path is level or at a grade of no more than 1:12 (for 1 in. of rise, 12 in. of length).

Van Accessible parking spaces meet these additional criteria:

- ___ A smooth level aisle 8 feet wide is marked beside each parking space for wheelchair accessibility. (Two spaces may share an aisle.)
- ___ A sign reading "Van Accessible" is alongside the universal accessibility sign.

Car Accessible parking spaces meet this additional criterion:

- ___ A smooth level aisle 5 feet wide is marked beside each parking space for wheelchair accessibility. (Two spaces may share an aisle.)

The number of accessible parking spaces needed is based on **the total number of spaces**.

Check	Total Spaces	Van Spaces	Car Spaces
___	25 or less	1	0
___	26-50	1	1
___	51-75	1	2
___	76-100	1	3
___	101-150	1	4
___	151-200	1	5
___	201-300	1	6
___	301-400	1	7
___	401-500	2	7
___	Over 500	2% accessible with 1/8 of those van spaces rounded up to the next whole number and the rest car spaces	

Entrance

___ A covered drop off area with 114" vertical clearance for vehicles to discharge passengers. (Recommended)

Entrance to the building is accessible to people who use wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers, as well as others who have difficulty using stairs. **Note:** This question only pertains to the method of building entry. A later question will address accessibility within the building.

All methods of accessible entrance meet the following criteria:

- ___ Accessible from accessible parking spaces via a smooth path at least 36 inches wide at a grade of no more than 1:12 (for 1 in. of rise, 12 in. of length).
- ___ There is clear signage indicating the accessible entrance. (If a main public entrance is not accessible, there should be a clear sign pointing to the accessible entrance.)
- ___ There is at least a five-foot level platform at the entry door.
- ___ The doorway entrance into the building is at least 36 inches wide.
- ___ Doorway has a level threshold of no more than ½ inch.

Accessibility can be via **Ground level**, a **Ramp**, or an **Elevator or lift**.

Ground level accessible entrances meet all of the above criteria

Ramps also meet the following criteria:

- ___ Ramp maximum incline of 1:12 (for 1 in. of rise, 12 in. of length), preferably 1:20.
- ___ Ramp minimum width is 36 inches.
- ___ Handrails are provided – on at least one side for shorter ramps (except curb ramps) and on both sides for rises of more than 6 inches.
- ___ After each 30 feet of ramp (measured horizontally) at a slope of 1:12 to 1:16 (or 40 feet for a slope of 1:16 to 1:20), there is a level landing.

Elevator or lift. Accessible entrances that include an elevator or lift also meet all of the following criteria:

- ___ Elevator or lift is certified by the company for intended use.
- ___ Elevator or lift is able to be easily used by standing or wheelchair user.
- ___ Elevator or lift is large enough to accommodate a wheelchair (preferably, along with a standing attendant).
- ___ Elevator or lift is able to bear the weight of a power wheelchair with person in it.

Doors are of two types:

- **Automatic doors** are recommended wherever possible since they provide the greatest amount of independence to the most people.
- **Manual doors** can also be made more accessible.

Manual doors should meet the following criteria:

- ___ Able to be opened by a wheelchair user without forcing the wheelchair off of the surrounding level surface.
- ___ Have a handle easy to grasp with one hand without the need for tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist.
- ___ Doors are light and easy to open (less than 5 lbs. pressure) by a wheelchair user.
- ___ (Highly recommended) Have an usher or greeter stationed at the door to help persons with mobility challenges.

Automatic doors should meet the following criteria:

- ___ Marked with the universal wheelchair access symbol and in good operating condition.
- ___ Plainly visible push buttons at comfortable height for person in a wheelchair.
- ___ Buttons at sufficient distance from any door that opens toward the user.
- ___ Doors open at moderate speed and give sufficient time for user to pass through.

Interior. Hallways and other interior sections of the building are accessible to people who use wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers, as well as others who have difficulty walking. **Note:** All of the criteria are required unless otherwise indicated.

- ___ **Hallways.** Hallways are level or have an incline of no more than 1:12, have a barrier-free width of at least 48 inches (60 inches preferable) to allow one wheelchair and one person walking to pass each other.
- ___ **Coat Racks.** At least one section of coat racks is low enough to be accessible by persons in wheelchairs and small children.
- ___ **Stairs.** All stairs have at least one handrail mounted 34-38 inches above the step. (This should include the podium platform; please see the Worship Area section.)
- ___ **Carpets and rugs.** Carpets and rugs are securely attached with a firm backing and have a pile level no more than 1/2-inch thick.
- ___ **Door handles.** (Required for doors on restrooms, worship area, and classrooms labeled accessible and highly recommended for others.) Room doors are able to be opened and closed with minimum effort and have handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist (generally lever handles).

Restrooms At least one restroom accessible to users of wheelchairs and others with mobility issues is available for both men and women. Restrooms may be of two types:

- **Family/companion restroom.** At least one is highly recommended. This makes it possible for a spouse or attendant of a different gender to assist the person with the disability.
- **Restroom stall within the standard facilities for each gender.**

Accessible family/companion restrooms meet the following criteria.

- ___ Have signs clearly marking them as accessible.
- ___ Have entrance doors with lever door handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist to operate.
- ___ Have entrance doors at least 32-inches wide.
- ___ Have entrance doors that either swing into the hallway, or, if swinging into the room, allow sufficient room beyond the radius of the door to turn a wheelchair. (See next point.)
- ___ Restrooms are at least 60 inches wide (beyond the radius of the door; see previous point) and 59 inches deep.
- ___ Wall-mounted grab bars are 33-36 inches high next to and at the back of the commode.
- ___ The toilet seat is 17-19 inches high.
- ___ The sink counter is no more than 34 inches high, has a knee clearance of at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide and 19 inches deep, and hot and cold handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist to operate.

Restroom accessibility provided by a **stall within the standard facilities** for each gender meets the following criteria. **Note:** Accessible stalls in standard restrooms are recommended even if an accessible family/companion restroom is also provided. In situations where accessible stalls are the only accessible options, entrance doors to the restrooms must be wheelchair accessible (highly recommended in any case).

- ___ Entrance doors into the restrooms are at least 32 inches wide.
- ___ Entrance doors are operable by a person in a wheelchair and any door handles provided do not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist to operate.
- ___ Entrance doors either swing into the hallway, or, if swinging into the room, allow sufficient room beyond the radius of the door to turn a wheelchair. (See next point.)
- ___ The restrooms have at least a five-foot wide turning radius (beyond the radius of the door; see previous point).
- ___ At least one sink is provided with a counter no more than 34 inches high, a knee clearance of at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide and 19 inches deep, and hot and cold handles that do not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting wrist to operate.
- ___ Accessible restroom stalls are clearly marked with the universal accessible sign.
- ___ Entrance doors into the accessible stalls swing into the room, not into the stall.
- ___ Accessible restroom stalls are at least 60 inches wide and 59 inches deep.
- ___ Accessible stalls have secure, wall-mounted grab bars 33-36 inches high on the side and at the back of the commode.
- ___ Accessible stalls have a toilet seat 17-19 inches high.

Worship Area

All methods of accessible entrance meet the following criteria:

- ☐ Have an accessible building entrance and hallway leading to them.
- ☐ At the entrance, the presence of greeters, a clear view, and/or clear signage indicates the way to the accessible entrance to the worship area.
- ☐ There is at least a five-foot level platform at the entry door.
- ☐ The doorway entrance into the worship area is at least 36 inches wide.
- ☐ Doorway has a level threshold of no more than ½ inch.
- ☐ Ushers are available at the doorway to help persons find seating.

Accessibility can be via **Floor level**, a **Ramp**, or an **Elevator or lift**.

Floor level accessible entrances meet all of the above criteria:

Ramps also meet the following criteria:

- ☐ Ramp maximum incline of 1:12 (for 1 in. of rise, 12 in. of length), preferably 1:20.
- ☐ Ramp minimum width is 36 inches.
- ☐ Handrails are provided – on at least one side for shorter ramps and on both sides for rises of more than 6 inches.
- ☐ After each 30 feet of ramp (measured horizontally) at a slope of 1:12 to 1:16 (or 40 feet for a slope of 1:16 to 1:20), there is a level landing.
- ☐ There is five-foot level platform at top and bottom of ramp and at any switchbacks.

Elevator or lift. Accessible interior paths to worship area entrances that include an elevator or lift also meet all of the following criteria:

- ☐ Elevator or lift is certified by the company for intended use.
- ☐ Elevator or lift is able to be easily used by standing or wheelchair user.
- ☐ Elevator or lift is large enough to accommodate a wheelchair (preferably, along with a standing attendant).
- ☐ Elevator or lift is able to bear the weight of a power wheelchair with person in it.

Worship Area Seating. Seating is provided so that a wheelchair user can sit beside family members. Please indicate the number of spaces provided. **Note:** A space is defined as an area able to accommodate one wheelchair with at least one additional seat by its side.

- ☐ Front (No. _____)
- ☐ Rear (No. _____)
- ☐ Middle (scattered site cutouts with considerations for drafts, temperature, sound, light, view) (No. _____)

Leadership area. The leadership area (chancel, platform, bimah, minbar) is accessible so that persons with mobility issues can function in leadership roles.

- ___ Stairs to the leadership area have at least one handrail mounted 34-38 inches above the step.
- ___ A ramp or lift is provided for wheelchair accessibility (highly recommended), or provision is made for an alternative accessible speaking location for a person in the wheelchair to be seen and heard.
- ___ A 27-inch table is provided as needed as an alternative to a short podium.

Classrooms. At least one classroom is accessible to wheelchair users. **Note:** All of the criteria are required.

- ___ An accessible path at least 36 inches wide leads from an accessible entrance to the classroom door.
- ___ There is a five-foot level platform at the classroom door.
- ___ The doorway entrance into the classroom is 36 inches wide with a level threshold of no more than ½ inch.

Social/Gathering Area. The area where the congregation gathers for social activities is accessible to wheelchair users. All of the criteria are required.

- ___ An accessible path at least 36 inches wide leads from an accessible entrance to the door of the social/gathering area.
- ___ There is a five-foot level platform at the door of the social/gathering area.
- ___ The doorway entrance into the social/gathering area is 36 inches wide with a level threshold of no more than ½ inch.

Additional Recommendations to enhance accessibility are recommended.

- ___ **Accessible telephone.** A telephone is provided with the top of the controls no more than 48 inches from the floor and with a knee clearance of 27 inches.
- ___ **Fire alarms,** both visual and auditory are installed 48 inches from the floor.
- ___ **Evacuation plan.** An evacuation is in place for persons who are in wheelchairs, are blind, have an intellectual disability or mental illness, or who otherwise need help.
- ___ **Special seating** is provided with seat 19 inches from floor, arm rests, foot stool, and extra wide leg room.
- ___ **Fragrance free section.** Seating is provided in a separate environment which is kept fragrance free for persons with chemical sensitivities.
- ___ **Bookstands or lapboards** are available for persons unable to hold hymnals or scriptures.

Hearing and Language

Please read this section carefully. It contains important background material for the next two sections.

In this category, it is important to distinguish between three descriptive terms.

- **Hard of hearing** – persons who have a hearing loss but can still hear with a hearing aid or Assistive Listening Device. Some may also use sign language.
- **deaf** (with a small “d”) – persons who have very little or no hearing and rely on the English language, an alternate sign language, speech reading (sometimes called “lip reading”), print, and/or other visual materials as their primary means of communication.
- **Deaf** (with a capital “D”) – persons who use a distinct language, American Sign Language (ASL), and identify themselves with a cultural group (North American Deaf Culture). These individuals may have some hearing.

Two separate emblems are possible in this category.



Hearing. Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) and other aids are provided for persons who are hard of hearing.



Sign Language interpretation can help remove barriers in communication and participation between hearing persons and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Qualified interpretation into the particular sign system that the person uses should be provided. Interpretation into **American Sign Language** should be provided to enable communication between Deaf and hearing persons.

In addition, under the **Vision** section is an important recommendation on “Lighting for speakers” Persons who rely on speech reading (sometimes called “lip reading”) also require proper lighting on the face of speakers.



Hearing

Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) and other aids are provided for persons who are hard of hearing.

Congregations that display this emblem will have a good sound system along with individual ALD. A roving microphone or acceptable alternative is important, especially for congregations who have announcements, a time of sharing, prayer requests, etc. Several additional items follow that are highly recommended.

The main worship area of the congregation has a good sound system along with individual ALD.

Note: All criteria required.

- ___ **Sound System.** A clear audible sound system, equipped with at least one microphone, is regularly used in the main worship area during the worship service.
- ___ **ALD.** The sound system in the main worship area includes individual ALD for people who are hard of hearing.
- ___ Ushers are educated on the location of ALD and how to assist persons wishing to use them.

A roving microphone or acceptable alternative is necessary for Hearing Accessibility.

Note: One out of three is acceptable.

- ___ **Roving microphone.** A roving microphone is available for sharing time, prayer requests, etc.
- ___ **Alternative 1.** When a roving microphone is not available, an accessible microphone is available at the front of the room.
- ___ **Alternative 2.** When a roving microphone is not available, the worship leader summarizes each comment over his/her microphone so that all can understand.

The following are recommended. Please check any that are available.

- ___ **Phone with volume control.** At least one hearing aid compatible phone with volume control is available.
- ___ **Taped services.** Sermons or complete worship services are made available on audio and/or videotape.
- ___ **Sermon texts.** Paper copies of sermon texts are available.
- ___ **Closed captioning** or another visual language option is available.
- ___ **Background noise eliminated.** Background noise has been eliminated as much as possible.

In addition, most persons who are hard of hearing or deaf can read, so the visual aids under **Vision Accessibility** are also recommended.



Sign Language

Sign language interpretation is provided.

Congregations meet the criteria for displaying this symbol by providing a qualified interpreter to assist with communication between persons who are deaf and those who do not know sign language. This typically means interpretation between American Sign Language (ASL) used by the Deaf community and spoken English but may also be met by providing interpretation into another sign system typically used by persons in that local community.

___ **Sign language interpretation** is provided. Please indicate the sign language system used.

___ **ASL.** Interpretation in ASL is provided.

___ **Other sign system.** Interpretation is provided in the following signed English systems. _____

Sign language interpretation is provided in the following **contexts**:

___ **Worship.** Sign language interpretation is provided in at least one main weekly worship service.

___ **Classrooms.** Sign language interpretation is provided in educational settings for persons who need it.

___ **Social Functions.** Sign language interpretation is provided for informal social activities.

___ **Other** _____



Vision

Aids are provided for persons who have difficulty seeing. Most of these aids are in the form of some kind of large print.

Basic standards for visual accessibility are met when there is **adequate lighting** in the worship area and there are at least two accommodations to make **large print** available either through **printed materials or visual projection** of words. Additional recommendations are also made to both accommodate those with low vision or to use visual means to make possible other accessibility features.

___ **Adequate Lighting** is provided throughout the worship area (sanctuary). This includes the elimination of glare from windows and lights. **Note:** See the Visual Aids question below for an additional consideration.

___ **Large Print** worship materials are provided, and ushers are educated on their location and use. **Note:** Large Print should be at least 14-point type, but may need to be larger, depending on the font used as well as the individual person.

___ Large Print **Bulletins**.

___ Large Print **Hymnals**.

___ Large Print **Song Sheets**. For non-hymnal music used by congregation.

___ Worship materials are **projected** on an **overhead screen**. **Note:** This can be a suitable alternative for many people to large print materials.

___ **Worship Order** projected.

___ **Worship Readings** projected.

___ **Announcements** projected.

___ **Hymns** projected. An alternative to Large Print Hymnals.

___ **Worship Songs** projected. An alternative to Large Print Song Sheets.

The following **auditory accommodations** are recommended as helpful for persons with low vision:

___ **Announcements**. Verbal announcements are given using a microphone.

___ **New Hymn Introduction**. New hymns/songs are introduced prior to the worship or in such a way that people with low vision can participate more fully during the worship.

The following are also essential visual aids to accompany other accessibility features. (Highly recommended.)

___ **Exterior signs visible**. Signs are easily visible near the building entrance indicating location of accessible parking spaces and entrances.

___ **Interior signs visible**. Interior signs are easily visible noting the location of any available accommodations, i.e., accessible restrooms, elevators, Assistive Listening Devices, etc.

- ___ **Lighting for speakers.** Lighting for the area which speakers use is directed to the front of speakers, toward the face, not from behind the person. This is important for persons who are hard of hearing or who rely on speech reading.

The following are also essential to aid persons who are **blind**: (Highly recommended.)

- ___ **Greeters and Ushers.** Greeters and ushers are available at building and worship area entrances and are trained to orient new persons who are blind to the environment and guide them as necessary.
- ___ **Doorway lettering.** Raised letters and Braille signs are provided at doorways to rooms, including classrooms and restrooms.
- ___ **Braille material.** Bulletins, signs, and other written material are available in Braille.



Support

The congregation supports inclusion of persons with disabilities and mental illness through awareness-raising events, educational materials and activities, support groups, and provision for individual differences in gifts, behavior, and learning style.

This emblem will be awarded by meeting the criteria in any of the following areas. All are recommended.

___ **Mission Statement.** The congregation has language in its mission statement, covenant, or other foundational document addressing its intention to provide access to, and inclusion of, people with disabilities and mental illness.

Awareness and Education Activities. At least one of these awareness-raising activities has been carried out within the past year.

___ **Disabilities awareness.** Disabilities awareness is promoted by the observance of annual awareness events in the worship or education program of the congregation. Example: Disabilities Awareness Week (Disabilities Awareness Week (second week in March in the U.S.).

___ **Mental health awareness.** Mental health awareness is promoted by the observance of annual awareness events in the worship or education program of the congregation. Examples: Mental Health Month (May), Mental Illness Awareness Week (first week in October in the U.S.)

___ **Sermons.** At least one sermon relating to disabilities and/or mental health issues has been preached.

___ **Educational events.** At least one workshop, seminar, or educational series has been held in the congregation.

___ **Individual and Family Needs Questionnaire.** Members and attendees have been surveyed within the last three years about disabilities and mental illness present in their families and how the congregation may become more inclusive, supportive, and accessible to them. (This questionnaire is available on the CAN website and is adaptable to any congregation.)

___ **Library Resources.** Educational materials on disabilities and mental illness are available in the congregation's library, office, or other space open to attendees.

Training. The following training opportunities are provided and promoted.

- ___ **Leadership knowledge and training.** Congregational leaders have been educated in general terms on the differences between diagnoses of mental illness, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, etc. Those who work directly with persons with disabilities have received specific instruction or training on those disabilities.
- ___ **Companion training.** Training has been held in the past two years for persons who serve as aides or companions to persons with disabilities and/or mental illness.
- ___ **Hospitality training.** Specific training is provided to greeters and ushers so they can better help individuals with mental illness and other disabilities feel welcomed, accepted, and included in the congregation.

Special Education Services. The following special education services are offered:

- ___ **Classroom Integration.** Children and adults with developmental, intellectual, and learning disabilities and differences are welcomed in the regular education program of the congregation through the use of special materials, teaching methods, behavioral supports, and classroom aides as necessary.
- ___ **Special education classes.** Classes are provided for adults with developmental disabilities which support their abilities to learn without treating them like children.
- ___ **Individual Spiritual Formation Plan (ISFP).** An ISFP is on file for children and adults who need special considerations in order to be included in worship, spiritual education, and/or other aspects of congregational life.

___ **Referrals.** Congregational leaders have a working knowledge of counseling professionals and appropriate agencies in the community to whom they can refer people with questions or needs in the area of mental health or disabilities.

Gift discernment. The congregation's gift discernment process includes consideration of persons with disabilities, including mental illness.

- ___ **Mission and Service.** The congregation has ministry and service opportunities (e.g., choir, teaching, ushering, elder, etc.) open to persons with disabilities, including mental illness.
- ___ **Discernment Process.** The congregation has a gift discernment process whereby persons with disabilities, including mental illness, are asked to share their abilities in the congregation and community outreach.

Individual and Family Supports. The following services are offered and promoted.

- ___ **Benevolence fund.** A benevolence fund (or other financial support structure) is available through the congregation to provide financial assistance for expenses incurred above and beyond insurance coverage for members, including those who have a mental illness or other disability.
- ___ **Respite.** The congregation has designated individuals who can provide respite care to family members who have dependents with disabilities and/or mental illness.
- ___ **Facility availability.** The congregation's facility is available free of charge to community support groups on issues involving disabilities, mental illness, addictions, etc.
- ___ **Support groups.** The congregation organizes support groups or caring circles for people who have disabilities (including chronic mental illness) and their families.
- ___ **Special Diets.** Special diets (e.g., diabetic, gluten-free) are considered when food is served.

___ **Other congregational supports.**



Churchwide Statement on Immigration

2014 Revision of 2003 Statement

Feb. 15, 2014

Vision: Healing and Hope

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world. (*Mennonite Church USA Vision Statement*)

Mennonite Church USA's 10-year Purposeful Plan (2011) calls the church to pursue the priorities of Christian Formation, Holistic Christian Witness, Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation, among others.¹

Millions of people are painfully caught in the web of the structures that comprise the United States' broken immigration system. Long wait lists keep families separated for years and tempt people to circumvent the system; workplace raids create a culture of fear and harm entire communities; and lax oversight of guest worker programs leaves a system ripe for exploitation and worker abuse.² Societal discord on the issue has risen and also polarized people within the Church.

As Mennonite Christians, we are moved by the healing and hope that God offers through Jesus Christ to join with sisters and brothers from other faith traditions in offering our faith-filled responses to this suffering and injustice. We claim our identity as citizens of God's kingdom, and therefore, as "aliens" and "exiles" in the country in which we reside. We renounce the indifference to and mistreatment of undocumented and documented immigrants that has occurred and continues to occur in our congregations, our communities, and this country. We are committed to joining God's reconciling mission (Isa. 58:6-9, 2 Cor. 5:16-19) and to live and act as sisters and brothers in Christ regardless of our legal status.

As such, we advocate for just and humane immigration policies for immigrants and refugees, and we empower congregations, area conferences and denominational staff to serve as advocates for these vulnerable groups of people.

We commend all levels of the Church in efforts to welcome immigrants: providing mutual aid and social service resources, building intercultural relationships and diverse worshiping communities, and treating immigrants with dignity and respect.

We commit to grow in understanding our context—to comprehend the root causes of immigration and examine how the U.S. immigration system operates—so that we can better understand each other's stories. We also commit to grow in cross-cultural competency to advance our goal of being an intentional community for Christ.

We seek to join in God's healing work regarding immigration, trusting that God goes before us and desires wholeness and well-being for all people.

Supporting documents are available that include recommended actions, the biblical basis for this document, a statement on identity, a brief exploration of the issues, and a list of resources.

¹ Mennonite Church USA's seven churchwide priorities: Christian Formation, Christian Community, Holistic Christian Witness, Stewardship, Leadership Development, Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation, and Church-to-Church Relationships.

² These descriptive statements come from "Immigration Policy Principles," a document compiled by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and updated in April 2009. See mcc.org/media/resources/664. Additionally, some immigrants without documents are considered to be "undocumentable" because for them to reside in the U.S. legally, they would first have to return to their home countries for three or 10 years (depending on how long they had been in the U.S.) before they would be eligible to apply for legal re-entry.

Appendix A: Actions

The following action steps are grouped into two sections:

- The first section (A) has five specific action steps; two are educational and three are ministry actions. The Executive Board calls congregations and area conferences to engage at whatever level possible in *at least one educational action* and *one ministry action* in the next two years (2014–2016).
- The second section (B) offers suggestions for additional educational and ministry actions, which congregations and area conferences are encouraged to engage in as they are able.

Depending on the action, congregations, area conferences and/or the denomination will be in a position to take the lead, facilitate and/or provide resources. Some actions may best be served by ecumenical partnerships in local and/or regional areas.

Appendix C contains a list of resources that support the actions.

A. Actions for 2014–2016

Educational

1. Learn skills to help facilitate intercultural competency and/or undoing racism processes in congregations through the Communities of Hope process.
2. Plan Bible studies, sermons and worship services on themes of hospitality to immigrants.

Ministry

3. Advocate for just and humane immigration policies for immigrants and refugees by contacting our local, state and national elected officials. (See “Immigration Policy Principles,” a document compiled by Mennonite Central Committee U.S.: mcc.org/media/resources/664)
4. Offer church facilities and volunteers for documentation services, language classes, mental health support, cultural celebrations, after-school homework help and other ministries.
5. Engage in mutual aid to offer food, shelter, clothing, housing, transportation and other resources to immigrants regardless of their status.

B. Additional suggested actions

Educational

1. Learn about the political and economic situations that push and pull people’s migration to the U.S.

and how U.S. consumer culture and policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have helped to create these dynamics.

2. Plan local and/or regional learning tours in our communities.
3. Join study tours to the U.S./Mexico border, refugee camps or detention centers to learn more about U.S. immigration and refugee policies. Share our learnings.
4. Learn about the process and timing of legally becoming a U.S. citizen.
5. Learn about the detention centers across the U.S. that hold undocumented immigrants, and locate the ones nearest our congregations.
6. Attend a *Bienvenido* training to provide support for immigrants in our congregations and/or communities.
7. Study and learn about the U.S.’s prison industry and how private prison corporations profit from their role in the current immigration system.

Ministry

8. Support immigrants in navigating the legal system to become U.S. citizens. Offer information about the available alternative oath for those who are not willing to bear arms. Help connect immigrants with attorneys and/or with financial assistance for legal support.
9. Advocate for a fair and living wage for all low-wage workers and immigrants in our workplaces and communities.
10. Build relationships among newcomers and long-term residents in our communities. Facilitate the mutual sharing of stories in our congregations and neighborhoods.
11. Partner with immigrant congregations to plan church services or community events.
12. Plan and join public ecumenical or interfaith witness events for immigrant justice.
13. Pray for just and humane immigration reform and policies for all immigrants and refugees; for immigrants in our communities and across the globe; and for all parts of Mennonite Church USA as we seek to discern and follow the Spirit’s leading.

Appendix B: Background

1. What does the Bible say?

We hold in the Light of God's Word the complex realities of today's undocumented migration. With our hearts, minds and might, we desire to walk in the wisdom, witness and humility of Jesus Christ.

- **God creates humankind “in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).**

Despite the restrictions, permissions and requirements that the United States' immigration laws have assigned to newcomers at different times throughout history, we hold to the biblical understanding that *all* persons are sacred. According to the Genesis 1 creation story, each woman and each man is a gift of our Creator. The Bible calls us to view and to treat one another as persons created in the image of the Holy One, regardless of our status under immigration laws.

- **God covenants with people “on the move.”**

The Hebrew Scriptures are full of stories of migration! The stories of Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Moses, the Israelites escaping Egypt, Naomi and Ruth, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and others are faith stories of immigrants. We claim our immigrant biblical ancestors as spiritual guides who teach us about struggle, failure, vulnerability, perseverance and God's faithfulness in their risky journeys with God and with their communities.

- **God's Law compassionately provides for immigrants.**

In the ancient world of the Old Testament, foreigners were extremely vulnerable due to their lack of extended family and lack of access to land, which was passed on through inheritance. More laws regarding treatment of immigrants appear in the Hebrew Torah than in any other law code known in the ancient world.³ God repeatedly urges God's people to remember their own salvation history: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 22:21). God loves the stranger and commands God's people also to love and give consideration to the stranger (Deut. 10:17-19).

- **God sent Jesus, who embraced outsiders.**

Jesus, whose parents fled with him as political refugees to Egypt after his birth (Matt. 2), was consistently

attentive to and compassionate with people who were ostracized from society. Jesus taught his disciples to welcome strangers, to minister to prisoners and to provide for anyone who was hungry, thirsty or in need of clothing, because through these actions his disciples would minister directly to him (Matt. 25:31-46). He described his mission as bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, giving sight to the blind and freeing the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-21). He consistently violated social norms, sharing God's love by spending time with and eating with those on the margins of society, such as “sinners,” tax collectors, Gentiles and Samaritans (Matt. 8:5-14; Mk. 7:24-30; Lk. 5:29-32, 7:1-10, 10:25-37, 17:11-19; Jn. 4). The Apostle Paul taught the first churches how Christ's giving up his life for all because of love, and then being raised up through the power of God's love, broke down dividing walls and created peace between hostile peoples (Eph. 2:11-22).

2. Who are “we”?

We are Mennonite Church USA, and we come from many places. Some of us are recent immigrants to this country. Some of us have ancestors who migrated here generations ago. Some of us are living especially vulnerably in the United States, without documentation.

Through the Holy Spirit's transforming presence and power, we are on a journey of healing and hope to become a Church in which “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28; Eph. 2:11-22).

Together, on this journey, we affirm that:

- we are beloved children of God. This is our fundamental identity. Therefore, each one of us is a sacred image of God, created in God's likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). Yet we are all sinners, all falling short of the glory of God, receiving the grace of Jesus Christ as a gift (Rom. 3:21-26).
- we are “aliens” and “exiles” in the United States, an identity freely chosen in our baptisms, given to us by

³ In the Law, God provided for the needs of the foreigner, addressing fair labor practices (Exod. 20:10, 23:12; Deut. 5:14, 24:14-15), justice (Deut. 1:16-17, 24:17-18, 27:19), food sharing (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 14:28-29, 24:19-22), inclusion in worship (Exod. 12:45-49; Lev. 16:29) and love for neighbor, including the foreigner (Lev. 19:18 with 19:33-34). The content of this teaching about God's law and the Scripture references are taken from “Immigration: Today's Civil Dilemma and Theological Challenge—What Does the Bible Say?,” a keynote presentation to the Mennonite Church USA 2013 Delegate Assembly in Phoenix by M. Daniel Carroll R., Ph.D., Denver (Colo.) Seminary, on July 2, 2013.

the Spirit who forms us as God's own people. Our first loyalty is to God and to live as citizens in God's Kingdom (1 Pet. 2:9-11).

- we are residents of the United States whose roots are *all* connected to migration in one of three ways:⁴
 1. those of us whose ancestors were original inhabitants of this land, and who have suffered a continuing legacy of displacement.
 2. those of us whose ancestors were *forced* to come here by economic and political forces such as slavery, war or colonization, and those who continue to come because of push factors such as economic hardship and/or fear of danger in our countries of origin.
 3. those of us whose ancestors *chose* to migrate here to seek religious freedom and economic opportunity—in many cases, without documentation.

We acknowledge that we come from diverse cultural backgrounds and hold a variety of perspectives as we prayerfully discern how God is calling us to respond to the complex issues of immigration before us. Our biblical and theological understandings, as well as our own stories, unify us as we respond with our prayers, words and actions to the United States' broken immigration system and to the injustices that undocumented immigrants are suffering.

We lament the reality that injustice in how we treat each other happens not only outside the Church but also in our congregations. It is urgent that those among us with privileges gained through U.S. citizenship, education, lighter skin color, gender and/or socioeconomic status find the courage and will to recognize and renounce

the individual and systemic racism in ourselves, in our church and in this society. May those of us who have benefited from the unfair treatment of immigrants—historically or currently—be able to see and confess our complicity, allowing God to transform us and use us as agents of reconciliation.

3. What issues are we facing?

Among the factors that displace people in vulnerable communities across the globe and lead to migration are natural disasters, floods and droughts caused by climate change, economic instability, violence and war. People from places all over the world—from Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere—come to the U.S. hoping to start a new life, some as refugees.

Another factor is U.S. trade agreements,⁵ which have focused on consumer goods crossing borders but have neglected to take into account the human needs of workers, in many cases displacing small farmers and other small businesses. Facing poverty, millions of people have chosen to migrate from their homes, hoping and praying to be able to provide for their families and earn a living wage.

However, a broken U.S. immigration system often makes it difficult to migrate to the U.S. for work or to reunite with family.⁶ Families are kept separated by an unjust and outdated quota system that discriminates against citizens from some countries, and by long delays in document processing.⁷ Family separation causes emotional pain and stress as well as economic hardship and motivates spouses and children to face extremely dangerous conditions to cross the borders in the hope of reuniting in the U.S.

⁴ These categories are attributed to Ched Myers, *Our God is Undocumented* (Orbis Books, 2012), pp. 63–64.

⁵ One essential part of addressing the root causes of migration is the renegotiation of trade agreements. For example, over the last 20 years, the largest root cause of undocumented migration to the United States from Mexico and other Latin American countries has been the economic push/pull dynamics between our countries. According to the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Policy Principles (2009), one way to address this is for the United States to seek foreign policy solutions and trade agreements that promote economic opportunity and stability in migrants' home countries.

⁶ Mennonite Central Committee U.S. [Immigration Policy Principles](#) (2009) suggest what just and humane immigration policy could look like. These include (1) ensuring a legal pathway to citizenship for immigrants currently living in the U.S., without requiring unworkable fines or "touchback" provisions; (2) maintaining the current family-based immigration system and increasing the number of available family visas, so that families can reunite and immigrate together in a legal and timely way; (3) creating just and fair guest worker programs, along with appropriate oversight mechanisms, to protect labor rights such as fair wages, employer choice and due process protections; and providing the opportunity for immigrant workers to apply for permanent status and, eventually, citizenship; (4) ensuring access to basic benefits and services for those lawfully present, while avoiding policies that seek to deter access to public health and safety services and lead to a culture of fear and isolation in immigrant communities; (5) choosing border security strategies that protect community rights, human dignity and the natural environment while opposing policies that contribute to deaths and increased fear in immigrant communities; (6) addressing political instability and economic disparity in migrants' home countries caused, in part, by U.S. foreign policies and trade agreements; and creating incentives for sustainable development; (7) ending indiscriminate raids and detention for non-dangerous immigrants, while targeting enforcement efforts on drug, weapon and people smugglers.

⁷ To legally immigrate to the U.S. with a work visa, a person needs to have an adult family member in the U.S. or an employer who is willing

Although the U.S. depends economically and culturally on the contributions of immigrant laborers,⁸ entrepreneurs, professionals and artists, many immigrants experience hardship, discrimination and abuse. Many undocumented immigrants work difficult and often dangerous jobs for very low pay. They are vulnerable to being cheated out of wages and denied compensation for work-related injuries. Undocumented immigrants in poverty cannot receive most welfare and healthcare benefits. Millions of children of undocumented immigrants live in poverty in the U.S.⁹

Many U.S. citizens view immigrants as a threat to safety and economic security. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, whose stated vision is “to ensure a homeland that is safe, secure and resilient against terrorism and other hazards,” also handles immigration enforcement and services.¹⁰ Racial profiling, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on workplaces, and increased collaboration between local police and ICE agents cause high stress and fear in immigrant communities. Also, the increasing militarization of the border between the U.S. and Mexico has led to hundreds of deaths in the Arizona Sonoran Desert each year¹¹ and to reports of abuse by border patrol agents.

While thousands of immigrants of many nationalities await deportation in detention centers across the nation, the private corporations that own and operate the prisons

earn large yearly profits paid from taxes. This is a rapidly growing part of the lucrative U.S. prison industry that incarcerates people with brown and black skin at rates far exceeding those of people with lighter skin.

Many teenagers and young adults who were brought to the U.S. as young children by their parents have grown up experiencing the stress and fear of living without documentation. Known as “DREAMers,”¹² some have organized themselves politically, asking for a path to legal status so that they can work and attend college without the fear of deportation. Many DREAMer organizations are asking for protection for their families as well.

As Mennonite Christians, we prayerfully discern, “What does it mean for Jesus to be the center of our faith, community the center of our lives, and reconciliation the center of our work?” If we truly “see the misery, hear the cries and know the sufferings”¹³ of undocumented immigrants among us, our authentic response will be to choose, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk the difficult and sometimes risky journey of growth in confronting these complex immigration issues. As people who look to Scripture for guidance, we believe that the stories of our spiritual ancestors in the Old Testament and Jesus’ teachings in the New Testament are clear: we are to welcome the stranger.

to sponsor him or her. Immigrants who enter the U.S. without documents or inspection or who overstay their visas are subject to “three- and ten-year bars” that require them to return to their home country for three or ten years before they can legally apply for a visa to enter the U.S. (www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/so-close-and-yet-so-far-how-three-and-ten-year-bars-keep-families-apart)

⁸ History shows that business interests during the past half century have invited workers from Mexico and Central America to come to the U.S. because their labor was needed. However, their presence was not consistently welcomed.

⁹ More Latino/a children are living in poverty in the U.S.—6.1 million in 2010—than children of any other racial or ethnic group. Of these, more than two-thirds (4.1 million) are the children of immigrant parents (not necessarily undocumented), and 86.2 percent of the 4.1 million were born in the U.S. The other 2 million are the children of parents born in the U.S. Data from “Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics Sets Record, Leads Nation,” Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends Project, Sept. 28, 2011, www.pewhispanic.org/2011/09/28/childhood-poverty-among-hispanics-sets-record-leads-nation.

¹⁰ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines its five core missions as follows: to prevent terrorism and enhance security, to secure and manage our borders, to enforce and administer our immigration laws, to safeguard and secure cyberspace and to ensure resilience to disasters. See www.dhs.gov/our-mission.

¹¹ University of Arizona researchers report that the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner processed the remains of 2,238 migrants from 1990 to 2012, of which more than 750 remain unidentified. “Migrant deaths are still very high in Southern Arizona,” said Robin Reineke, coordinator of the Missing Migrant Project at the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner. “(There are) hundreds each year, and that hasn’t changed despite the fact that there are fewer migrants crossing [according to Border Patrol apprehension statistics].” The report, “A Continued Humanitarian Crisis at the Border,” shows that the majority of bodies recovered in the desert are those of Mexican citizens. However, there has been an increase in people from Central American countries being apprehended by Border Patrol or dying along the international border.

¹² DREAMers take their name from the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act, proposed legislation that has historically had bipartisan support, through which qualifying undocumented youth would be eligible for a conditional path to citizenship. In 2010, the DREAM Act was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives but fell five votes short in the Senate.

¹³ This sequence of seeing, hearing and knowing comes from Yahweh’s own self-description of compassion culminating in “coming down to deliver” the Israelites suffering in Egypt (Exod. 3:7-12). In the Phoenix 2013 convention workshop “Take Off Your Sandals,” Anton Flores-Maisonet of the Alterna Community in Georgia named these steps as ones that are taken in one’s journey toward compassionate action.

Appendix C: Resource list [in process]

Many of these resources come from the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office website and are reprinted with permission: washingtonmemo.org/immig and mcc.org/learn/what/migration

A. Pray

1. Prayers, faith reflections, sermon resources and worship resources:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/for-churches
2. Faith statements:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/in-brief
3. Guides for organizing vigils in your church or community:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/take-action

B. Learn

1. General information about immigration issues, in-depth resources for border issues, DREAM Act, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA):
washingtonmemo.org/immig/topics
2. State immigration policies:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/state-policy
3. *People on the Move*, an MCC migration exhibit that can be reserved: mcc.org/learn/what/categories/immigration/exhibit
4. Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Listening Project
The Immigration Listening Project was launched by MCC U.S. in order to assess attitudes about immigration among Anabaptist churches across the U.S. MCC staff organized listening sessions with 36 groups from Anabaptist churches. The project intentionally included a diverse spectrum: people of color and white people; new and long-time immigrants. Download PDF: washingtonmemo.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/mcc-us-listening-project-pdf.pdf

C. Advocate for justice

1. "Principles for U.S. Immigration Policy," (*Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office Memo, Spring/Summer 2013*):
mcc.org/media/resources/664
washingtonmemo.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/immigration-fact-sheet-2013.pdf

2. Sign up to receive MCC Action Alerts:
org2.salsalabs.com/o/5764/signup_page/signup
3. Guides to letter-writing and visiting officials; op-eds: washingtonmemo.org/immig/take-action
4. Larger interfaith campaigns:
www.interfaithimmigration.org
5. Resources for monitoring state policies:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/state-policy

D. Teach

1. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*
M. Daniel Carroll R., Ph.D., Baker Academic: 2008, 176 pp., ISBN: 080103566X
www.bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/christians-at-the-border-2nd-edition/283513
(also available in [Spanish](#))
2. *Strangers in the Land*, a six-week study guide based on *Christians at the Border*, from Sojourners
amzn.com/B00FL2VH40
3. *Missio Dei 19: Immigration and the Bible / La inmigración y la Biblia*, M. Daniel Carroll R., Ph.D.,
Purchase: store.mpn.net/productdetails.cfm?PC=1873
Download: [English](#) | [Español](#)
4. *Loving Strangers as Ourselves: Biblical Reflections*
This resource, in the form of a booklet, reflects on God's view of the strangers in the biblical text. Seven lessons written by seven different Anabaptist authors address biblical texts in which God reminds his people about how to treat the strangers who live among us.
mcc.org/media/resources/696
5. Video: *Dying to Live*; 33-minute DVD (2-hour session): dyingtolive.nd.edu
Download resources for a group process:
 - *Dying to Live* schedule: mennoniteusa.org/resource/dying-to-live-schedule/
 - *Dying to Live* questions: mennoniteusa.org/resource/dying-to-live-questions/
 - Circle process instructions: mennoniteusa.org/resource/circle-process/
 - Reflection guide: dyingtolive.nd.edu/DyingtoLiveREFLECTION%20GUIDE1.pdf

6. Materials for group presentations (Sunday school, workshops):
washingtonmemo.org/immig/for-churches
7. Videos related to immigration:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/for-churches/videos
8. Books related to immigration:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/for-churches/books
9. Stories related to immigration:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/for-churches
10. Speakers
 - Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
 - Saulo Padilla, coordinator, immigration education, (717) 859-1152, sp@mcc.org
 - Tammy Alexander, senior legislative associate, MCC Washington Office, (202) 544-6564, TammyAlexander@mcc.org
 - Mennonite Central Committee East Coast
 - Curtis Book, peace and justice coordinator (Philadelphia), (215) 535-3624, cbook@mcc.org
 - Andrew Bodden, diverse constituency coordinator (Miami), (305) 249-3477, apb@mcc.org
 - Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes
 - Jorge Vielman, peace and justice coordinator (Goshen), (574) 534-4133, jorge@mcc.org
 - Mennonite Central Committee West Coast
 - Gloria James, legal services advisor (Calif.), (909) 945-0809, gjames@mcc.org

If your congregation has found a particular resource helpful, please let Iris de León-Hartshorn, director of transformative peacemaking for Mennonite Church USA, know: irisdh@mennoniteusa.org.

E. Engage

1. Communities of Hope Process
Communities of Hope is a process for assisting congregations in becoming more culturally competent and working at undoing racism.
mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/undoing-racism/communities-of-hope/
2. *Bienvenido* Program
The *Bienvenido* Program began as a mental health promotion intervention for adult Latino/a immigrants and has expanded to reach adolescents in community settings, schools, churches, jails and juvenile correctional settings.
bienvenidosolutions.org
3. Mennonite Church USA DREAMer Fund
To help undocumented persons who qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program pay the application fee.
mennoniteusa.org/resource/dreamer-fund/
 - [DREAMer Fund Guidelines](#)
 - [DREAMer Fund Covenant](#)
 - [DREAMer Fund Application](#)
4. Resources for finding partners:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/state-list
5. Opportunities for volunteering and resources for teaching English as a second language:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/take-action
6. Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC)
The official national network of the U.S. immigration detention visitation movement.
www.endisolation.org/
7. Immigrant detention watch network
immigrantdetentionwatch.blogspot.com/2013/02/visitation-guide-published-by-civic-to.html
8. Guides to visiting detention facilities:
washingtonmemo.org/immig/take-action



Mennonite World Conference
A Community of Anabaptist-related Churches

Shared Convictions

By the grace of God, we seek to live and proclaim the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. As part of the one body of Christ at all times and places, we hold the following to be central to our belief and practice:

1. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.
2. Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.
3. As a church, we are a community of those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.
4. As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience.
5. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.
6. We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.
7. As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In these convictions we draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century, who modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. We seek to walk in his name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ's return and the final fulfillment of God's kingdom.

***Adopted by Mennonite World Conference
General Council
Pasadena, California (USA)
March 15, 2006***

2024

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



Part VI

CDC Resolutions

CDC Resolutions

1998-2008

1998 42nd Annual Session at Bluffton College

ACTION: “On this weekend, the broader Mennonite Church is recognizing the *25th anniversary of the ordination of Emma Richards to pastoral ministry*. It is with gratitude that we recognize the gift of leadership that women have brought to our churches and conferences. Therefore, be it resolved that the Central District Conference will continue to call out, affirm and encourage the gifts of women in ministry.”

ACTION: “We, as the Central District Conference of General Conference Mennonite Church gathered at Bluffton College, June 18-20, 1998, *deplore and grieve the presence of handguns* in our society and the violence and death caused by the use of the handguns in our homes, schools and communities. Therefore, be it resolved that we call our society to join us in taking a bolder stand against this violence by supporting such actions as handgun legislation, teaching conflict mediation, praying and confronting the economical and racial injustices which lie at the root of this violence and in which we may knowingly or unknowingly participate.”

1999 43rd Annual Session at Iowa Wesleyan College

ACTION: “*Mennonite College of Nursing*: In these very days that the Central District Conference is meeting in its annual session, the Mennonite College of Nursing is celebrating the completion of 80 years of nursing education as an independent Mennonite Church related institution, after which it will become an integral part of Illinois State University in Normal. Its principle historic landmark, the Troyer Memorial Nurses’ Home, has been sold and will continue to be used by another facility. It is appropriate that we use this occasion to express deep appreciation for these eighty years of dedicated service – For the Love of God and Humanity, as stated in the College memo. We call to remembrance the pioneer leaders, such as Peter Schantz and Emanuel Troyer, who convinced the Central District Conference to establish a hospital and training school for nurses, and then solicited the assistance of the Defenseless Conference, thus leading to the establishment in 1919 of the Mennonite Sanitarium and the Mennonite Sanitarium Training School. We recall and express our appreciation for the many dedicated Mennonite administrators (e.g. Benjamin and Lydia Rupp, first Superintendent and Matron; Lena Maxwell, long-time Superintendent of the Nursing School; William Dunn, CEO of the Mennonite Hospital Association; Presidents Jacquelyn Kinder and Kathleen Hogan), as well as staff members, teachers, and constituents who made possible the growth of the hospital program and the nurses training school from its early beginnings to its more formal education program as the Mennonite Training School. Mennonite Hospital School of Nursing and its eventual establishment as the Mennonite College of Nursing with accredited Bachelor of Science and Masters of Science in Nursing Degree programs. We express appreciation for the 2,258 dedicated nurses who completed requirements for Diplomas, Bachelors, or Masters degrees at the Mennonite Hospital School of Nursing and the Mennonite College of Nursing and have faithfully served not only the needs of central Illinois but also the needs of many other parts of the world in a wide variety of service and mission programs. Today we especially express our deep appreciation to President Kathleen Hogan for 30 years of meritorious service, including 15 years as CEO and President, during which she led the Mennonite College of Nursing to be the first fully accredited independent College of Nursing in the United States.

2000 44th Annual Session at Goshen College (joint session with IMMC, IMC, and OMC)

No resolutions

2001 45th Annual Session at Bluffton College

ACTION: “We, the delegate body of the Central District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church, declare the *intent of the Central District Conference to join Mennonite Church USA*. Central District Conference with its member churches will become part of Mennonite Church USA upon the approval of the Plan of Merger (see Membership Guidelines for the Formation of the Mennonite Church USA, section II, 7, b) by the General Conference delegate body in July of 2001.”

2002 46th Annual Session at Meadows Mennonite Church

ACTION: “*Resolution for Peace*: Be it resolved that we continue to pray for leaders of nations, especially George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Ariel Sharon and Yassar Arafat, that the seeds of hatred which have been and are being planted might not germinate and the seeds being planted for peace could grow, so that current and future generations might be enabled to live in hope and peace.”

2003 47th Annual Session at Bluffton College

ACTION: “We, the delegate body of the Central District Conference, *affirm the Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship in their service to the people of Atlanta*. We support and encourage them in their mission of hospitality to the vulnerable in their midst and in their fellowship together as the body of Christ. During the coming year, we pledge as congregations to engage with Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship in sharing the cup of blessing, in deepening our connection with one another, and in acknowledging our kinship in God’s family. We look forward to completing Atlanta Mennonite fellowship’s application process in our net annual meeting.

2004 48th Annual Session at Oak Grove Mennonite

ACTION: “We, the delegates of CDC, ask our *conference leaders to work with leaders from Illinois Mennonite, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite, and Ohio Mennonite conferences, and with MC USA leadership, to explore new possibilities for the way these conferences work together*. This exploration will reflect the reality that these conferences and congregations are part of one denomination, Mennonite Church USA, and that there is a strong call within these conferences and MC USA to become more effective as a missional church. Any new plan will require both the counsel and the confirmation of conference delegates.”

Action: “*Resolution on USA & Iraq*: “We, the delegate body of the Central District Conference, gathered at the Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Ohio on June 24-26, 2004, affirm the “*Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective*” — in particular articles 22 & 23 which relate to matters of peace and justice. We commit ourselves to teach more faithfully our understanding of Christ’s call and His way of peace. We believe that the same Spirit that empowered Christ empowers us too: to love enemies, to forgive rather than seek revenge, to practice right relationships, to rely on the community of faith to settle disputes, and to resist evil without violence. In response to all forms of violence, personal and corporate,

private and public, individual and national, we confess our guilt and disclose our shame. We admit our knowledge of God's will for us — God's will that we would live at peace with one another. We know this to be God's will for all humanity. As gathered followers of Christ, and in response to our Savior's call and example, we recommit ourselves to living and speaking for peace. To this end we pray and work for an immediate cessation of all hostilities in Iraq. We lament our nation's chosen form of engagement. We stand in resolute opposition to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We commit ourselves to praying for our nation's leaders, to offering visions for peaceful alternatives, and to supporting all who are working for an end to the present war. May God bind the hands of all who would do violence and free the hands of those who yearn for peace. We pray for all involved: For those who make decisions, for those who are ordered to carry them out, and for those who are required to endure their consequences. We pray for ourselves too, when we, willingly or unwillingly — knowingly or unknowingly — pay for the very violence we deplore. May God have mercy on us all. In this volatile and uncertain time, [we] pray that the new Iraqi provisional government will rule justly and be like a morning after a long and dark night for the Iraqi people." —*J. Daryl Byler, MCC Washington office director*. May the Spirit of Christ guide us in our every thought and deed."

ACTION: *Letter to Vietnam:* Ruth Naylor, Resolution Committee, presented a letter defining the relationship of Mennonites in Vietnam and asking for the release of Mennonite Church leader, Nguyen Hong Quang sent from MC USA. This letter will be sent to the United States Embassy in Vietnam on behalf of Central District Conference. Delegates received copies of the letter and were encouraged to ask their congregations to send copies of the letter as well.

2005 49th Annual session at Maplewood Mennonite Church

ACTION: "Be it resolved that we, the delegates of Central District Conference, note the *death of Ann Hilty*, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio on June 9, 2005. We express our deepest appreciation for her years of service to CDC as conference historian and member of the former Historical Committee."

ACTION: "*Resolution on Military Recruitment:* We as Anabaptist-Mennonites are known as an historic peace church. That history begins with those first disciples who followed the nonviolent Jesus in his way of salvation through the cross and Resurrection. The 16th-century Anabaptist-Mennonite movement renewed a witness to the way of radical love for Christian disciples. With the apostle Paul we testify that "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5.1). We have taught that faithful obedience to the example (I Peter 2.21-24) and teaching (Matthew 5-7) of Jesus requires us to refuse military service. At many points in our history as a community of faith we have sought options of alternative service when governments instituted compulsory military conscription. Today in the United States we face a different situation. Although officially there is no military draft, we have become aware that the vigorous recruiting efforts by the armed services in fact represent a "virtual draft." We are concerned about the impact of these tactics on both our own young people and the society as a whole.

Current military recruitment efforts

Whereas

- * Young men and women in high school are being approached by military recruiters with an effort unparalleled in U.S. history;
- * Promises of money, education, and a profession are being used to entice youth who feel vulnerable and without viable options for their future;
- * The U.S. military has given its Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test in about 14,000 high schools nationwide to look for potential recruits, often without parents'

- knowledge;
- * Federal law now provides for student contact information to be released to military recruiters, unless a student takes action to “opt out;”
- * Many public school administrators across the country are cooperating with military recruiters to meet recruiting quotas.

Therefore, we, the delegates of Central District Conference, call on congregations to take the following actions.

Commit to Christ's way of peace and to affirm that peace and nonviolence are core Anabaptist Christian commitments.

Learn what your local school administration's current policy is and request they release to military recruiters only contact information of students whose parents request this. This is called an “opt in” policy.

Encourage youth to begin a file about their beliefs regarding conscientious objection to war. Christian Peacemaker Registration forms are available from the MCC web site.

Participate in the organizing of a broad community coalition to work at counter-recruitment strategies.

Spend time with the youth of your congregation developing strong relationships and educating them about conscientious objection to war and nonviolence. (see resource list)

÷If ASVAB test is given in the local high school challenge its appropriateness for students not interested in military service.

÷Be available to counsel youth and offer alternatives to those being actively recruited by military personnel.

Resources:

From MCC: Thermostat: a new DVD and study guide for youth on peace, conscientious objection to war and nonviolence. A website: www.mcc.org/ask-a-vet, provides e-mail links to military veterans who are now conscientious objectors to war, so youth can have direct conversation with them. Also includes Christian Peacemaker Registration information. Second Mile: curriculum for a congregational journey of peacemaking. Change of Command: video featuring the stories of military veterans now committed to peace and nonviolence.”

2006 50th Annual session at Bluffton University

ACTION: *Resolution of Appreciation for Lee Snyder.* On this occasion of Dr. Lee Snyder's retirement from the presidency of Bluffton University, we express gratitude for her ten years of faithful service to Bluffton University and to the Mennonite church, for her strengthening of ties between the church and the university, for her commitment to the peace church mission of Bluffton and its impact on students from many backgrounds, for her leadership in building an institution of higher learning that will serve the faith and scholarship of future generations of Central District Conference members, for her wise and steady leadership as moderator of Mennonite Church USA during the historic 2002 merger between the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church, for serving as a role model for leaders of church institutions, especially for women, and for her lifelong commitment to the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. We wish for her and her husband Del God's richest blessings in the years to come.

ACTION: *Resolution of Remembrance of Barney Habegger.* We, the delegates of Central District Conference, note the death this past year of Barney Habegger, First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana. We remember with deep appreciation his creative and passionate service to the church, his masterful recruitment of people for the projects of the church, and his ability to turn dreams into practical and

accessible realities. We recall with gratitude his service on the Commission on Home Missions and on the board of Camp Friedenswald. We especially note the impact he had on many young and recently planted churches through his work with the men's organization, Join Hands, and we acknowledge the contributions he made to these churches through his hard work, often down on his knees, on behalf of the renewal and reconstruction of church facilities. Many who responded to his call to service were deeply transformed by his life and witness. Thanks be to God.

ACTION: *Resolution of 50th anniversary celebration:* During this 2006 annual meeting, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Central District Conference, we thank God for:

- those congregations that covenanted in 1957 to create the Central District Conference;
- the congregations that have joined the conference since its beginning;
- the individuals who provided leadership and facilitated the work and ministry of the conference;
- the institutions and programs of the conference where God's love has been made known;
- those issues which have brought us closer together through discussions in which God's will has been discovered and followed.

We thank God for faithfulness to us in the past and in bringing us together this year. We thank God for the stories of how God is working in our congregations.

We pray for God's wisdom and guidance as we seek to:

- strengthen the mutual awareness of the ministries that are emerging among us;
- free the Spirit to move in our midst through faithful stewardship and greater generosity;
- discern the practical shape of God's grace in our discernment of faithful lifestyles;
- articulate more clearly the strengths of our conference's heritage of voluntary congregational and conference relationships;
- extend our hospitality beyond conventional Mennonite habits of connection and relationship;
- expand on our present diversity to more faithfully reflect the global and cultural variety of God's in-breaking reign.

We pray God's vision and strength to continue the journey as God shows us the way. We anticipate the as-yet-unwritten stories of God working in our congregations.

Praise be to God for the past, present, and future faithfulness of that part of the church of Jesus Christ known as the Central District Conference!

2008 52nd Annual Session at Wheaton, Illinois

ACTION: *Iran Resolution*

Be it resolved: It is Time to Talk with Iran

The situation:

Tensions are mounting between the governments of the United States and Iran. In fact, it appears the U.S. is positioning itself for more aggressive action toward Iran, including the strong possibility of military strikes within the coming months.

Our Faith:

In the spirit of our assembly theme: "For such a time as this:"

**We know that all are created in the image of God, U.S. and Iranian citizens alike.*

**We know that we are called to be bearers of peace in the world.*

**We call for the following response,*

Our Response:

The delegates of Central District Conference pledge to:

**Respectfully call on all our elected leaders to talk (pursue diplomacy) with Iran and refrain from military action.*

**Pray weekly with our families and congregations for peace with Iran*

**Educate ourselves regarding U.S.-Iranian relationships and support Mennonite peacemaking efforts with Iran.*

For more information and resources: www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net; www.mennoniteusa.org/peace; www.mcc.org

An invitation to the congregations of Central District Conference
A Congregational Peace Pledge:
A call to intentionally encounter the realities of war

Goal: To invite congregations and conferences to commit to the actions delineated in the proposal

Whereas:

We believe that peace is the will of God, that God created the world in peace, that God's will is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world, and that as Christians we are called to follow the path of Jesus and his call to live as peacemakers; we thus believe that we are called to engage the violence of war and injustice in the world that largely leaves us untouched.

1. When we have opportunity for personal contact with those who suffer, compassion is planted, and out of this compassion comes our responses. Examples of showing compassion are encounters: with the hungry in soup kitchens, the homeless in a tornado's wake, or with prisoners. Warfare, on the other hand, causes hurt in ways that Mennonites are not as likely to confront on a regular basis.
2. Historically war was an inescapable reality forcing hard choices on U.S. Mennonites. During the Civil War men had to choose whether they would fight, hire substitutes, pay commutation fees, or face punishments. In World War I some Mennonites drafted into the military refused to wear the uniform or carry guns, while others became stretcher-bearers for the army. There was no possibility of alternative service. Some were court-martialed, imprisoned, and suffered mistreatment. In World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War young Mennonites could claim conscientious objector status and engage in alternative service if they could defend their convictions convincingly. In recent years the government has adopted a volunteer army and ended the use of the draft. This has radically changed the relationship of civilians to war and in particular has changed the dynamics for pacifists wishing to witness faithfully to the issues of war.
3. Men and women around us volunteer to fight multiple wars simultaneously; Mennonites may avoid scenes of violent conflict, demands to bear arms, or having to justify their pacifism. Can we continue to be a peace church if we remain insulated from the reality of war and the need to witness to this reality?

Therefore, be it resolved:

That Central District Conference invites congregations, who wish to be intentional about the reality of war, its victims, and the hard questions it asks of nonviolent followers of Jesus, to commit themselves each year to actions such as the following:

- For each 100 members in the congregation, send one member on a delegation to a conflict zone with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Witness for Peace, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Mennonite Mission Network, or other organizations dedicated to providing a nonviolent presence internationally or locally. The congregation is encouraged to pay partial funding for the trip and support the member's efforts to raise the remaining funds. Congregations with less than 100 members may pool resources into a common fund to support one of their members. After the trip the congregation will assist the member with sharing about his/her experiences with the congregation and other local audience.
- Sponsor at least one event each year that asks youth to question participation in war. Examples can include education of the congregation's youth group, counter-recruitment efforts in local schools, and/or provide a counter-presence when military recruiters visit local schools.
- Bring at least one speaker to the congregation each year who has worked at peace building with victims of war, is a former combatant who knows the experience of having inflicted harm on others, or did alternative service during a previous war. The Oasis of Hope Community in Newport News (757-775-8101), the TWOW (Transforming the Wounds of War) program at EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (<http://www.emu.edu/cjp/pti/twow>), or the MCC Peace Office are possible sources of speakers.

A Resolution on Unity in a Time of Disagreement

Call to unity. As Mennonite disciples, we believe we have been called by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in unity. We believe that our unity is in Christ, brought about through his life, death and resurrection. We believe that God has promised that all things will be gathered into Christ Jesus, and that God is at work in the church to bring that promise to fruition.

We believe that Christian unity is not ours to create, but is a gift from God already given. We are aware that we often lack faith in that promised and already-given unity. We are aware of our human tendency instead to seek uniformity of belief and practice through the setting of boundaries and the creation of rules. We are aware that this tendency is most evident in times of disagreement and stress. We are aware that we are currently living in such times.

It is our hope that we will continue to grow in faith, and so learn how to inhabit the unity that is ours in Christ Jesus. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on our congregations, conferences and denomination, making that growth possible. We pray that we will love one another as Christ loved us, and that we will be known to the world by that love.

Our ongoing anxiety. The current disagreement regarding the credentialing of a pastor in a same-sex committed relationship has once again raised the anxiety about inclusion in our denomination. Questions of theology, polity, faithfulness, and discernment of the Holy Spirit's leading are being asked across our denomination.

Respecting each other's discernment. We believe that the answers we seek are best found in dialogue and mutual discernment, rather than denunciation and separation. We ask our sisters and brothers in the broader church to remember our common "*commitment to ongoing dialogue and discernment and 'agreeing and disagreeing in love,'*" as affirmed by MC USA delegates in Columbus (2009).

We believe that a strength of our denomination has been its understanding of accountability as being relational rather than punitive. Current calls by some to reverse the credentialing of Theda Good seem to us to work against that understanding. We are concerned that such action would set a troubling precedent, moving us toward a polity that is based on a centralized and hierarchical understanding of Christian unity. And we believe that calls to the Executive Board to discipline Mountain States Conference, or risk losing other area conferences, run counter to our denominational commitment to agree to disagree in love.

Therefore, as the MC USA Executive Board engages in conversation with Mountain States Mennonite Conference leaders, we call on them to help us be a denomination that continues the practice of relational rather than punitive accountability, no matter the strength of our disagreement. We commit ourselves to remaining in relationship with our sisters and brothers in Mountain States Conference, as we will with other area conferences, regardless of the outcome of their conversation with MC USA Executive Board. We commit ourselves to prayer for all concerned. And we will continue to do our part to help us, as a denominational body of believers, to live into the unity already ours in Christ.

An invitation to the congregations of Central District Conference

A call to greater inter-racial and cross-cultural engagement

Goal: to invite all CDC congregations and members to take deliberate steps to develop inter-racial and cross-cultural relationships that will increase mutual understanding and equip us to work and witness together for greater justice and peace.

Confession:

We acknowledge and grieve the long history of racism in our nation and in the church. We have too often failed to be proactive in seeking justice, and in building bridges of understanding and friendship with sisters and brothers of different races and cultures. We have not always modeled nor reflected in our community life God's welcome and love for all the racial and cultural diversity of God's people and we too often reflect the fact of Sunday morning being the most segregated time in our society.

Whereas: We believe that God created and equally loves the broad diversity of our human family, that God desires that the church reflect the racial and cultural diversity that is the human community, that God calls the church to bear witness to God's mission to form a community made up of people "from every nation" and defined by just relationships, that Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers and that we are all enriched through inter-racial and cross-cultural relationships; we thus believe that this should be reflected in each of our local communities of faith and that we are called to take the initiative for that to happen.

Therefore be it resolved:

That Central District Conference invites all member congregations to take intentional steps to connect with and develop relationships with a church of a predominantly different cultural and/or racial composition through one or more of the following steps:

1. Plan a joint worship service
2. Cooperate in a joint activity such as a church picnic
3. Host a joint Summer Bible School/camp activity
4. Engage in a joint public peace and justice witness
5. Plan a pulpit exchange
6. Do a joint service project
7. Plan a one-day workshop on anti-racism
8. Etc.

Respectfully submitted by Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, March 17, 2014

An invitation to the congregations of Central District Conference

A call to greater faithfulness in our witness for peace

Goal: to encourage all CDC churches and members to take a small step in faithfulness to our call to be peacemakers and witnesses for peace by deliberately and clearly communicating our convictions with our government and government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service.

Confession: We grieve the violence of war and conflict throughout the world. We acknowledge and confess the role our country has played and plays overtly and covertly in so much of that violence. As a nation, we readily respond in violence to perceived and real threats. We have settled into a state of perpetual war with which we are too readily at peace. Defense of perceived national interests, defense of national honor, and political pressure often lead our nation to shortsighted and reckless use of military power. In the process, people have been tortured, innocent civilians have been killed by drones, oppression of peoples by their repressive governments have been supported, and movements for greater justice and peace have been squelched. This all happens at a sanitary and safe distance from us, but in our name. We confess that we know this is not God's will. We also confess that we are too often silent in proclaiming God's will both by what we do and by what we don't do.

Whereas: We believe that God's will for the world is redemption and wholeness and peace, in essence, shalom, that justice is God's will for all relationships both personal and international, that resources are given for building and not destroying, and that we are called to give witness to these convictions through word and action,

Therefore, be it resolved:

That Central District Conference encourages all of its congregations and members to take deliberate steps in our context and time to witness to God's reign and God's will for peace this next year through taking one or more of the following or similar actions during "tax season":

1. Sending a congregational letter to the local newspaper
2. Creating a banner expressing our beliefs for public display
3. Hosting a community candle light vigil
4. Witnessing outside the post office while sharing a snack and an information sheet
5. Including with our IRS tax filing, a written testimony of our commitment to peace and withholding a symbolic portion of our taxes paid for war
6. Etc.

Respectfully submitted by Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, February 19, 2015

Affirmed by delegates June 12, 2015 at the Annual Meeting, Southside Fellowship on the AMBS campus