

2025

REPORT BOOK
of the

Central District Conference
of
Mennonite Church USA



June 19-21, 2025

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:

Greta Holt (Cincinnati)
Phil Yoder (First Mennonite Bluffton)
Matthew Yoder (Grace)
Robin Timpe (Grace)
Carolyn May (Jubilee)
Jeff Boehr (Lima)
Lydia Brenneman (Lima)
Aysa Short (Peace)

A big thanks to Mark Burassa, Bluffton University, Dean of Students, for his 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 Coordinators

Carrie Mast (First Mennonite Bluffton)
Georgia Metz (Shalom Mennonite Congregation)

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 lower level of Marbeck Center. 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.
- * An offering for Central District will be taken on Friday afternoon during the worship service.
- * The hosting congregations have selected the Haitian Ministry of Lima Mennonite Church 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 "Haitian Ministry" 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 Bluffton 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 information table located just outside the delegate session meeting area.

Wi-Fi Access

Wi-Fi password is *sayNO2wires*

Displays During the Annual Meeting

Anabaptist Disabilities Network
Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary (AMBS)
Bluffton University (BU)
Camp Friedenswald (CF)
Canadian Mennonite University (CMU)
Everence
Journey
Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes
Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)
MennoPin
Ten Thousand Villages
Water Crisis in Bangladesh

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 19-21, 2025

Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio

Listen! Wisdom is Calling

Thursday, June 19

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

- 2:00 pm Registration in Marbeck Center lower level
- 3:00-4:30 pm Pre-conference seminar in Centennial Hall: Contemplating Radical Hospitality with Elizabeth Kelly and Matt Pritchard
- 5-6:45 pm Pastor Appreciation Dinner in Marbeck Center Kreider Room
- 7:30 pm WORSHIP I: at Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio
Theme: Wisdom from our Anabaptist History
Speaker: Perry Bush
Offering: Giving Back to the Community – Lima Mennonite Haitian immigrant ministry
- 9:00 pm Ice Cream Social at Grace Mennonite

Friday, June 20

- 8:30 am *Delegate Session I in Marbeck Center*
Welcome
 - Getting acquainted around tables
 - State of the Conference Address
 - Centering
 - Congregational Story: Assembly Mennonite Church
 - Introduction of Resolutions and Listening Committees, and Parliamentary
 - Summary Review of 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes
 - ACTION: 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes
 - Treasurer's Report/Presentation of 2025-2026 Proposed Spending Plan
 - Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Slate
 - ACTION: 2024-2026 Slate
 - Commissioning Prayer: Incoming and continuing committee members
- 9:45 am Break/Snacks in Marbeck Center (BU Alumni Reception in Bob's Place)
- 10:15 am
 - Song/Centering
 - Camp Friedenswald Report
 - Introduction for membership of Knoxville Mennonite Church and Peace Mennonite Fellowship
 - Update on First Mennonite Chicago
 - Release of Agora Ministries
 - Presentation, Table Conversation, Open Mic – [Abuse Prevention and Response in Mennonite Church USA](#)
 - Introduction of Guests
 - Announcements
- 11:45 am Lunch in Marbeck Center

- 1:30 pm *Delegate Session II*
Song/Centering
Conference Minister Evaluation
- 1:40 pm WORSHIP II: in Marbeck Center
Theme: Wisdom from our Churches Today
Storytelling: Each person bring a symbolic object that represents something the Spirit has been doing among your congregation the past year.
Offering: Central District Conference
Communion
- 3:15 pm Break
- 3:45 pm *Delegate Session III*
Seminars/Activities
*Swiss Historical Society and Schumacher Homestead led by Doug Luginbill
*Wild Church Worship in Nature Preserve led by Janeen Bertsche Johnson, James Rissler, Brian Sauder, and Sarah Werner
*Hymnsing in Yoder Recital Hall: Anabaptist singing through the years with Adam Tice and Katie Graber
- 6:00 pm Dinner in Marbeck Center or on your own (list of local restaurants in delegate packet)
Free Time –
 *Opportunity for informal get-togethers
 *Emerging Communities conversations
 *Attend Mennonite Women: 100 Years and Story and Song at First Mennonite Church, 7:00p

Saturday, June 21

- 8:30 - 9:30 am WORSHIP III:
Theme: Wisdom for the Future Church
Speaker: Melissa Florer-Bixler
- 9:30 am Break Marbeck Center
- 10:15 am *Delegate Session IV*
Song/Centering:
Congregational Story: Columbus Mennonite Church
Missional Church Committee
Ministerial Committee
- 11:15 am Song/Centering:
 ACTION: 2025-2026 Spending Plan
 Open Mic
 Listening Committee Report
- 11:40 am 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 to Bluffton, Ohio for our 69th Annual Meeting. I want, first, to thank CDC staff, board and committee members who have given their time to shape the work of the Conference and this Annual Meeting.

Over the past two years, we've been guided by the theme Listen! Wisdom is Calling. I hope that, like me, you've continued to sink into that theme and have found that it deepened and enriched your faith journey.

I keep hearing the word "unprecedented" used to define the times we live in. During these times I've felt a call to be with people who care about being faithful followers of Jesus, people who know that Wisdom can most often be found as we gather with others also seeking a way forward.

Central District Conference is, I believe, a place that offers sustenance and comfort. Over the past year, I've been blessed to be part of conversations and meetings where Board members and Committee members worked alongside our amazing staff to discern how CDC can best resource congregations, pastors, individuals. A few of the places that discernment has led us are:

- Holding a Zoom Mid-Year Gathering so congregations could share their concrete experiences as they strive to become communities of refuge and hope
- Drawing on the experiences of our congregations to compile a list of resources on immigration that have been widely shared throughout MC USA
- Providing resources for pastors and other leaders through Healthy Boundary Training and preparation to use the Our Whole Lives curriculum
- Exploring ways to continue to enlarge our welcome and our commitment to Diversity, Equality and Inclusion at Camp Friedenswald and on our Board and Committees

I've heard more than one person talk about how much they appreciate Sarah's work in helping us tell and share our stories in the Conference and more broadly. Emma's deep understanding of CDC, our congregations and people, coupled with her wisdom and care for what we do and how we do it, steady us and keep us moving.

Matt's infectious enthusiasm brings new ideas, new ways to think about worship, new energy to our meetings and our life together. Doug continues to call us to express our care for each other and to provide vision and hope for the future we're crafting.

During these times where so much would seek to tear us apart, I am grateful to be church with all of you as we continue to seek to hear and follow Wisdom's leading.

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 on the 2025 delegate report form or the 2024 conference directory)

Americus Mennonite Fellowship (30) 229.815.1034 <i>Brian Kilheffer, Contact Person</i> <i>bk.ck1@hotmail.com</i> 409 E Hill St, Americus, GA 31709 https://www.facebook.com/AmericusMennoniteFellowship	*Ann Arbor Mennonite Church (10) 734.996.9198 <i>Chima Ozor, Contact Person</i> <i>dr.chima.ozor@gmail.com</i> meets in homes Mail to: 1455 Kelly Green Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48103
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St Louis Mennonite Fellowship 314.632.6846 <i>Joshua Richardson, Pastor stlmenno@gmail.com</i> 3752 Giles Ave, St Louis, MO 63113 https://www.slmf.org/	St Paul Mennonite Fellowship (8) 651-291-0647 <i>David Edminster, Contact Person brodaahoud@gmail.com</i> meets at Cherokee Park United Church, 371 West Baker Street, St. Paul, MN 55107 http://spmfmennolink.org/
New Community of Faith **Asian Mennonite Community Church 630.801.5060 <i>Jai Prakash (JP) Masih, Pastor pastorjpamcc@gmail.com</i> meets at Lombard Mennonite Church, 528 E Madison St, Lombard, IL 60148	In Membership Process Knoxville Mennonite Church 865.290.0552 <i>Pat McFarren, Pastor kmc@knoxvillemennonite.org</i> 4401 Sullivan Rd, Knoxville, TN 37921 https://www.facebook.com/knoxvillemennonitechurch
Peace Mennonite Fellowship (80) 567.703.7075 <i>David Elkins, Interim Pastor peacemennonitefellowship@gmail.com</i> 22897 US-20 ALT, Archbold, OH 43502 https://www.facebook.com/peacemennonitefellowship	Emerging Communities of Faith Moveable Feast 312.967.6785 <i>Celeste Kennel-Shank Groff, Pastor pastor@moveablefeastcommunity.org</i> https://www.moveablefeastcommunity.org/
Olentangy Wild Church 304.741.9370 <i>Sarah Werner, Pastor sarah@mcusacdc.org</i> https://www.facebook.com/groups/1291710278335294/	The Intention Church 305 317 3513 <i>Ralph Ferguson III (Trey), Pastor trey@theintentionchurch.com</i> https://theintentionchurch.com/

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 (2026)

Lydia Brenneman Lima Mennonite Church

Member-at-large (2027)

Brian Johnson North Danvers Mennonite Church

Member-at-large (2027)

Melissa Florer-Bixler Raleigh 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 phillipsc@bluffton.edu
Musselman Library, 1 University Dr, Bluffton, OH 45817

Resolutions Committee

Jeff Boehr (2025) Lima Mennonite Church

Kiva Nice-Webb (2026)
Chicago Community Mennonite Church

Rich Preheim (2027)
Hively Avenue Mennonite Church

Gifts Discernment Committee

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

Janeen Bertsche Johnson (2027)
Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Rebecca Rich (2027)
Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship

Stewardship Committee

Tim Lind (2025)

Florence Church of the Brethren-Mennonite
Doug Luginill (Staff), Ex-officio
Emma Hartman (Staff), Ex-officio

Ministerial Committee

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

Robin Walton (2027) Columbus Mennonite Church

Matthew Yoder (2027) Grace Mennonite Church

Missional Church Committee

Brian Sauder (2025)

Chicago Community Mennonite Church
Xaris Martinex (2025)

Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship
David Voth (2025) Grace Mennonite Church

TBD (2026)

Julia Gingrich (2026)
Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Elizabeth Kelly (2027)
First Mennonite Church Bluffton

TBD (2027)

Matthew Pritchard (ex-officio)
Atlanta Mennonite Church

Camp Friedenswald Board

Sibonokuhle Ncube (2025)

Eighth Street 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
Evan Miller (2027)

Open Table Mennonite Fellowship
Allison Troyer (2027)

Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship
Kendra Yoder (2027) Southside Fellowship

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 (2027)

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, 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

CDC Wave (wave bw)



Part I

Action/Discussion

Central District Conference
Minutes
June 20-22, 2024
College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana
Listen! Wisdom is Calling

Thursday, June 20

*Seminar: Listening Together led by Sally Weaver Glick

*Pastor Appreciation Dinner

*Worship I: College Mennonite Church
Theme: Holy Wisdom on the Way
Text: Proverbs 4:1-13
Speaker: Carol Penner
Offering: LaPosada Immigrant Services

*Ice Cream Social

Friday, June 21

Delegate Session I

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Let's Walk Together*, Voices Together #6.

Welcome

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) welcomed delegates to the 68th annual session with the sounding of the gavel. Joel Miller (Columbus) invited delegates to choose an object in the room and use it to tell a congregational story from the past year that you were involved in or one characteristic of your congregation that you especially appreciate.

State of the Conference Address

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) shared that Central District Conference can be described as a rich tapestry of individuals, congregations, emerging communities, and dreamers. Each August the board of directors along with representatives of the committees meet to dream and pray together and to set a vision for the next biennium. Last August, the group reviewed a summary of the findings of the sacred listening sessions.

*Congregations value being welcoming and providing care for those in their communities.

*We don't believe we have all the answers and we do believe that trying to follow Jesus and the leading of the Spirit will bring us closer to the church we want to be.

*We are not afraid of questions and are at our best we provide non-judgmental spaces for them to be asked.

*We take care of the members of our congregations in the big and small events in their lives.

*We strive to keep our eyes and hearts open to the needs of our communities and the broader world, including homelessness, immigration, food insecurity, incarceration, climate change in the environment, doing anti-racism work, making reparations, violence prevention, and the situation in

Gaza.

*We work on addressing these things in partnership with others in our communities, in other faith traditions and in the broader Mennonite world. We do this work in creative ways that use the gifts, dreams, and skills of the members of our congregations.

*We valued the connections we forged with other CDC congregations, Camp Friedenswald, Bluffton University, MCC Relief Sales, and MC USA agencies and other para-church organizations we work with.

*We care about our children and youth and their faith formation and want to find ways to value the gifts of the oldest ones among us.

*We love to sing and produce music.

*We shape our worship and leadership styles based on the gifts and discernment of our congregations.

*Some of us have no paid leadership, some of us have pastoral teams.

*All of us believe the church is stronger and more faithful if everyone's gifts are called out and nurtured and used.

*We are all still trying to figure out how to address the changes, challenges, and learnings of the Covid years and wondering how to move forward.

As the leadership group reflected on the what we learned from the sacred listening meetings, worshiped and prayed together, we were led to the theme for this biennium of *Listen! Wisdom is calling*. Conference Minister, Doug Luginbill, has developed sermons and articles on the theme. Matt Pritchard, Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith has continued to listen for new groups being birthed in our midst and provided resources to help them grow. We will hear stories from two communities who wish to join CDC. Matt's work with emerging communities has prompted us to think about conference membership in new ways and led to the proposed bylaws amendment we will vote on later. We are a storytelling conference and Sarah Werner, our communications coordinator, has highlighted some of our stories in the Connector and other Anabaptist publications.

Individuals and congregations have contributed generously to the Tending Transformation Campaign bringing us closer to meeting our goal by next year's annual meeting. An anonymous donor has contributed \$50,000 to provide assistance to credentialed persons in the conference who have educational debt. Individuals and congregations have continued to support the work of the conference with your donations.

The Ministerial Committee is guiding us to new ways to live into repentance and transformation building on the powerful ritual from last year's annual meeting. We have provided healthy boundaries training for credentialed and lay leaders and will be providing a training on the Our Whole Lives curriculum in the fall. The Missional Church Committee has developed a plan to create and implement a conference wide vision of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Board and Leadership Council will be working with that proposal in the coming months. Members from several CDC congregations recently participated in a civil rights learning tour led by Mennonite Mission Network.

Jan encouraged participants to read the reports found in the report book and to visit displays in hallways. Several things to look forward to in the next year are quarterly Zoom retreats led by some of the spiritual directors in the conference, resources for a four week wisdom worship series, and an

invitation to congregations to share wisdom sayings from their lives. We want to learn from the wisdom of others. We are called to listen and pay attention to what we hear. Central District Conference is a place that calls out the stories of our people. We are not perfect, we are church. We are called together to listen and find ways to follow the wisdom we receive. May we share our wisdom with each other and the world around us.

Lydia Brenneman (Lima) led delegates in a centering exercise. She invited them to choose a word or sentence that has been wisdom to them and to think about it while participating in a breathing exercise.

Congregational Story: Ralph (Trey) Ferguson III, executive pastor of The Refuge Church in Homestead, Florida shared the story of the emerging community called The Intention Church. Trey serves as the pastor of The Intention Church. He shared that in 2020, in the midst of the global pandemic, much of what we did was done online. We learned about the church's failure to treat online communities as real and necessary. Shortly after things started shutting down in March 2020, a series of high profile and vigilante killings caught our national attention. We could not look away because we were stuck inside. Lots of people were confronted with uncomfortable truths about race that we previously had been able to ignore. Mostly white people came to realize that they had lived the majority of their lives without any meaningful relationship with anyone who didn't look like them or experience life like they did. The internet seemed like a feasible way to close that gap. Not everyone was looking to be entertained or enlightened, not everyone was looking for a new black friend to hide behind. A lot of people were simply looking for belonging. What the pandemic and all the increased time online exposed was the profound sense of isolation if not outright loneliness so many people were feeling. The church should have been set up to address this exact thing, but this was not always the case. Increasingly, Trey found more people reaching out publically and privately with all sorts of questions about justice, about history, about race, about faith, and about God. More people from around the country and the world viewed him as something only a few people had before – their pastor. These relationships looked different but he took them seriously.

When Trey graduated from seminary, he did so after turning in a capstone project on how digital engagement communities were reshaping society around us and how the church needed to take that seriously and to be intentional about it. Now three years later, he is preparing to launch The Intention Church. The purpose is to try to provide structure to a community that happened rather organically. A community committed to safety, belonging, growth, and ultimately, Christ. If people can meet spouses online, perform jobs online, and complete degree programs online, it may be time to admit that there are people ready to find Christ-centered community online. If they are ready to find Christ-centered community online, we have a responsibility to provide it for them. There are some gaps when online is viewed as an accessory. If we were to view online as the starting place and physical meet-ups as auxiliary, we can cover a bit more ground. Shortly after announcing the launch of The Intention Church as an emerging congregation of Central District Conference, someone online shared about feeling inspired to visit their local Mennonite congregation for the first time. That speaks powerfully to the fact that there are many people drawn to peace theology and never had the impetus to try it out. There is an opportunity to all of us to speak prophetically and to the theology they hadn't had exposure to in this setting. Even though The Intention Church is not official yet, it is exposing people to the Jesus focused, Anabaptist peace church tradition of the Mennonite church as well as the prophetic tradition of the black church of America. The Intention Church is trying to be intentional about the reality of the

way the internet is part of our daily lives. Online friends are real friends. Community online is real community even if it is not physical and church online is not only real but a necessary aspect of the coming reign of God. If we are to teach disciples about the love of God, we must be intentional about placing ourselves where the people are. That's what The Intention Church is all about.

Introductions: Joel Miller (Columbus) introduced the following:

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

Listening Committee: Naomi Baumgartner (Silverwood), Kevin Chupp (Mennonite Church of Normal), and Jan Croyle (First Mennonite Wadsworth)

Parliamentarian: Gerald Mast (First Mennonite Bluffton)

Youth delegate: Clara Lind (Eighth Street)

Review of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes: Christine Guth (Eighth Street) summarized the minutes of the 2023 annual meeting. *A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes of the 2023 annual meeting as written. Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street), Jaimie Houghton-Thompson (Maplewood) The motion was affirmed.*

Treasurer's Report/Presentation of Spending Plan: Joel Miller (Columbus) directed delegates to p52 of the report book. The conference completed the financial year with income above expenditures. He thanked individuals and congregations for their contributions and gave an update of the Tending Transformation Campaign. He invited delegates to share any questions re the income and expense statement.

Question: Does CDC donate funds to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)? *CDC does not donate conference funds through our spending plan to MCC but does pass on any donations from congregations and/or individuals that come in designated for MCC.*

Proposed spending plan: Joel directed delegates to p35 of the report book. The plan for 2024-2025 is ~8% above the current spending plan due mainly to increased personnel costs that follow the MC USA salary guidelines. The plan tracks closely with previous year's spending plans. Joel invited questions re the 2024-2025 proposed spending plan.

Questions:

*Why has the amount allotted for the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) meetings decreased from \$5000 to \$3000? *The amount decreased because the CLC has moved to meeting via Zoom every other meeting, which reduced travel costs.*

*How do you calculate how much you expect to receive in donations to cover the expenses of the spending plan? *Each fall, we gather information from congregations (total spending plan and number of giving units) to project how much of the spending plan congregations can cover. We use that information along with a projected amount of giving from individuals to build the income side of the spending plan. Generally we invite congregations to donate between 4% and 5% of their spending plans to help cover conference expenses.*

*Doug Luginbill noted that the conference does maintain a cash reserve of ~ six months of the spending plan to cover an unexpected decrease in income or emergencies.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Joel moved to accept the 2024-2025 spending plan as presented. Delegates will vote on the proposed spending plan on June 21.

Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Proposed Slate: Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) introduced members of the committee: Laura Brenneman-Fullwood (First Urbana), Brenda North Martin (Raleigh), David Moser (Southside), George Lehman (First Bluffton), and Chuck Gibson (First Urbana). She directed delegates to p36 of the report book and named the nominees for 2024-2025:

- *Board of Directors: Melissa Florer-Bixler (Raleigh), member-at-large and Brian Johnson (North Danvers), member-at-large
- *Ministerial Committee: Robin Walton (Columbus) and Matthew Yoder (Grace)
- *Missional Church Committee: Elizabeth Kelly (First Bluffton) and Anton Flores-Maisonet (Atlanta)
- *Camp Friedenswald: Kendra Yoder (Southside), Evan Miller (Open Table), and Allison Troyer (Grand Rapids)

A motion was made and seconded to affirm the 2024-2025 slate of nominees. Michael Crosby (First Urbana), Richard Wildermuth (Madison). 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

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom*, VT 196.

Committee reports panel discussion: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) invited representatives from the Ministerial Committee (Gayle Gerber Koontz, Assembly), Missional Church Committee (Matt Pritchard, Atlanta), and Camp Friedenswald (Jenna Liechty Martin, Eighth Street) to share what their respective groups are doing. He invited them to respond to the following questions:

- *Share one or two important actions/decisions that your committee or group made during the past year.
- *When you consider various options for making decisions, how did wisdom show up?
- *Share a story that demonstrates how you are carrying out CDC's mission statement to know Christ's love and answer God's call.

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Rain Down*, VT 703.

Lydia Brenneman (Lima) led delegates in a centering exercise. She invited them to choose a word or sentence that has been wisdom to them and to think about it while participating in a breathing exercise.

Receiving St Louis Mennonite Fellowship into Membership: A motion was made and seconded to receive St Louis Mennonite Fellowship as a member of Central District Conference. Beth Bontrager (Faith), Heidi Sommer Simones (Cincinnati). Delegates were invited to cast a paper vote.

Introduction of Peace Mennonite Fellowship, Archbold, Ohio: Denton Yoder and Stacy Lehman described the origin of the congregation and the discernment process that led to their congregation's name and their choice of conference membership. David Elkins is serving as the interim minister along with several leadership teams. They are working on creating their structure and deciding how they want to be church together. They are currently looking for a church consultant to help them in this work. Peace has a listening and planning team that is working at creating a building that is environmentally friendly and will be a place that serves their community. Denton invited anyone with insight and resources to contact them.

Introduction of Knoxville Mennonite Church: Pat McFarren shared that Knoxville is a small group of people that meets in a house that was formerly a dwelling for Catholic nuns. The congregation longs to love as Jesus loved and show compassion to all. We live by the faith and actions that Jesus taught. They believe that everyone is included. Early in 2021, one of the elders encouraged the congregation to be more intentional about LGBTQ inclusion. They devoted time to prayer and discernment, and developed a survey asking the congregation about how they felt about inclusion of LGBTQ persons. They received 23 responses: 74% were in favor of changes in the way the congregation included LGBTQ persons. The majority were also in favor of joining a conference that welcomes inclusion.

Presentation of Bylaw Change: Jan Lugibihl directed delegates to p48 of the report book. Jan reviewed the current two-year process for membership in the conference. Matt shared that for emerging congregations or those without a conference, the two-year process can mean that they are without 501© 3 status or the formal support of a conference for key things like credentialing while they wait for full membership. Provisional membership enables leadership to compassionately respond to these situations while retaining our value for relationally based full membership. The bylaws change we are recommending allows the board to codify policies and procedures for membership as listed in the report book.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Joel Miller (Columbus) moved to affirm provisional membership as outlined on p48 of the 2024 report book. The vote will occur on June 22. Jan invited clarifying questions.

*Rich Preheim (Hively Avenue): Just to clarify, would a congregation with provisional membership continue to work toward full membership? *Provisional members must be working toward fulfilling the membership criteria.* Could provisional membership be used by a congregation while they decide if they want to do something else? It is for congregations wanting to become a member of CDC. *Yes, that is correct.*

*Georgia Metz (Shalom Mennonite Congregation): Are provisional congregations allowed to access the same grants as full members? *Yes for both CDC and MC USA.*

Delegates were invited to move into table discussion re whether they could support the resolution.

Dwelling in the Word: Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Bluffton) invited delegates to reflect on how they dwell in the Word and listen to God's wisdom. Does God's wisdom come through scripture? Can the interpretation of scripture only be done by pastors and theologians? Early Anabaptists argued that the wisdom did not come only from the State churches, but that scripture is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. We still hold this belief today. (Confession of Faith, Article 4).

Over the past year, Doug has been searching for all the words of wisdom found in the Bible, including the Apocrypha. Wisdom is present even before creation and is sought at the end of Revelation. Wisdom always appears as feminine and shows up in times of trouble.

After reading Ephesians 1:15-19 and Ephesians 3:8-12, Doug invited delegates to engage in table discussion and reflect on the scripture and the following questions

- *Who is someone who has embodied or offered wisdom for you?
- *Paul talks about a 'mystery hidden for ages.' (Eph. 3:1-9) How do you understand that mystery? Why is it mysterious?
- *Ephesians 3:10 offers a challenge and invitation to the church. Do you believe it? How do you understand 'the rich variety' of God's wisdom? How do you understand the church's invitation to make known the wisdom of God to the 'rulers and authorities?'

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.

Lunch

Delegate Session II

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Draw the Circle*, VT 802.

St Louis Mennonite Fellowship Membership Vote Results: Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) announced that there were 88 ballots returned and the vote was unanimous to receive St Louis Mennonite Fellowship (SLMF) into membership. Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) presented a blessing cup filled with blessings from conference congregations. Steve Miller, representing SLMF responded.

Plenary Session

Doug introduced the plenary session: three 15 minute sessions of input by Carol Penner, each followed by a time of table discussion. Each table discussion ended with Doug singing one verse of *In the Beginning* (VT 270).

Section 1

Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street) read Psalms 51:1-12. Carol Penner shared the story of David and Bathsheba and its cautionary tale of unaddressed sin. She talked about the need for safe place policies in congregations. Jesus told his disciples to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. We need to watch for sin and believe the best in people. How do we find wisdom when there is conflict in the church? Abuse can tear the church apart. It is even more difficult when the violence involves misconduct by a church leader. Pastoral abuse happens more often than you think. Often churches accuse the victim of lying and have a hard time believing that someone they know could abuse someone. There is a power differential. How will we respond to victims when they come forward?

Delegates were invited to table discussion to respond to the following questions:

- *Can you think of a time when someone came to the church and said they were harmed by

someone else in the church whether through words or actions? (Just think about this question.)

*What was the reaction of yourself or others to the person who was harmed? The focus is how you did or did not support the victim.

*Looking back now, how was wisdom calling you and your congregation to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves?

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) sang verse 2 of *In the Beginning* (VT 270).

Section 2

How can we as a church reach out to people who have offended by violating a boundary or physically or sexually harmed someone? There is usually a period of not knowing if the person actually offended or if they are falsely accused. Many times the people in the church support the offender because they are sure that because they know the person and the person claims they did nothing wrong, he/she is innocent. Often people who supported an offender can feel betrayed or guilty.

Sometimes offenders over achieve in other areas to deflect attention away from their offense. They choose one person to abuse. People who abuse are part of the community. They have deep problems and need help. How do we reach out and help them heal? How do we help them take responsibility for what they have done? How is wisdom calling us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves?

Most people who abuse others are very good at lying, even to themselves. Just because they are caught doesn't mean they can immediately change the behavior that is so ingrained in them. They need love and support but don't believe everything they say. We can say we love you and support you but your actions show what is inside your heart. You have to change your actions. We can encourage people who abuse to see a qualified specialist trained in abuse and do the hard work they need to do.

People who abuse are profoundly self-centered and have a hard time developing empathy for the person they harmed. Sometimes people who have abused are desperate to make things right. They have lost a lot and sometimes think that if only they can sit down with the person they have abused and apologize, things would get fixed. But hard experience has shown that quick apologies are counter productive and don't work. If we love people, we must encourage them to do the hard process and therapy. Victims are on their own journey and may not be ready or willing to accept an apology. People accused of abuse need to leave the congregation so they can be adequately cared for. Often people who are forced to leave a congregation blame the victim.

One of the hardest dilemmas conference ministers and leadership councils face is to talk about sanctions and what will help this person and whether they can be in ministry again. Being a pastor is not a human right, but it is a privilege. If someone has abused their power, it is more important to protect the innocent and vulnerable than for a minister to be able to use their gift.

Delegates were invited to table discussion to respond to the following questions:

*Can you think of a time when someone in the church harmed another person through words or actions –maybe it was sexual abuse, maybe it was sexual harassment, maybe it was bullying, maybe someone yelled at someone in church? (Just think about this question.)

*What was your reaction or the reaction of others to the person who did the harm?

*Looking back now, how have we been calling you and your congregation to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves?

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) sang verse 3 of *In the Beginning* (VT 270).

Section 3

Wisdom is calling the congregation to the journey of healing as well. Whenever we see abuse in the congregation, we see turmoil as well. Everyone reacts differently to abuse and yet we have to make decisions together as a congregation. How do we act in the congregation? Abuse in the congregation undermines trust in our faith and in other people, especially the pastor. This results in a theological crisis, personal crisis, and financial crisis. What do we do?

God is an impossibility specialist. God can help us walk through even the messiest of situations even when no one else can. It takes a lot of work—lots of church meetings, church board meetings and trying to figure out how to support the victims and the offender, their families, and the congregation.

Congregations also need to do a lot of soul searching. Were there warning signs we should have seen? How could this have been prevented? It is easier to work on a church safety policy than it is dealing with something after it has happened.

Should it happen to your congregation, even with a safety policy in place, there are many resources available to help deal with abuse in the church. The process won't happen in a month but will take a long time. Addressing abuse is the work of the church. Churches can be very resilient.

Delegates were invited to table discussion to respond to the following questions:

*Have you been part of a congregation that was dealing with abuse of some kind? (Just think about this question.)

*What worked to foster healing after abuse? What did not work so well? Did you draw on outside resources, Why or why not?

*Looking back now, what lessons was wisdom teaching you and how do you make sure those lessons aren't forgotten?

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) sang verse 4 of *In the Beginning* (VT 270).

Open mic sharing:

**Kerry Strayer (Columbus), Table 7*: We talked about the importance of having a neutral person to guide the conversation. How do we make sure an abuser doesn't leave and go on to another place? How do you protect the rights of the abuser, but not allow it to happen again?

**Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street), Table 3*: We talked about the various psychological struggles that abuse creates and that we need to acknowledge those as being normal. It is normal to feel betrayal, to feel confusion, and to feel vulnerable. We need to have someone helping the congregation work through those internal struggles.

**Ted Larrison (Assembly)*: In many congregations, we do a good job teaching the children what is good and bad touch. After conversation at our table, I am aware that we need to be talking about healthy boundaries with all of the adults in the congregation as well. We assume that the adults will be

responsible, but that is not always the case.

**Michael Crosby (First Urbana):* I want to share a practice that has been meaningful for our congregation. Our safe church policy requests an annual safe church workshop. It is a requirement for anyone in the congregation who is going to work with children and youth over the next year. It is also strongly encouraged that everyone in the congregation participate. We have a lot of latitude for what constitutes a safe church workshop, so we have done things like healthy touch and boundaries in the congregation, medical response and how to work the defibrillator, and multi generational conversation about what makes church a safe place for you. While we don't get everyone to attend, we do emphasize that this is a work we do together. We devolve into a place of insecurity if we think that just having a safe church policy is going to prevent abuse. It requires a collective vigilance that we are all here taking care of each other. Safe church policies are not good at preventing abuse. They outline what we do when there is an instance of abuse in the congregation and this kind of vigilance is far more important when we think about preventative work.

**gwyn stetler (Jubilee):* There is a difference between accessing effective reentry resources for offenders and shunning.

**Gayle Gerber Koontz (Assembly):* Some of us remember when we didn't talk about sex at all in the church. We had no policies. We muddled through if we addressed abuse at all. Looking back, we should recognize that we have done some good things and know that we are not in the same place. Collective vigilance is important because there is another generation coming up, new people in the church, and we don't want them to forget all the wisdom we have learned.

**Joel Miller (Columbus):* My congregation had a safe church policy in place before I became the pastor. We have worked to incorporate it into the culture. Almost every year when we have new members coming into the church, someone will say how important it was that we have a safe church policy in place and that is why they have come. That is something people appreciate and are looking for in a church.

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) led delegates in reading a litany.

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led delegates in singing *O Holy Spirit, Root of Life*, VT 376.

Break

Delegate Session III

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom*, VT 196.

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) introduced Rachel Ringenberg Miller, denominational minister for Ministerial Leadership for Mennonite Church USA (MC USA).

Rachel shared what has been happening across Mennonite Church USA:

**MC USA is 15 conferences strong*

**Next national gathering is July 8-12, 2025 in Greensboro, North Carolina*

**We will celebrate 500 years of Anabaptism together*

**Rachel is often asked about the state of Mennonite Church USA*

***God is creating new life and ways for us to flourish even if we can't see it yet.*

***MC USA is in the stage of discerning what comes next for us. What is this new thing that is springing forth? Who is God calling us to be now with the people who are present now and the*

people who might join us in the future?

****God has chosen to work with us and through us. The hope is that as we approach 500 years, we take the opportunity to reimagine by looking back to where we have been, to consider where we are, and to dream about where God is calling us next.**

Rachel shared a slide presentation on safe church and the resources available from MC USA.

Rachel encouraged pastors and leadership to read through their safe church policy at least once per year and get to know it. Knowing the policy will keep you focused. Policies are in place to keep us from doing what is easiest and to help us do what is best. She also encouraged congregations to watch the Safe Church webinar, [Navigating Your Protection Policy During Crisis](#).

Delegates were invited to table discussion to discuss what safe church policies and practices look like for their congregations.

Open mic sharing (responses in italics)

***Georgia Metz (Shalom Mennonite Congregation):** Georgia would be interested in talking to anyone who has vulnerable adults included in safe church policies. Vulnerable adults means adults with disabilities such as Parkinsons, Alzheimers, and other disabilities. We have them in our policies but there is a lot of concern about logistics re visitations by pastors. She also wondered about policies and best practices you have found that are life-giving and nurture strong relationships around teens, mentors, youth ministers, and texting. *Rachel Ringenberg Miller responded that in the church she pastored before taking this role, the congregation had adult children living at home who had various disabilities. It was important to those parents that vulnerable adults were included in the policies. The requirements were similar to the policies for children, i.e., two adults.*

Texting: Churches do it different ways. A best practice is to have some kind of agreement or the covenant between mentor, parents, and the child. It is important to openly communicate about what is expected. Information is still evolving around how to use texting in the congregation.

***Karla Minter (Open Table Mennonite Fellowship):** Karla shared a response she received from Michael Danner: We have safe church policies for children, youth and vulnerable adults. We have Healthy Boundaries Training for pastors. There are a whole lot of other people left. What we are doing is good and we need more. In our congregation we don't have young children but we have a lot of adults who are together a lot. We need more to speak into healthy boundaries for participants in the congregation, not only pastors. There is a document about lay leaders that was created by MC USA that we link to on our safe church policy. It is not very visible currently. Again that is for lay leaders and there are still other participants in the congregation. We would welcome another kind of conversation for just being together in a healthy way. *The best way to have this kind of conversation is to start having them in the congregation. One of the table discussion questions was, "How often do you talk about what is appropriate touch or not in church life? How often do we talk about sex and sexuality in our congregations? Having these conversations provides the space for more conversation. The biggest key is being open to talk about it, being honest and vulnerable with one another.*

***Scott Troyer (Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship):** Re texting: Scott works professionally with youth. Some of the practices/policies we have with youth include having another unrelated adult on the text, limited hours for response, and to document the text like phone call. A question I have is "Is there any

specific guidance for congregations that are very small? We have 17 people, five of them are children. We also partner with another church to do our children's programming and are currently using their safe church policy. Is there guidance that is specific to very small congregations?" *We were talking about how difficult it is when the congregation is small. Rachel Ringenberg Miller suggested contacting Nancy Kauffmann and talk with her about what ways you can work at being a safe church when you are a smaller congregation.*

**Sarah Werner (Columbus Mennonite Church):* Columbus has a practice of having a "Keeping CMC Safe" Sunday. Once a year, the whole congregation gets safe church training because it is incorporated into the worship service. We have a sermon on a theme related to any aspect about how we create safe communities not only for children but for adults and any intergenerational interaction. It normalizes talking about safe church in the community. We also did a fire drill that could be used for an active shooter situation. We wanted everyone to know that there are multiple ways to get out of the sanctuary, not just the way they came in. We have sanctuarians, who sit in the foyer every Sunday. The service begins at 9:30 and at 10:00, the doors lock. If someone arrives late, the sanctuarian has to physically let them in. We also have a button that you can hold down for three seconds to alert emergency services that something is happening such as a fire or someone in distress. It also helps keep people in the sanctuary safe.

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) thanked Rachel Ringenberg Miller for her input.

Break

Seminars

*Anabaptist 500th Anniversary led by Gerald Mast

*Bluffton University led by Doug Luginbill

*Seasons in the Life Cycle of Congregations led by Celeste Kennel-Shank Groff

Saturday, June 22

*Worship III: College Mennonite Church

Theme: The Word of the Wise

Texts: John 1:1-14; Proverbs 3:19-20; 8:1

Speaker: Ralph Ferguson III (Trey)

Offering: Central District Conference

Delegate Session IV

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom*, VT 196.

Lydia Brenneman (Lima) led delegates in a centering exercise. She invited them to choose a word, sentence, or mantra that has been wisdom to them and to think about it while participating in a breathing exercise.

Congregational Story: North Danvers Mennonite Church (presentation)

Brian Johnson (North Danvers Mennonite Church)

North Danvers Mennonite Church is 173 years old. They meet in a building that was built in 1872 so the congregation has been gathering for worship in the same space for 152 years. I was asked to share a

story of what brings the North Danvers congregation joy and where the energy is as they listen to how wisdom is calling in the community that they serve.

We are currently in a worship series called the 'Life of Joy' as we work our way through Paul's letter to the church in Phillipi. We began with a focus on joy in service as we thought about joy in partnership as is mentioned in Phillipians 1. This coming Sunday's service is centered around grace as we look at Phillipians 3. A week from now, the service will be centered around community as we focus on joy in fellowship as we think about how important it is that we are not on this path alone but that we journey together in faith.

Brian invited the congregation to share on what brings them joy. He heard two main points:

- *service together both in the community and on projects that are farther afield
- *fellowship that they have together brings joy

Brian shared some of the ways that the congregation creates times of fellowship together:

- *Fellowship time following worship with snacks and a potluck the last Sunday of the month. There is time to talk about what is happening in our lives, with children and friends.
- *Every other week a group gathers for coffee and devotions led by a long time member of the congregation. They share music, celebrate birthdays, and bring snacks. They share both their sorrows and their joys. Sorrows are lessened and joys are increased as they are shared together.
- *Friday morning coffee fellowship that started about nine years ago. Many of the members live in close proximity to the building even though it is in a rural area. This is a come and go as you please group with no agenda other than to be together and to share. There is only one rule: You are welcome to talk politics, but if you do, you have to sit at a table by yourself. Having this rule forces us to talk about all kinds of things such as the history of the community in this setting, learning about families, sharing jokes, etc. The other rule is that we have to sit at the same table. Over the years there have been a significant number of people who have no other connection to the congregation come and participate regularly in this gathering. There are many people, not only in Danvers, but in many places who are hungry and thirsty for not only coffee and cinnamon rolls, but for fellowship. They want to be heard and share their stories with one another. They enjoy this time of building meaningful relationships.

The fellowship hall was built and dedicated in 1988. It was created when a man in a wheelchair needed a way to get into the building. Instead of building a small room for access to a lift, the congregation decided to build a fellowship hall that was ground level so he could use the lift just like everyone else. Sometimes I worry about what is going to happen in the future. The lesson for us here is that when we look at what is right in front of us and trust in a God who is able to incredibly more than we can imagine, if we are faithful with what is in front of us, then what we do will be used in ways that we never could have imagined. The fellowship hall is used in all kinds of ways, not only for our congregation, but in the community.

Missional Church Committee Report (presentation): Matt Pritchard (Atlanta Mennonite Church)

The Missional Church Committee has three grants: Anti-racism Grant, Reign of God Grant, and the Emerging Communities of Faith Grant. Over the past year, the committee has revamped the process for grants to make the process more relational, more flexible, and to provide greater support for the

grantees. The committee is seeking to walk alongside applicants in the process and to learn from what the applicants learn through the grant process. We encourage experimentation even bold initiatives that may not succeed. We recognize that writing is only one way to communicate and encourage use of whatever form of communication that is comfortable for applicants. The hope is that the application will be used as a guide to the information we are looking for.

The Anti-racism Grant is available to CDC congregations at up to \$500/year. It is restricted to specific trainings but to what will help the congregation move forward toward anti-racism.

The Reign of God Grant needs to be more than one CDC congregation working together and is a 1 to 1 match. The grant can be up to \$2500. They need to be new cooperative initiatives between two or more congregations.

The Emerging Communities of Faith Grant is for new emerging communities of faith. The grant is for \$8000/year for up to three years. Matt shared examples of emerging communities that have received grants over the past year.

The committee is also working on a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) proposal within the conference. More information will be available over the next year.

Jake Elias (Eighth Street) shared that the dream lives on for racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation. These themes are highlighted in the Three Provocations document as an expression of Central District Conference's desire to work on reconciliation. Jake has written a book, *The Dream Lives On*, about Dorothy Word whose articles were rooted in the public forum called the Kokomo Tribune. The weekly newspaper articles focused on racial issues, ethnic violence, white supremacy, and various programs seeking to bring reconciliation. Dorothy Word, an African American woman dreaming of a hopeful future for her people, advocated for African American scientists, athletes, inventors, and others often not recognized for their contributions. She writes not as a noted scholar, politician, or journalist, but as a layperson from the back row of public visibility. Her voice needs to be heard.

Jake first got to know her when he was a pastor at Parkview Mennonite Church and reconnected with her when she was in the beginning stages of dementia. Although she could no longer be understood, she had left a legacy of articles through which her voice could be heard.

Dorothy Word was an African American woman from Fort Wayne. She was a charter member of the Fair Haven Mennonite Church and was baptized there. She came to Goshen College as a student but left after one year because she did not feel accepted, especially by the faculty members. Her articles tell the story about why she left Goshen College and what it felt like to return 42 years later as a speaker. She also talks about being a Black teacher in Fort Wayne, and many other issues, including why Columbus Day is not worth celebrating and needs to be replaced by reflections about the pain offered by this country toward indigenous people. The goal is to stimulate conversation, prayer, and action to address the racism that is still alive in our day.

Ministerial Committee Report

Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Bluffton) reported that there are only three congregations in pastoral

church processes.

Journey Program: Participants this year were Charles Baraka (Madison Mennonite), Jan Croyle (First Mennonite Wadsworth), April Lo (Chicago Community), and Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee Mennonite) Rena Le Blanc (Emmaus Road) will be studying at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) this fall.

Where do pastors come from? They come from us, from within our congregations, from within our communities. Doug encouraged participants to tap shoulders and encourage those who are called to serve the church.

Gayle Gerber Koontz (Assembly) recognized the newly credentialed and/or installed ministers in the conference:

- *Ana Arauz (Ministerio Jehová Luz y Esperanza), licensed toward ordination
- *Dio Arauz (Ministerio Jehová Luz y Esperanza), recognition of previous ordination
- *David Cramer (Keller Park), ordained
- *Benjamin Kreider (Chapel Hill), licensed toward ordination
- *Carrie Mast (First Mennonite Bluffton), licensed toward ordination
- *César Moya (Emmanuel), recognition of previous ordination
- *Sibonokuhle Ncube (Eighth Street), licensed toward ordination for her work at Mennonite Mission Network
- *Tim Peebles (Chicago Community), ordained
- *Josh Richardson (St Louis), licensed toward ordination
- *David Shenk (Florence), licensed toward ordination
- *Daryl Turley (Columbus), licensed toward ordination as a chaplain
- *Sarah Werner (Columbus), ordained as pastor of Olentangy Wild Church
- *Chaska Yoder (First Mennonite Bluffton), licensed toward ordination as a chaplain

Michael Crosby (First Mennonite Urbana) remembered the credentialed leaders who died this past year.

- *Chibuzor Ozor, (Ann Arbor Mennonite Church) died on July 31, 2023.
- *Earnest Porzelius, (First Mennonite Bluffton) died October 13, 2023
- *Leonard Wiebe (Eighth Street Mennonite Church) died April 3, 2024
- *Ron Ropp, (Mennonite Church of Normal), died June 4, 2024

ACTION: Proposed Bylaw Change for Provisional Membership:

Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) opened the floor for discussion of the amendment of the proposed bylaw change for provisional membership.

**Michael Crosby (First Mennonite Urbana)*: Michael affirmed the proposal. The proposal does create some awkwardness in the way we relate to MC USA. A congregation with provisional membership status cannot send delegates with voting rights to CDC, but can send voting delegates, because of its non-distinction, to MC USA delegate sessions. Michael wanted to acknowledge the odd polity situation and cautioned about creating pathways to conferences sending additional delegates to MC USA.

**Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street Mennonite Church)*, Table 3 noted that the tradition of waiting a year to accept a member is not a long standing tradition. That started when we brought in Atlanta

Mennonite Church in at the start of the merger of Mennonite Church USA. The denomination asked us to wait a year until the Southeast Mennonite Conference could work with Atlanta. We decided to make that a practice because we liked that get acquainted time.

**Beth Bontrager (Faith Mennonite Church):* Table 1 discussed the financial aspect of provisional membership. Provisional members are eligible for grants. They wondered if provisional members are included in the budget, i.e., do they receive a letter inviting giving. How are they included in the budgeting? *We will give some thought to that. We certainly would invite support.*

**Gayle Gerber Koontz (Assembly Mennonite Church):* Who decides whether progress has been made after a year of provisional membership? *The Board of Directors will make that decision.*

**Jaimie Houghton-Thompson (Maplewood Mennonite Church):* Table 17 had the privilege of sitting with a pastor of one of the emerging communities. During the break, Jaimie asked Matt about what this change would mean for emerging communities of faith and how they are supported. We learned from the pastor how much support is needed for an emerging community that we take for granted. Becoming a provisional member means having more support for emerging communities of faith. Jaimie appreciates the forethought of CDC leadership in creating the status of provisional membership.

The motion was affirmed unanimously.

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *How Clear Is Our Vocation*, VT 547.

Lydia Brenneman (Lima) led delegates in a centering exercise. She invited them to get comfortable and turn inward to know what was going on in their mind, heart and bodies and to participate in a breathing exercise.

ACTION: 2024-2025 Spending Plan: Jan Lugibihl (Chicago Community) opened the floor for discussion of the proposed 2024-2025 spending plan. The motion was affirmed unanimously.

Open Mic: Joel Miller (Columbus Mennonite Church) invited delegates to share comments/reflections.

**David Moser (Southside Fellowship):* David expressed gratitude for the work Matt Pritchard is doing. He shared that a friend of his in Northern Ireland, who works in West Belfast has a vision for an Anabaptist fellowship in that part of Belfast. The Anabaptist Network in the United Kingdom has unraveled, but his friend was able to make a connection with Matt, who has been a listening ear and positive presence. Central District Conference has been caring for people beyond our immediate borders.

**Dan Nester-Detweiler (Evanston Mennonite Church):* Ron Ropp was one of the best things that ever happened to our family. Dan appreciated how Ron spoke up for people at the last delegate session. Dan also appreciated that we devoted time to church safety. It is certainly important to protect our most vulnerable from an increasingly dangerous world. He was glad to hear the circle of concern extended to teenagers and expanded to vulnerable adults. Dan trusts and prays that we will be faithful in what is right in front of us and that we remember our commitment to correct the church's long history of harm against a person's space and how they look, how they love, or how they live. He hopes and prays that we will expand and extend our circle of care to a world where mental health and housing is increasingly less of a birthright and more of a struggle. May the church truly be a safe space within the world.

**Sheila Gruenhagen, (Peace Mennonite Fellowship):* Sheila thanked the delegates for welcoming Peace Mennonite Fellowship. Being a beginning church is scary and it is such a relief to know that we have so

many people that are behind us and helping us.

**John O'Brien (St Paul Mennonite Fellowship):* John thanked Emma Hartman for her work in Central District Conference.

**Georgia Metz (Shalom Mennonite Congregation):* Georgia drew attention to p201 in the report book to past resolutions about resisting military recruitment of youth in our context. Now that Congress is debating automatic selective service registration, it is especially important for Mennonite and peace church congregations to be educating our youth about the reality of the military and selective service and do counter recruitment in our local communities. Georgia would love to talk to anyone about youth peace education and conscientious objection. Her email address is georgia@shalommc.org.

**David Shenk (Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite):* In response to the earlier question about Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and whether CDC gives money to MCC: MCC is entering into a time of serious questioning about its conduct toward its workers. Many of us have had some involvement with MCC throughout the years and not just in an institutional way but in a way of forming our lives, our faith, our view of the world, and our connections. David asked that participants hold the people in MCC, which includes us as supporters, workers and administrators there, in prayer. There are some tough decisions that need to be made.

**Naun Cerrato (LaPosada):* Naun thanked Central District Conference for what they have done for LaPosada. LaPosada has individuals coming from Africa, Asia, and Europe. He thanked participants for showing compassion, mercy, and putting this into practice and opening the stage for individuals to speak.

**Ralph Ferguson III (Trey) (The Intention Church):* Trey has often been asked, "How did you end up getting connected with CDC? When a friend of his, who was not part of Central District, was trying to pull him into the Mennonites, Trey noted that the Mennonites were not real black and one of the things he needed to make this work with Anabaptism was that it had to be an environment in which people were willing to give him a chance to be him and not to feel awkward being himself. Being here the last couple of days has made him glad that he was connected with this particular conference. His wife, who was online and not used to Mennonite worship, texted him about the beauty of so many things she has not encountered before. Trey affirmed the ministry and presence of the Spirit in the conference.

Listening Committee Report: Naomi (Omie) Baumgartner (Silverwood), Jan Croyle (First Mennonite Wadsworth), Kevin Chupp (Mennonite Church of Normal)
Omie, Kevin, and Jan shared what they heard in worship, in the halls, in delegate sessions, and seminars.

Omie: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

In our first worship service, I heard the warm voices of people greeting each other and singing together. In the scripture Proverbs 4:1-13, the way of Wisdom was presented. In it, Wisdom encouraged us to embrace her and hold her close, for Wisdom will honor us as we nurture her. We listen, learn, discern, and practice the ways of Wisdom.

From the children, I heard words of wisdom. I followed up on the children's story and spent some time talking with the children about Wisdom on Friday afternoon. While it is a difficult word to describe, the children were able to share their ideas when asked: What can we do to make the world a better place? They eagerly responded with these ideas: Pick up trash. Be kind. Plant a garden. Stop destroying the forests. Pick up toys. Help people get the things they need like homeless people need homes. Hungry

people need food. Stop wars like the Civil War, or the civil war in Ethiopia or WWII. And finally, a young girl full of wisdom responded Help people imagine. Let's let that one resonate for a while.

In her message, Carol Penner from First Mennonite Church in Vineland, Ontario instructed us to be on the lookout for wisdom because Wisdom comes to us from all kinds of people, from all kinds of places, and from all kinds of situations. She declared Wisdom is pursuing us and wants to save us. For our offering, Patty Gorostieta shared about the ministry of La Posada Immigrant Aid where Wisdom is working with real people to listen, discern and provide for those in need. Finally, David Shenk and Ardean Friesen shared proverbs from the book African Proverbs - The Wisdom of a Continent compiled by Annetta Miller. One of my favorites noted "A wise person like the moon, shows the bright side to the world." (Africa) And one that made us laugh stated "A wise person does not need to be told twice. (Kenya)

The worship service closed with James Gingerich from Eighth Street Mennonite leading us in singing VT 196 "Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom", and I will close with the words from Verse 1. "Come and seek the ways of Wisdom, she who danced when earth was new. Follow closely what she teaches, for her words are right and true. Wisdom clears the path to justice, showing us what love must do."

Kevin: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

Delegate sessions operated in a way that was open and involved many faces and gifts. While such reporting has the potential to be dry and tedious, the conversational tone and use of humor by those leading discussion on budget and bylaws made the discussion much more playful and engaging. The explanations given in response to questions and concerns always felt like they honored the questions, and often anticipated them, while also guiding us to the "heart" that motivated such changes. We encounter wisdom in the way we have been led to joyfully face change while staying consistent and accountable to our shared values and our history.

Jan: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is calling.

Look around the room. What can we hear from the objects around us? What wisdom can they bring to light about our congregations? A chair, an oil lamp, a scrunchy crocheted thingy?

Breathe in 2,3,4 hold 2,3,4 and out 2,3,4. Lydia Brenneman asked us to grab a gem of wisdom—one word or a thought. Hold it in your hand.

I will be sharing the wisdom—calling that was happening throughout the conference. Pay attention, she's still here. Trey Ferguson of the Intention Church reminded us of the uncomfortable truths exposed during COVID. People were looking for belonging through this profound sense of isolation. We needed to feel connected, but it wasn't safe to meet together. We needed technology. The church needs to take technology seriously. The Intention Church is a community committed to safety, belonging to Christ. People were ready to find a Christ centered community online. Instead of making zoom the add on for hybrid worship, zoom is the main meeting place for this Jesus focused, peace church of the Mennonites. The Logos is the intention of God.

North Danvers Mennonite Church finds joy in service, both local and far away. By far their joy is found in fellowship together—through food and sharing both their joys and sorrows while learning from one

another. North Danvers shows us the need to trust God with what is right in front of us. Ah wisdom.

Omie: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

In the afternoon, we sat at tables to listen and learn together. I listened while people described the Central District Conference as a community growing in Wisdom. We are welcoming, caring, following Jesus, not all knowing, and not afraid of questions. We work together to address the problems around us. Our connections shape our worship as we celebrate the gifts of all.

As we gathered, Beth Bontrager from Faith Mennonite led us in singing “Draw the Circle.” Next, Lydia Brennenman from Lima Mennonite helped us center ourselves, and Carol Penner explained the structure of the afternoon worship/plenary session. She referenced Psalm 51 and 2 Samuel as she introduced the tension between watching for sin around us and thinking the best of others. This Wisdom of Serpent and Dove supported our discussions at our tables around these three questions. Wisdom is calling, will we listen to the victims of abuse who come forward? Wisdom is our constant companion; how will it guide us in our walk with offenders? Wisdom is calling, how will we foster healing after abuse. Care was taken to be mindful that the discussions might trigger some difficult feelings, and people were available to offer support.

At the end, the mics were open for people to share the nuggets of wisdom heard around the tables. Kerry Strayer mentioned the importance of a neutral party in the process. Janeen Bertsche Johnson recognized the normal nature of the psychological cycles of feelings. Ted Larrison noted that children have safety training, yet adults need healthy boundary training, also. Michael Crosby shared about ongoing Safe Church workshops, and Joel Miller stated a Safe Church policy is important to new members exploring our congregations, and Gail Gerber Koontz said shunning is not an effective practice in the process of reentry.

I will close with VT 196 “Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” Verse 3. “Sister Wisdom, come, assist us; nurture all who seek rebirth. Spirit guide and close companion bring to life our sacred worth. Free us to become your people, holy friends of God and earth.”

Kevin: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

We have been blessed that our “business” included and centered the stories and experiences of those who are new to us—and we credit that to wisdom of those who planned these meetings

- The story of The Intention Church, invited us to realize the growing need for cultivating online expressions of church, and challenges us to account for the reality that “online friends are real friends.”
- The story of Peace Mennonite Fellowship shows us the momentum of a movement that flourished organically as people simply responded and showed up because they felt the need

for such a community to exist.

- The story of Knoxville Mennonite invited us to join with our siblings who are eager to learn from us in growing as an inclusive community, and they seek fellowship with us in a spirit of resonating compatibility.
- I was grateful to have spilled my kombucha yesterday afternoon. As I hurried to get paper towel, I was outside the room when the vote for affirming St. Louis Mennonite was announced, and I could hear from a distance the burst of celebration that comes from a growing community.

We are inspired by these conversations, and we see the wisdom that has led us to hire an Associate Conference Minister of Emerging Communities of Faith, who makes sure these stories are front and center in our discernment about the life of the church, rather than an afterthought. The wisdom we meet in this process invites us to a continuing openness toward the ecclesially homeless who find their way to us.

Those of us who are not a part of emerging communities are also encouraged and blessed by the story of a 173-year-old congregation, in North Danvers Mennonite Church, that is intentionally cultivating lives of joy, through giving their energy to fellowship, providing their space for community that extends beyond the congregation.

Jan: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is calling.

Rain Down! Rain down your love on your people! For our second centering Lydia asked us to hold our hand over our heart. Holy wisdom is on the way. Feel your heart beating. Allow the wisdom of God to flow through the blood in your body.

Doug read from Ephesians 1 + 3 “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you.” There are 345 uses of wisdom as translated into English in the Bible. Wisdom comes from scripture—inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, interpreted along with Christ.

Wisdom was calling through our three seminars. Gerald Mast led Anabaptist 500th Anniversary. Wisdom is calling. They’re coming. They’re coming. They’re coming as blue books as brown books and black, those soft books and hard books in paper and print, in apps on our phones, with wisdom in pictures and etchings from Martyr’s Mirror. Be patient, wisdom cannot be rushed.

Bluffton University shared that the pulse of a new institution in beginning to beat. Can you hear it, or are you covering your ears? After ending 4 years now financially in the black, we hope to merge with Findlay College not because we are scared, but so that we can be more—be better—have great synergy.

Celeste Groff led Seasons in the Life Cycle of Congregations. There are two stages of church:

gathered church and dispersed church with a continuous expectation that church is not contained in a time or place. The parish model invited the congregation to engage everyone in their area—attending worship was optional. A “spiritual will” was deciding what legacy of projects, tasks, focuses they will leave. Being older doesn’t mean we have to be set in our ways. “There is no new life without death first.”

Omie: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

In our third worship service, I heard singing, praising, laughing, and a few soft Amens! Trey Ferguson from The Intention Church in Miami, Florida led us on a journey of reflection and celebration. Using John 1:1-14 and Proverbs 3:19-29 & Proverbs 8:1, he began getting us involved by singing the B-I-B-L-E. He shared that B-I-B-L-E is Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth. Once he had us engaged, we traveled with him and pondered the importance of the Word becoming flesh. He said God sends Wisdom to pursue us, to chase us. Wisdom does not dwell in words. Wisdom wants a relationship with us. If you want to know what Wisdom looks like, Wisdom looks like Jesus. He proclaimed that if Wisdom is calling, we must let its light shine. Let us be radical in our living. Let us be radical in our loving. Let us be radical in the ways of justice. Let us be radical in our communities and in our world as we follow Christ Jesus who shows us the way. Finally, let us slow down so Wisdom can catch us!

We celebrated communion together, and stations were available for anointing. We closed the service by singing VT 832 “The Lord Lift You Up”.

I will close with VT 196 “Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” Verse 2. “Listen to the voice of Wisdom, crying in the marketplace. What the Word made Flesh among us, full of glory, truth and grace. When the Word takes root and ripens, peace and righteousness embrace.”

Kevin: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is Calling.

We see wisdom in facing head on the discussion of “safe church.” We are grateful for wise guides in these conversations as we realize the prevalence of abuse within the setting of congregations and feel the need for a more thorough response from the church. We are grateful to be able to engage together around tables on such important issues, and we trust that our tables, congregations, conferences, and denominational groups will continue to urge each other on toward greater faithfulness in protecting those who are vulnerable among us. These wise relationships will continue to bless us as we ask new questions and encounter new challenges.

As wide as the scope of our conversation has been, wisdom would have us imagine whether there is room for expanding, or “Drawing the Circle Wide” if you will:

- Perhaps we can imagine how to invite deeper involvement from youth delegate(s)—and make these meetings engaging enough and perhaps for them, that the next round there might be plural delegates.

- As we partner with an emerging internet church community, perhaps we can overcome our Zoom creativity fatigue to invite those folks joining us from a distance to participate more thoroughly at these meetings.
- As I am attuned to notice, we have a number of folks raised in other than Mennonite traditions here, and I tend to find them, and wonder whether we ought to have some sort of support for these folks. The established roots of cradle Mennonites, with deep connections across the church and our institutions is a serious gift, but it is also a challenge for some of us who are coming in.

Jan: Listen! [Chime] Wisdom is calling.

Sophia, like our listening chime does not remain in one place. She moves—never stagnant. Pay attention to the wisdom that surrounds us and is among us in all of creation. So many wonderful wisdom nuggets to grab and hang onto—wisdom calling out to us:

- People everywhere are created equal.
- We are a story telling conference.
- We are excited about what we are called to next.
- Seasons of the earth are ways to listen for wisdom from creation.
- If you want to make God laugh, tell her your plan.
- We choose community building, over congregational buildings.
- It's not church until you eat together.
- Wisdom is always on the menu, but it is not necessarily the most popular item.
- People are finding rhythm in rituals.
- Wisdom calls from all ages and stages of life.
- Be wise as serpents and as innocent as a dove.
- Wisdom is chasing you, but you are much faster.
- We are not perfect. We are church!
- And it's a good time to be Mennonite! Amen!

Evaluations/Committee Nominations: Joel Miller (Columbus) invited delegates to fill out the evaluation forms and share suggestions for committee nominations.

Results from Raffle: Matt Pritchard (Atlanta) read the names of the winners of the raffle drawing.

Close of Delegate Sessions: Jan Lugibihl closed the delegate sessions with the sounding of the gavel.

Beth Bontrager (Faith) led in singing *Wisdom from on high is dawning* VT 238. Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) closed with prayer.

Children's Program: Thanks to Rachel Hershberger (Faith Mennonite Church) and her helpers for coordinating childcare and leading the K-Grade 5 programming.

Emma Hartman
Recorder

Central District Conference - Resourcing for Ministry

45
CDC Congregations



Grants given to
pastors and
churches

\$700

6
Emerging
Communities of
Faith



\$34,000
pastoral education
debt paid



Participants in "Our
Whole Lives"
training

15

Leaders licensed
or ordained

5



4
Wisdom retreats
held



Installations of
new pastors

6



95

Donors who helped
us reach our Tending
Transformation Goal
of \$350,000

10 CDC
Connectors



Distance between
CDC's Farthest
Churches

1,630 Miles

4
Pastoral Searches in
2024-2025



Central District Conference
2025-2026 Spending Plan

			SP 2022-2023	Actual 2022-2023	SP 2023-2024	Actual 2023-2024	SP 2024-2025	YTD Actual As of 3/31/2025	2025-2026 Proposed Spending Plan
INCOME									
		Congregational giving	\$211,111.00	\$217,077.63	\$227,948.00	\$242,272.18	\$244,859.00	\$202,000.56	\$265,300.00
		Annual Meeting	\$12,000.00	\$16,176.50	\$17,500.00	\$20,154.25	\$18,500.00	\$1,000.00	\$18,500.00
		Ann Mtng Offering/Fundraisers	\$3,000.00	\$2,986.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,445.80	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
		Additional Giving	\$45,000.00	\$42,227.00	\$50,000.00	\$34,255.00	\$55,000.00	\$42,834.27	\$67,215.00
		Bequests/Designated gifts in-kind		\$662.83		\$890.00		394.68	
		Earned/Interest income	\$6,000.00	\$6,513.95	\$6,000.00	\$6,492.54	\$6,000.00	\$4,842.48	\$6,000.00
		Miscellaneous income	\$1,266.00	\$2,303.18	\$237.00	\$1,745.23	\$1,799.00	\$1,945.00	\$2,000.00
		Total	\$278,377.00	\$287,947.09	\$303,685.00	\$308,255.00	\$328,158.00	\$253,016.99	\$361,015.00
EXPENDITURES									
Direct Congregational Services/Networking									
		Missional Church Committee	\$2,000.00	\$1,040.40	\$2,000.00	\$1,374.56	\$2,000.00	\$769.78	\$2,000.00
		Ministerial Committee	\$7,500.00	\$4,571.03	\$5,400.00	\$6,386.37	\$6,000.00	\$1,191.25	\$4,500.00
		Historian/*Archives	\$4,200.00	\$3,548.56	\$4,200.00	\$0.00	\$4,200.00	\$0.00	\$4,200.00
		Publications	\$5,000.00	\$3,111.54	\$5,000.00	\$4,456.76	\$5,000.00	\$3,194.52	\$5,500.00
		Communications Coordinator	\$5,912.00	\$8,162.46	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.04	\$21,600.00	\$16,200.00	\$23,610.00
		Regional Meetings/Congregational Listening	\$1,000.00	\$1,142.01	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
			\$25,612.00	\$21,576.00	\$37,600.00	\$32,217.73	\$39,300.00	\$21,355.55	\$39,910.00
Denominational Relations									
		Mid-States Conferences	\$0.00	66.06	\$100.00	63.93	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$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	\$1,358.86	\$3,000.00	\$2,859.89	\$3,000.00	\$3,014.98	\$3,500.00
		Constituency Leaders Council	\$3,000.00	\$2,710.39	\$5,000.00	\$1,265.92	\$3,000.00	\$850.74	\$3,000.00
			\$6,300.00	\$5,935.31	\$9,900.00	\$5,989.74	\$7,900.00	\$5,215.72	\$8,400.00
Conference Leadership/Administration									
		Board of Directors Meetings	\$2,000.00	\$2,375.36	\$2,500.00	\$2,524.34	\$2,500.00	\$1,525.00	\$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	\$6,310.51	\$3,900.00	\$3,660.14	\$4,000.00	\$5,477.33	\$5,500.00
		Annual Meeting Expense	\$12,000.00	\$19,877.75	\$18,000.00	\$29,264.09	\$20,000.00	\$1,253.17	\$20,000.00
			\$16,700.00	\$28,563.62	\$24,600.00	\$35,448.57	\$26,700.00	\$8,255.50	\$28,200.00
Administrative Support Costs									
		*Sabbatical Coverage Escrow		0		0			
		*Liability Insurance	\$2,500.00	\$2,802.47	\$2,500.00	\$3,317.80	\$2,500.00	\$426.20	\$1,200.00
		*Rent	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,500.00	\$2,331.00	\$3,108.00
		Supplies	\$2,500.00	\$3,216.68	\$3,500.00	\$4,473.70	\$3,500.00	\$2,610.37	\$3,500.00
		Equipment	\$2,500.00	\$3,001.03	\$3,500.00	\$6,197.14	\$3,500.00	\$0.00	\$3,500.00
		Telecommunications	\$3,000.00	\$3,476.57	\$3,500.00	\$2,611.96	\$3,000.00	\$1,399.62	\$2,000.00
		Postage	\$1,200.00	\$1,541.52	\$2,000.00	\$1,887.61	\$2,000.00	\$1,882.10	\$2,000.00
		*Bookkeeping Services	\$3,336.00	\$3,376.00	\$3,525.00	\$3,525.00	\$3,807.00	\$2,855.25	\$3,964.00
		Staff Travel	\$6,000.00	\$5,134.65	\$7,000.00	\$7,616.75	\$7,000.00	\$5,213.20	\$7,000.00
		Misc.		\$426.25		\$1,208.43	\$1,000.00	\$215.21	\$500.00
			\$24,144.00	\$26,083.17	\$28,633.00	\$33,946.39	\$29,807.00	\$16,932.95	\$26,772.00
Personnel									
		*Salaries	\$135,760.00	\$141,677.63	\$152,871.00	\$150,009.84	\$166,003.00	\$124,640.77	\$192,879.00
		*Benefits	\$32,162.00	\$34,234.50	\$36,815.00	\$35,172.35	\$45,448.00	\$29,827.30	\$50,354.00
		*Payroll tax/Worker's Comp	\$5,502.00	\$6,355.20	\$7,266.00	\$6,372.84	\$7,000.00	\$4,967.06	\$8,500.00
			\$173,424.00	\$182,267.33	\$196,952.00	\$191,555.03	\$218,451.00	\$159,435.13	\$251,733.00
Cash Reserves									
			\$0.00	\$0.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$4,500.00	\$6,000.00
		Total Expenses	\$246,180.00	\$264,425.43	\$303,685.00	\$305,157.46	\$328,158.00	\$215,694.85	\$361,015.00
		\$10,083.71 of the Assoc Conf Min salary will come from the balance remaining from the amount allocated in the Tending Transformation Campaign							
		Total Allocated	\$105,000.00						
		Total Used thru 6/30/2025	\$94,916.29						
		Remaining balance	\$10,083.71						

Dear CDC Delegates and Annual Meeting Participants,

Thank you for your participation in worship, fellowship, and discernment. One decision that we always make at Annual Meeting is the approval of a spending plan. Next year's spending plan represents a 10% increase from our 2025-2026 spending plan. Much of this increase is due to including the Associate Conference Minister's expenses in the spending plan. For the last three years, this has been covered by the *Tending Transformation Campaign*.

In December of 2021 the CDC Board initiated a three-year, \$350,000 *Tending Transformation Campaign* that focused on the following four goals:

- ⌘ Support a part-time Associate Conference Minister to resource emerging communities of faith
- ⌘ Develop a Grant Program to support emerging communities of faith
- ⌘ Provide clergy development grants and seminary scholarships for current and future pastors
- ⌘ Provide support for a Missional Activities Fund.

As of May 22, we have received \$345,000 with an additional \$6,500 in outstanding pledges. We are grateful for the generosity of over 100 donors that made this possible!

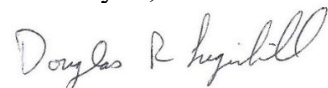
In January of 2023, Matt Prichard began as our Associate Conference Minister. Matt and our Missional Church Committee have provided excellent leadership to two emerging communities of faith; Moveable Feast, Chicago, IL and The Intention Church, a completely online congregation. Matt has also been an excellent support to some of our newer congregations and congregations who are seeking renewal or revitalization.

Matt's ministry and the work of the Missional Church Committee are helping us meet our overall mission as a conference including "Supporting missional partnerships that make God's reign visible and fostering ministries of evangelism, peace, healing, and hope."

The CDC Board is committed to continuing the Associate Conference Minister position into the future. **Through a slight increase in requests from congregations and increasing our individual contributions from \$50,000 to \$66,000 (a 32% increase), we believe we can fund this position through our annual Spending Plan.**

Enclosed is an outline of a strategy that will help us meet our Spending Plan. Please consider being one of our supporters that will help us reach our Spending Plan goal. Gifts can be made online at www.mcusacdc.org or send checks payable to Central District Conference to Central District Conference, PO Box 1199, Goshen, IN 46527-1199.

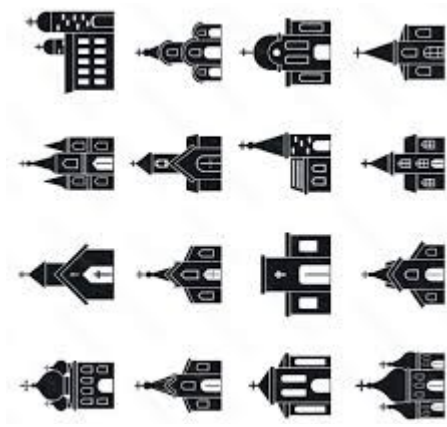
Thank you,



Doug Luginbill for the CDC Board of Directors

P.S. See the enclosed stories from members of emerging congregations to learn how they are experiencing faith in these new communities.

Many Gifts will fulfill the mission of the Central District Conference.

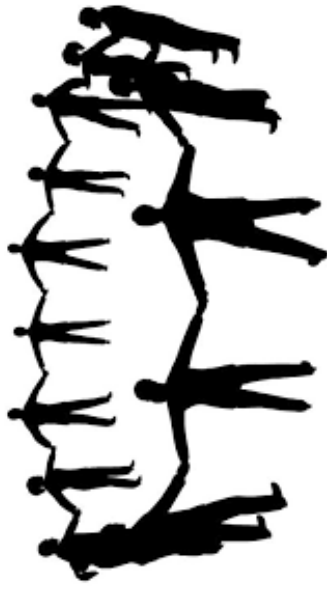


24-25 Church Contributions needed- \$245,000
25-26 Church Contributions needed- \$265,000

\$7,500

\$5,000

\$5,000



\$2,500

\$2,500

\$2,500

\$2,500

\$2,500

24-25 Individual Contributions needed- \$50,000
25-26 Individual Contributions needed- \$66,000

\$1,500

\$1,500

\$1,500

\$1,500

\$1,500

\$1,500

\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500
\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500
\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100
\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100

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

2025-2026 Slate of Nominees



Position: **Board of Directors,**
President-elect
Name: Karla Mineter
Congregation: Open Table Mennonite Fellowship
Occupation: Pastor/doula



Position: **Board of Directors,**
Secretary
Name: Clayton Gladish
Congregation: Silverwood Mennonite Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Board of Directors,**
Treasurer
Name: Steve Jolley
Congregation: Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship
Occupation: Contractor



Position: **Ministerial Committee**
Name: ****Kevin Chupp**
Congregation: Mennonite Church of Normal
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Ministerial Committee**
Name: ***Ruth Guengerich**
Congregation: Eighth Street Mennonite Church
Occupation: Retired



Position: **Missional Church Committee**
Name: Krista Showalter Ehst
Congregation: Shalom Mennonite Congregation
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Missional Church Committee**
Name: César Moya
Congregation: Emmanuel Mennonite Church
Occupation: Pastor



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: ***Steve Hartman Keiser**
Congregation: Milwaukee Mennonite Church
Occupation: Associate Professor of Sociology, Goshen College



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: Brent Miller
Congregation: Columbus Mennonite Church
Occupation: Spiritual Companion



Position: **Camp Friedenswald Board**
Name: ****Sibob**
Congregation: Eighth Street Mennonite Church
Occupation: Library Page at Grand Rapids Public Library; Animal Nutrition Volunteer at John Ball Zoo

* = incumbent
** = First elected term

Knoxville Mennonite Church

4401 Sullivan Road
Knoxville, Tennessee 37921

Date: March 9, 2025
To: CDC Board of Directors
From: Pat McFarren, Pastor of Knoxville Mennonite Church
Regarding: Request for full membership in CDC

Dear Friends on CDC Board of Directors:

"To those who have been made holy to God in Christ Jesus, who are called to be God's people. Together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place - he's their Lord and ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."
1 Corinthians 1. 2-3

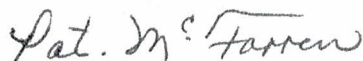
We, Jesus' disciples of the Knoxville Mennonite Church, request full membership in the Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. We believe we align with the CDC Membership Criteria in that....

- We keep Jesus Christ at the center of our faith and actions.
- We affirm commitment to congregational discernment that is biblically based, Christ-centered, and Spirit-led.
- We are guided by MC USA Vision: Healing and Hope, and Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.
- We affirm the CDC statement on Conference Polity.
- We believe we meet the CDC constitutional requirements for membership, being an established congregation with a definitive membership, intending to participate regularly in the conference, including providing financial support, giving and receiving counsel, and a willingness of members to serve in leadership positions.
- We have followed MC USA guidelines for changing conference affiliation.

We humbly offer this request for your consideration.

Stay noble, be gracious, and walk humbly with God.

Yours in Christ,



Pat McFarren
Pastor

PM/m

Central District Conference
1015 Division Street
Goshen, IN 46528

Central District Board of Directors,

Greetings from PEACE Mennonite Fellowship. We are writing to you to request full membership with the Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. We fully affirm CDC's membership criteria. As a fellowship, we commit to:

- Keeping Jesus Christ at the center of our faith and action.
- Congregational discernment that is Biblically based, Christ-centered, and Spirit led.
- Being guided by the Mennonite Church USA Vision: Healing and Hope and Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.

We affirm CDC's Conference Polity Statement and will follow MC USA's guidelines for changing conference affiliation if applicable. We also meet CDC's membership guidelines. We have a membership covenant that affirms our identity at PEACE. We plan to read it together annually, giving our congregation the chance to verbally assent to the covenant. Attached you will find the current draft of this membership covenant.

If there is any other information you need from us or questions you have, please reach out to us. We look forward to hearing from you and gathering with you at the annual meeting in June. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Steering Team of PEACE Mennonite Fellowship:

Gabe Beck, Kerry Beck, Dee Custar, Stacy Lehman, Kent Nafziger, Jennifer Nichols, Jay Roth, Mara Belle Schmucker, Brittany Spotts, and Denton Yoder

PEACE Mennonite Fellowship
22897 US-20A
Archbold, OH 43502
(567) 703-7075
peacemennonitefellowship@gmail.com

Draft of PEACE Mennonite Fellowship Membership Covenant

4.20.25

As members of PEACE Mennonite Fellowship, we commit ourselves to being a Christ-centered Anabaptist community where all people are welcomed into the full life of the church. We affirm the diverse characteristics each person brings, including embracing differences in ethnicity, race, economic and marital status, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, and age. Our calling is to follow Jesus, allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, and proclaim God's peace. Together, we strive to create a safe space where relationships are valued, love guides our life together, and all are encouraged to seek justice, healing, and reconciliation in our world.



Richard Bartholomew pastor

400 W Broad St address
Columbus, OH 43215

(614) 280 1212 tel
(614) 280 0312 fax

rich@agoraministries.org email
www.agoraministries.org internet

Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

doug@mcusacdc.org

P.O. Box 1199

Goshen, IN 46527

February 25, 2025

Dear Mr. Luginbill,

Agora Christian Fellowship, Inc. began a very slow and deliberate process of withdrawing from Mennonite Church USA and becoming a part of the EVANA network of churches. On November 7, 2021, it was determined by unanimous decision by the members of Agora Christian Fellowship that we begin this process, completing it at "the discretion of Pastor Richard C Bartholomew, Jr." On March 17, 2022, we received acknowledgement of our membership in the EVANA Network of churches.

Please accept this as our formal request to no longer be considered part of the Central District of Mennonite Church USA.

Thank you for your patience with us. It was our wish here at Agora Christian Fellowship to determine carefully where it is that we belong regarding fellowship with the larger body of Christ, due to our commitment to Anabaptist theology. We appreciate the patience of the Central District, the Ohio Conference, the EVANA Network of churches, and those who serve together with us here in Columbus, Ohio who are not affiliated with any of those church bodies.

Sincerely,

Richard C. Bartholomew,
Pastor, Agora Christian Fellowship, Inc.

PREVENTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY RESOURCE FROM MENNONITE CHURCH USA

What is this? Attached are resolutions that append the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA that MC USA delegates will be discerning on July 12, 2025. Also attached is a brief summary of the *Prevention and Accountability Resource (PAR)* that all conferences of MC USA are committing to utilize. This *PAR* has been reviewed and supported by conference ministers, the Constituency Leaders Council, and the MC USA Executive Board. It has also gone through legal review. The *PAR* is lengthy (86 pages) and is available for review at mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Prevention-Accountability-Resource.pdf The *PAR* will be a “living document” in that the MC USA Executive Board can update this periodically with input and support of conference ministers.

Why is this important? Mennonite Church USA and CDC are committed to providing safe congregations, minimizing the potential for abuse in the church, and holding those accountable who engage in abusive behavior in the church. As the *PAR* states,

God is a refuge for those who are abused, and God does not ignore the cry of the one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Therefore, Mennonite Church USA is called to be a place of refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. (p. 6)

Is this new? MC USA has provided resources and guidance to congregations and conferences regarding Safe Sanctuary or Safe Church practices for many years. MC USA has also provided a Ministerial Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedure since 2002 which was updated in 2015. MC USA has also provided resources for responding to abuse by lay people in the congregational setting. *PAR* is updating these resources and combining them into one document.

Is this a mandate from on high? Mennonite Church USA operates primarily with a congregational polity meaning that congregations have a great deal of autonomy and independence. The denomination serves primarily as a resource, support, and collaborating organization for our congregations and conferences. Congregations and conferences are part of MC USA because we choose to do so. MC USA calls wise and experienced leaders with expertise in various areas in order to serve the broader church. When denominational leaders bring resolutions for delegate discernment, they have consulted with and received feedback from conference leaders. The resolutions to append the bylaws to include *PAR* as a guiding document for all conferences (and thus, the churches), has strong support from conference ministers Doug Luginbill and Matt Prichard, as well as the CDC board and ministerial committee.

How are we addressing this at our CDC Annual Meeting? We will have about 40 minutes to hear more about this and to discuss this among table groups during our business session at 10:15 on Friday morning. CDC delegates will not be asked to vote on this. However, we value your collective wisdom, questions and concerns and want to hear from you prior to MennoCon in July.

What should we tell our MC USA delegates? Please feel free to share anything from this packet and from table group feedback with MC USA delegates from your congregation.

PREVENTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY RESOURCE FROM MENNONITE CHURCH USA

A Brief Summary by Doug Luginbill, CDC Conference Minister

Overview: It is challenging to summarize an 86-page document. While the full *Prevention and Accountability Resource (PAR)* is available to anyone who would like to read it at mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Prevention-Accountability-Resource.pdf, I believe it is helpful to provide a short overview of the resource. The resource provides an introduction, a summary of our MC USA polity, two primary sections and three appendices.

Introduction: The introduction begins with, “*The purpose of this document is to provide resources for MC USA congregations and conferences as they seek to prevent abuse in the church and to respond effectively in the event abuse does occur.*” (page 2) The introduction also explains the relationship between the PAR and *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*. *A Shared Understanding* explains the way MC USA understands pastoral leadership, credentialing, and pastoral ethics.

A Word about MC USA Polity: The term “polity” simply means the way an organization is structured and the relationships between various levels of an organization. The PAR states, “*MC USA observes a congregational polity. That means that the power and authority rests at the congregational level – as opposed to the national level. Congregations have autonomy when determining membership criteria in the local congregation, programming, personnel, property, and so on. Congregation members are accountable to their local congregations as defined by the membership covenant of that congregation (which varies from congregation to congregation).*” (page 4)

Congregations are part of conferences. Central District Conference (CDC) is one of fifteen conferences of MC USA. Central District Conference has membership criteria that all congregations agree to when they become part of CDC. Central District also appoints a ministerial committee of six people to oversee credentialing of pastors and provide resources to credentialed leaders. Credentialed leaders have an accountability relationship with our CDC ministerial committee.

The PAR also clarifies the relationship MC USA has with conferences and credentialed leaders. It states, “*When a person serves in the role of pastor in a congregation and/or that person is credentialed by the conference, it creates an accountability relationship between that person and the area conference. In those cases, the area conference is responsible for abuse prevention – including education and accompaniment – and response, if a pastor or credentialed leader is accused of misconduct. The area conference partners with the Safe Church ministry of MC USA to ensure that abuse prevention and accountability processes are thorough and consistent with the goals and values of MC USA.*” (page 5)

Part I: Abuse Prevention: Part I is divided into several sections that include:

- *Code of conduct for credentialed and non-credentialed leaders* in congregations as well as identifying healthy boundaries relating to both children and adults that help protect against misconduct.
- *Ethical Practices related to the task of clergy* including power, authority, conflict, confidentiality, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, financial ethics, and community relationships.
- *Best Practices for Congregations in Support of Abuse Prevention and Harm*. This includes such things as congregational behavioral covenants, conflict resolutions

processes, grievance processes, church safety policies, financial practices, Pastor Congregation Relation Committees, pastoral evaluations, clergy health, and continuing education.

- *Suggested Policies in support of abuse prevention.* This section identifies several policies congregations are encouraged to create to protect pastors and congregants from potential abuse and misuse of power.

Part II: Accountability: Part II describes the detailed process of reporting, investigating, and discerning accusations of abuse against clergy and lay leaders. A significant change from the previous Ministerial Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedure is that investigations of reported abuse are going to be led at the denominational level rather than at the conference level. The rationale for this includes:

- Investigations require a significant amount of time and emotional energy by volunteers who may be unfamiliar with the process or who may have not had a refresher on the process for a long time.
- Investigations require a significant amount of time and emotional energy by conference staff, thus delaying other important conference ministry tasks.
- Conference ministers are placed in the difficult position of administering an investigation against credentialed individuals for whom the conference minister is typically a primary support person. This creates a potential conflict of interest or dual role with competing responsibilities.
- Different conferences interpreted policies differently and/or include different procedures and communication techniques. Having the denomination overseeing investigations provides more continuity and consistency across conferences.

Another significant change from previous guidance includes the creation of a “Denominational Minister of Church Safety.” Currently Nancy Kauffmann serves this position in an interim role. Also, each conference is to identify a “**Church Safety Liaison.**” The Church Safety Liaison will:

- Be trained at the denominational level
- Facilitate abuse prevention and response training with new and existing clergy in their area conference
- Facilitate abuse prevention and response training for congregations
- Ensure compliance with clergy abuse policy at the area conference level
- Maintain a deep working knowledge of the clergy abuse policy
- Participate, as needed, in investigations when clergy or lay leader abuse is reported.
- Complete a total of 10 hours of outside abuse prevention and response training on an annual basis

Appendices: The *PAR* includes the following appendices.

- **Appendix 1: Glossary of Definitions**
- **Appendix 2: Forms**
- **Appendix 3: Additional Resources**

While no process or procedure can eliminate abuse, the *PAR* is a valuable resource for conferences and congregations and helps us provide safety, responsibility, and accountability to all who are part of our faith communities.



Abuse Prevention and Response in Mennonite Church USA

A proposed resolution from:

Mennonite Church USA Executive Board
3145 Benham Ave., Suite 1
Elkhart, IN 46517

Michael Danner
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Mennonite Church USA

Introduction

The purpose of this resolution is to clarify the responsibilities of congregations and Area Conferences concerning abuse prevention and response processes. To have consistent expectations and accountability processes for all credentialed leaders across MC USA, it is necessary for each congregation and Area Conference to follow the same ethical guidelines, abuse prevention best practices and the same accountability processes.

This resolution is an organizational resolution and appends Article III and Article IV of the current MC USA bylaws.

This proposal makes it mandatory for Area Conferences of Mennonite Church USA, and all congregations belonging to those Area Conferences, to follow the practices, policies, and processes for abuse prevention and response to misconduct complaints as laid out in the current approved version of the Prevention and Accountability Resource.

This addition is intended to ensure that each Area Conference is using the same ethical expectations, definitions of abuse and accountability processes for credentialed leaders within their Area Conference for the purpose of creating consistency across the denominational system.

Consistency across the system will lead to safer congregations for minors and vulnerable adults. The benefit of this consistency is most clearly seen by considering the opposite. If each Area Conference and, by extension, their member congregations, utilize different definitions of abuse, different accountability processes, and different ethical guidelines, it undermines the confidence that the credentialing process is meant to ensure – namely, that a credentialed leader is held to particular standards of ethical conduct and is held accountable in the same manner for ethical violations.

This also helps all credentialed leaders, irrespective of the Area Conference that holds their credentials, know what is expected of them and the process that will be utilized by Mennonite Church USA in the case that a misconduct complaint is received against them.

Congregations will also have confidence that any credentialed leader they hire has been vetted in the same way and held accountable to the same ethical standards concerning abuse prevention and accountability. This will also enable our congregations to be places of healing and hope through abuse prevention.

Resolution

Be it resolved that:

- Article III be appended to include item 7:
 - “**Abuse Prevention and Response:** All congregations belonging to an MC USA Area Conference will utilize the current version of the Prevention and Accountability Resource, as approved by the MC USA Executive Board, in consultation with the area conference ministers, as the guidelines for pastoral ethics, abuse prevention and abuse response for all pastors, ministers, and/or ministerial leaders in the church.”
- Article IV be appended to include item 6:
 - “**Abuse Prevention and Response:** All area conferences of Mennonite Church USA will utilize the current version of the Prevention and Accountability project, as approved by the MC USA Executive Board, in consultation with the area conference ministers, as the guidelines for pastoral ethics, abuse prevention and abuse response for all leaders credentialed by the Area Conference. This includes, but is not limited to, meeting the education and training requirements of the resource and providing adequate staff (paid or volunteer) and financial support to accomplish the required functions of the conference listed in the resource.”

44 Churchwide Impact Statement

45 The impact statement should address the current policies or programs related to the resolution.

46 **What does the resolution address in MC USA, or what issue is it trying to invite further discernment**
47 **on?**

48 The current approach to abuse prevention and accountability, as defined by the previous Ministerial Sexual
49 Misconduct Policy and Procedure (MSMPP), is an “opt-in” policy that Area Conferences are asked to follow
50 voluntarily. The act of “opting-in” has meant that different Area Conferences have revised the MSMPP to fit
51 conference preferences. This has led, in some cases, to uneven application of the MSMPP across the
52 system.

53 This resolution requires Area Conferences and, by extension, their member congregations, to follow the
54 same ethical guidelines as well as accountability responses.

55 **What MC USA current bylaws, policies, documents, or programs are related to the subject of the**
56 **resolution, and what is the impact of the resolution on each one?**

57 This resolution does not change or amend any current bylaws in MC USA. It appends two sections of the
58 bylaws to include a responsibility to follow the current Prevention and Accountability Resource, as affirmed
59 by the MC USA Executive Board, in consultation with area conference ministers.

60 **What are the proposed changes, and which entities of MC USA are responsible for executing the**
61 **actions?**

62 The proposed changes obligate both the Area Conference and their member congregations to utilize the
63 same policy and procedures for abuse prevention and accountability. The current version of the Prevention
64 and Accountability Resource requires MC USA Executive Board staff and the Area Conference, to provide
65 staff to administer, providing training for, and execute the provisions of the P&A resource.

66 **What is the potential downside of this proposal?**

67 This resolution, if passed, will obligate Area Conferences and their member congregations to responsibilities
68 as spelled out in the P&A resource. This is a shift in MC USA polity – which is congregational. It is important
69 to consider if the goals of requiring compliance to a uniform standard of abuse prevention best practices,
70 pastoral ethics, and accountability processes is in keeping with the mission and vision of MC USA – does it
71 better help MC USA become a source of God’s healing and hope in the world?

72 Implementation

73 **How will this be rolled out to the denomination, and what is the timeline for implementation?**

74 The final version of the Prevention and Accountability Resource will be rolled out in July 2025. What is at
75 issue in this resolution is whether Area Conferences and their congregations are obligated to follow it per
76 the bylaws.

77

78 If the resolution passes, the obligation will follow as of the time of the passed vote.

79 If the resolution does not pass, we will revert to the status quo, and each Area Conference will be asked to
80 opt in by committing to utilize the current prevention and accountability resources as their own. Area
81 Conferences that do not opt in will not be able to access the abuse prevention and response framework of
82 MC USA.

84 **Budget Estimate**

85 The budget estimate outlines the financial costs of implementing the resolution and details plans for
86 supporting the action financially.

87 This resolution concerns the act of obligating Area Conferences and congregations to follow the policies and
88 processes of the P&A resource. If so obligated the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board and Area
89 Conference will take on additional staff requirements and financial responsibilities.

- 90 • Mennonite Church USA currently staffs the position of Denominational Minister for Church Safety as
91 required by the P&A resource.
- 92 • Each Area Conference is free to use current staff time, add additional staff, or utilize a volunteer for
93 the position of Conference Safety Liaison.
- 94 • Sexual misconduct cases will require the hire of independent investigator(s), which is a cost incurred
95 by the Safe Church office of Mennonite Church USA.
 - 96 • Each Area Conference will be assessed an annual Safe Church fee of \$5 per active and
97 retired credential to be placed in a fund that assists in the expense of an investigation.

99 **Resources**

100 [Prevention & Accountability Resource.pdf](#)

101

Central District Conference
Conference Minister Review for Doug Luginbill (2025)
A Summary of Constituent Survey Responses

The Survey Review Team

Jan Lugibihl, CDC President; Brian Bolton, Ministerial Committee; Lydia Brenneman, CDC Board of Directors; Elizabeth Kelly, Missional Church Committee

The Survey Process

The CDC Board of Directors invited all CDC credentialed ministers, members of CDC's Leadership Council, and several congregational lay leaders with whom Doug has worked (search committees and congregational crises) to reflect on Doug's performance in the Conference Minister role, focusing on his gifts as well as growth opportunities. An additional question asked respondents to identify challenges and opportunities in the Central District Conference. Doug completed a self-evaluation used for comparison.

149 surveys were emailed, and 77 surveys returned (52%), representing each of the groups listed above. Respondents represented a range of people from those new to the CDC and/or ministry to long-term conference members and retirees. The full geographic range of CDC congregations was represented and included established and newer congregations.

General Impressions from the surveys:

Doug is widely regarded as steady, patient, accessible, and highly gifted in his role and is described as thoughtful, faithful, and skilled in communication, ministry, and leadership. Many respondents expressed appreciation for his ability to listen carefully and provide calm, thoughtful responses. There were also affirmations and noted challenges related to the CDC's openness to growth, welcoming of congregations from other traditions seeking affiliation in CDC, and new models of ministry in emerging communities of faith.

Affirmations of Doug's Ministry:

Doug demonstrates deep faith and scriptural grounding in his leadership, preaching, and personal and wider communications. Respondents commended Doug for strong relational skills and effective responses in personal interactions and conflict resolution. People noted Doug's supportive leadership style and ability to provide steady guidance for teams and individuals. He is affirmed for his commitment to inclusivity and the promotion of diversity and openness. Doug's deep spirituality and willingness to put it into action is specifically evident in the donation of a kidney to his brother and his arrest for conscience in Washington, DC, during a 2024 protest calling for a cease-fire in Gaza. One respondent offered a poignant illustration of Doug's meaningful and repentant response to a past interaction where they felt hurt and sought a more restorative process. Many expressed gratitude for the sense of stability that Doug provides and his key role in CDC becoming a positive, supportive environment, noting that these attributes are not present in some conferences. Ministers spoke positively about the Pastor-Peer

groups and opportunities to know one another better, as well as the opportunities for deeper discussions about relevant church issues.

Areas for Growth:

There were very few responses identifying areas for personal growth and each of those noted that his overall leadership is strong. A few suggestions focused on expanding his leadership focus beyond personal relationships to structural or systemic change. One response suggested the potential for development in handling difficult conversations with even more clarity and directness.

Doug' self-evaluation

Doug's self-evaluation mirrored the survey responses, both affirmations and areas of challenge. This is a good indication of Doug's authenticity in his role and ability to relate well to people, especially during challenging times in their personal lives or the lives of congregations. While respondents often described the personal impact of Doug's leadership or engagement (a past or present snapshot), Doug's evaluation included his role in relation to the CDC as a whole and his responsibilities in MCUSA. He addressed the current state and future considerations related to the CDC's geographical spread and attention to sustainable financing for future staffing. Doug expressed appreciation for the addition of the part-time Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Churches. He noted the specialized knowledge, skill, and support that Matt Pritchard brings to these unfolding relationships and Doug's awareness that he would not be able to do this work himself, in either time or talent.

Challenges/Opportunities for the Conference

In response to the question asking for ideas about challenges and opportunities for the Conference, many noted that these can often be two sides of the same coin. How do we meet the challenges and engage the opportunities as we move forward since, as one person said, "The church won't be what it was in the past. We can't go back. So how do we imagine and reinvent the "new" peacemaking church that is so needed?"

Opportunities for the Conference:

The Conference is seen as healthy— a place that provides joy and nourishment to our members. Because of this, some wondered how CDC might provide more leadership both in MCUSA and with other Anabaptist groups. As one person wrote, "CDC has a leadership role in discerning what relationship building/maintaining needs to be done with other Anabaptist and Anabaptist-related groups."

Many respondents mentioned their desire for the Conference to continue to be a welcoming place for churches, pastors, and individuals. There is an affirmation of the work to develop and nurture Emerging Communities of Faith and a call for openness to the newness and gifts they bring to the Conference. Because of the changing demographics in the church, CDC needs to work on recognizing and embracing diversity.

There was strong encouragement for the Conference to be proactive in responding to what is happening in the world today including encouraging congregations to work with each other and with groups in their communities to become engaged in peace-making and responding to the needs they see around them.

CDC is seen as a place congregations, pastors, and individuals should be able to go for spiritual formation and teaching and there is a call for more of this. Perhaps this call is best summarized in this quote from the evaluations: [CDC is called] “to be a collective voice and story-sharing community of faithful witness to the Jesus way of peace and compassion.”

Challenges Identified:

The geographic spread of the Conference, theological differences, and changes in church identity and structure can make it harder to establish relationships between congregations and harder for a conference minister to keep things together. In a time when these kinds of relationships seem more important, how do we provide the needed resources and connections?

Respondents wondered, as one person said, if “we are raising a loud enough voice to counter the war-like rhetoric” and if we are challenging members enough to do the hands-on work of peacemaking and seeking justice.

In what ways might the Conference find ways to sustain and support leaders amid evolving needs and expectations?

How might the Conference engage overly busy people, call out the gifts and talents of a diverse range of people, and, at the same time, “continue to present ‘Jesus-following’ in a joyful, gracious, genuine, and inclusive manner”?

Once again, we are grateful for Doug’s many gifts, his self-awareness, and his openness to where God’s spirit might be leading us. Thank you, Doug, for your leadership and service as our Conference Minister.

CDC Wave (wave bw)



Part II

Conference Financial and Staff Reports

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE
Balance Sheet
As of April 30, 2025

Checking	418,787.83
Savings	150,395.66
	<hr/> 569,183.49
Undeposited Funds	224.28
Prepaid expenses	1,496.92
Missional Fund	170,729.13
	<hr/> 172,450.33
	<hr/> 741,633.82
	<hr/> 741,633.82
Accounts Payable	-2,611.30
Other Agency Transfer	10,685.33
Other Current Liabilities	5,727.99
Funds/Escrows	
General Assembly Escrow	6,407.17
Cash Reserve Escrow	135,483.29
Conference Minister's Sabbatical Escrow	13,343.74
Ministry Inquiry Program	319.75
Missional Church Committee	20,568.19
Leadership Development	22,317.65
Emerging Communities of Faith	117,270.75
Tending Transformation New Hire	575.95
Jubilee Fund	1,522.56
Transitional Pastors Sabbatical	11,114.27
Reign of God Grant	2,992.00
Surplus Reserve Fund	14,041.28
Missional Committee Grants	15,093.20
Healthy Boundaries	461.11
Moveable Feast Escrow	2,547.53
The Intention Church	14,533.24
Education Debt Reduction Grant	23,996.85
Celtic Pilgrimage	35,190.68
Total Current Liabilities	<hr/> 451,581.23
	<hr/> 451,581.23
Equity	
Net income	80,397.13
Total Equity	<hr/> 209,655.46
Total Liability and Equity	<hr/> 741,633.82

**Central District Conference
Income and Expense Statement
As of April 30, 2025**

	Actual 2024-2025 thru April 30 (10 months)	SP 2024-2025 thru April 30 (10 months)	SP 2024-2025 (12 months)	Actual 2023-2024 12 months	SP 2023-2024 (12 months)
INCOME					
Congregational Giving	\$222,582.79	\$204,049.18	\$244,859.00	\$242,272.18	\$227,948.00
Annual Meeting Registration/Offering	\$0.00	\$15,416.68	\$18,500.00	\$20,154.25	\$17,500.00
Annual Meeting Donations: Memorial/C	\$1,000.00	\$1,666.68	\$2,000.00	\$2,445.80	\$2,000.00
Additional Funding	\$43,044.27	\$45,833.34	\$55,000.00	\$34,055.00	\$50,000.00
Bequests/In-kind donations	\$394.68	\$0.00		\$890.00	
Earned/Interest income	\$6,454.65	\$5,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,492.54	\$6,000.00
Miscellaneous income	\$2,045.00	\$1,499.18	\$1,799.00	\$1,745.23	\$237.00
Total	\$275,521.39	\$273,465.06	\$328,158.00	\$308,055.00	\$303,685.00
EXPENDITURES					
Direct Congregational Services/Networking					
Missional Church Committee	\$769.78	\$1,666.68	\$2,000.00	\$1,374.56	\$2,000.00
Ministerial Committee	\$1,406.66	\$5,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,386.37	\$5,400.00
Historian/*Archives	\$0.00	\$3,500.00	\$4,200.00	\$0.00	\$4,200.00
Publications	\$3,540.38	\$4,166.68	\$5,000.00	\$4,456.76	\$5,000.00
Communications Coordinator	\$16,200.00	\$18,000.00	\$21,600.00	\$20,000.04	\$20,000.00
Mid-Year Gatherings	\$0.00	\$416.68	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
	\$21,916.82	\$32,750.04	\$39,300.00	\$32,217.73	\$37,600.00
Denominational Relations					
Mid-States	\$0.00	\$83.34	\$100.00	\$63.93	\$100.00
*General Assembly Delegate Escrow	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00
Denominational Meetings	\$3,014.98	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$2,859.89	\$3,000.00
Constituency Leaders Council	\$850.74	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$1,265.92	\$5,000.00
	\$5,365.72	\$6,583.34	\$7,900.00	\$5,989.74	\$9,900.00
Conference Leadership/Administration					
Board of Directors Meetings	\$1,882.53	\$2,083.34	\$2,500.00	\$2,524.34	\$2,500.00
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	\$7,229.76	\$3,333.34	\$4,000.00	\$3,660.14	\$3,900.00
Annual Meeting Expense	\$1,253.17	\$16,666.68	\$20,000.00	\$29,264.09	\$18,000.00
	\$10,365.46	\$22,250.04	\$26,700.00	\$35,448.57	\$24,600.00
Administrative Support Costs					
*Sabbatical Coverage Escrow					
*Liability Insurance	\$573.62	\$2,083.34	\$2,500.00	\$3,317.80	\$2,500.00
*Rent	\$2,590.00	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$3,108.00	\$3,108.00
Supplies	\$2,767.46	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$4,473.70	\$3,500.00
Equipment	\$548.00	\$2,916.68	\$3,500.00	\$6,197.14	\$3,500.00
Telecommunications	\$1,467.80	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$2,611.96	\$3,500.00
Postage	\$1,902.09	\$1,666.68	\$2,000.00	\$1,887.61	\$2,000.00
*Bookkeeping Services	\$3,172.50	\$3,172.50	\$3,807.00	\$3,525.00	\$3,525.00
Staff Travel	\$5,751.91	\$5,833.34	\$7,000.00	\$7,616.75	\$7,000.00
Misc.	\$365.21	\$833.34	\$1,000.00	\$1,208.43	
	\$19,138.59	\$24,839.24	\$29,807.00	\$33,946.39	\$28,633.00
Personnel					
*Salaries	\$138,474.29	\$138,335.88	\$166,003.00	\$150,009.84	\$152,871.00
*Fringe	\$24,845.15	\$35,790.54	\$45,448.00	\$35,172.35	\$36,815.00
*Payroll tax/Workman's Comp	\$5,509.44	\$5,833.34	\$7,000.00	\$6,372.84	\$7,266.00
	\$168,828.88	\$179,959.76	\$218,451.00	\$191,555.03	\$196,952.00
Cash Reserves					
	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00
Total	\$230,615.47	\$271,382.42	\$328,158.00	\$305,157.46	\$303,685.00

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	23-24 YTD Actual	24-25 YTD Actual	Total TT (inc 21-22 donations)
5200 - Campaign Donations	52,565.00	155,785.06	79,650.00	58,450.00	
Total Campaign Donations	<u>52,565.00</u>	<u>155,785.06</u>	<u>79,650.00</u>	<u>58,450.00</u>	346,450.06
TENDING TRANSFORMATION ALLOCATIONS					
Emerging Communities of Faith	26,282.50	77,892.53	39,825.00	29,225.00	173,225.03
Missional Activities	5,256.50	15,578.51	7,965.00	5,845.00	34,645.01
Leadership Development	5,256.50	15,578.51	7,965.00	5,845.00	34,645.01
Associate Conference Minister	15,769.50	46,735.52	23,895.00	17,535.00	103,935.02
Total TENDING TRANSFORMATION ALLOCATIONS	<u>52,565.00</u>	<u>155,785.06</u>	<u>79,650.00</u>	<u>58,450.00</u>	<u>346,450.06</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	79,600.20		345,887.79

Central District Conference Congregational Contributions

Number of giving units (as reported in 2024) is in parentheses

*Dual Conference Congregations

Congregations	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022
	As of 4/30/25			
	10 months	12 months	12 months	12 months
Agora*				\$0.00
Americus (13)	\$1,000.00	\$1,100.00	\$1,225.00	\$1,200.00
Ames (closed)			\$150.00	\$250.00
Ann Arbor*	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00	\$1,000.00
Asian Mennonite Community				\$1,000.00
Assembly (122)	\$21,250.00	\$19,875.00	\$11,227.50	\$6,352.50
Atlanta (18)	\$4,781.72	\$4,954.98	\$4,845.40	\$3,136.08
Berea (now Atlanta Mennonite Church)				\$1,000.00
Chapel Hill (20)	\$3,500.00	\$3,500.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,200.00
Chicago Community (25)	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00		\$5,000.00
Cincinnati (33)	\$4,310.00	\$6,450.00	\$8,308.00	\$9,290.00
Columbus (120)	\$14,634.00	\$17,918.00	\$16,934.00	\$16,295.00
Community Mennonite*(9)		\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Covenant (59)	\$11,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$9,000.00	\$8,500.00
Eighth Street (93)	\$21,667.48	\$15,777.12	\$20,465.30	\$24,666.50
Emmanuel (13)	\$3,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,400.00
Emmaus Road (24)	\$3,640.00	\$2,730.00	\$3,640.00	\$3,185.00
Evanston* (8)	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$500.00
Faith (27)	\$2,500.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
First, Bluffton (123)	\$17,500.00	\$21,500.00	\$21,296.61	\$17,148.00
First, Chicago				\$0.00
First, Sugarcreek (9)	\$1,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
First, Urbana* (62)	\$5,250.00	\$10,500.00	\$6,750.00	\$6,500.00
First, Wadsworth (20)	\$300.00	\$800.00	\$300.00	\$800.00
Florence (21)	\$1,364.51	\$1,500.00	\$1,400.00	\$1,400.00
Grace Mennonite (35)	\$9,600.00	\$9,750.00	\$8,347.50	\$8,130.00
Grand Rapids	\$200.00	\$120.00		
Hively Avenue (33)	\$6,000.00	\$7,200.00	\$6,900.00	\$7,150.00
Joy Fellowship*				\$0.00
Jubilee (5)	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Keller Park (20)	\$750.00	\$2,250.00	\$4,000.00	
Knoxville	\$1,750.00			
Lima* (15)	\$1,500.00	\$6,650.00	\$3,000.00	\$1,500.00
Madison (45)	\$6,460.00	\$10,000.00	\$7,750.00	\$7,500.00
Maplewood (32)	\$1,000.00	\$1,212.50	\$1,250.00	\$1,000.00

Congregations	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022
	As of 4/30/25			
	10 months	12 months	12 months	12 months
Mennonite Church of Normal* (90)	\$18,535.74	\$16,549.08	\$15,999.99	\$14,783.52
Milwaukee (10)	\$1,687.55			\$0.00
Morning Star*				\$0.00
North Danvers (50)	\$3,162.00	\$1,240.00	\$2,025.00	\$470.00
Oak Grove* (82)	\$7,500.00	\$5,565.50	\$5,225.00	\$9,175.00
Open Table Mennonite Fellowship (13)	\$500.00	\$800.00	\$995.00	\$0.00
Paoli* (25)	\$5,000.00	\$6,360.00	\$5,299.33	\$4,116.00
Peace	\$3,812.88			
Raleigh (40)		\$2,430.00	\$5,100.00	\$5,000.00
Shalom Community (33)	\$1,650.00	\$1,650.00	\$6,750.00	\$3,850.00
Shalom Mennonite Congregation (73)	\$8,926.91	\$16,220.00	\$5,724.00	\$6,950.00
Silverwood (74)	\$11,250.00	\$15,000.00	\$13,500.00	\$9,750.00
Southside (31)	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$2,500.00
St Louis	\$2,500.00	\$500.00		
St Paul (6)	\$600.00	\$670.00	\$670.00	\$600.00
Trenton (33)- withdrew				\$500.00
Total	\$222,582.79	\$242,272.18	\$217,077.63	\$201,797.60



Conference Minister's Report 2025

"God's purpose is now to show the rulers and powers in the heavens the many different varieties of God's wisdom through the church." (Ephesians 3:10 CEB)

Listen! Wisdom is calling. This theme we have used over the past two years seems especially timely. "The heavens" are centers of power, authority, influence, and control. The "wisdom" of these powers is often in direct opposition to the wisdom of God through Christ. Some of the ways Central District Conference congregations are showing God's various forms of wisdom include:

- Giving time, gifts, resources, and energy to creative worship of God. We know our God. It is God alone who receives our acts of worship.
- Following the peaceful way of Christ Jesus. We are following Jesus into homeless shelters, to the seats of power in our cities and country, to the bedsides of loved ones ill or dying, to the spaces where immigrants huddle, to communities of refuge and hope.
- Walking with and supporting emerging communities of faith. We continue to build relationships with new faith communities who are searching for a Gospel of peace rooted in hospitality, and committed to loving God, neighbor, and self.
- Calling Anabaptist pastoral leaders who are "wise, dynamic, and compassionate." (See our CDC mission statement.) And providing leaders with resources for continuing growth toward wisdom.
- Sharing stories of healing and hope. These stories are shared during monthly pastor peer gatherings, through our *CDC Connector* newsletter, during Mid-Year Gatherings and at Annual Meeting.
- Practicing spiritual disciplines that tune our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies to God.
- What is an additional way you are witnessing God's wisdom in your life and community?

This is a year of celebration for 500 years of Anabaptist witness. In a presentation on the AMBS campus in February, John Roth invited us to consider the difference between understanding Anabaptism as primarily a "restoration movement" or a "renewal movement." I wonder if Wisdom can help guide us toward an understanding of what it means to bear witness to God's love as Anabaptists and Mennonites today.

Matt Prichard initiated a conversation with various leaders across the denomination to reflect on how we talk about, train for, experiment with, and engage in renewal among our churches. How is Wisdom calling us individually and as congregations to open ourselves to the creative and transformative Spirit of God? In a world that is, as Psalm 46 suggests, "changing, shaking, and roaring," how do we embrace hope and let go of fear? Who are the voices that call us to renewal? What are the actions that lead us to renewal? How is the Spirit cultivating in us an openness to renewal?

I am so grateful for the sharing of resources that happens across the conference. Not only are we likely to exceed our CDC proposed income, we have successfully completed the \$350,000 *Tending Transformation Campaign*. This has supported Matt Prichard's position over the past 30 months, provided emerging churches with grants, supported ongoing pastoral education, and provided missional ministry resources for congregations and individuals.

The CDC Board is committed to continuing the position of Associate Pastor for Emerging Communities of Faith (Matt's position). This requires additional contributions from individuals of roughly \$40,000 and from congregations of \$10,000-\$15,000. Together, I am confident that we can stretch ourselves towards the mission and ministry to which our conference and churches are called.



Associate Conference Minister's Report 2025

Central District Conference is experiencing a vibrant season marked by the flourishing of both established congregations and dynamic new faith communities dedicated to peace, justice, and inclusion. I am proud of our work with emerging communities and am excited as we continue to resource their work. Since the last meeting, I have moved to Winnipeg to begin the

MDiv program at Canadian Mennonite University, while continuing to serve in this role.

Empowering a Network of Thriving Emerging Communities of Peace

As Associate Conference Minister (working $\frac{1}{3}$ time or about 15 hours a week), I support emerging faith communities and aid established congregations in their renewal efforts. Over the past year, a significant focus has been on developing institutional processes and supports to best incubate emerging communities of faith 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 the Network:** Cultivating relationships and resourcing several emerging communities, including:
 - Moveable Feast (Chicago, IL) moveablefeastcommunity.org
 - Olentangy Wild Church (Columbus, OH)
 - The Intention Church (Online) theintentionchurch.com
 - Imagine Cincinnati (OH) imaginecincinnati.org
 - Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (MI) grandrapidsmennonite.org
 - PEACE Mennonite Fellowship (Archbold, OH) peacemennonitefellowship.com
- **Ongoing Connections and Resourcing:** In addition to one-on-one coaching, CDC continues to offer a monthly pastor peer gathering to foster collaboration and connection among leaders (and potential leaders) of emerging communities. We also develop resources as needs arise.
- **Financial Assistance:** Missional Church Committee awarded \$32,000 in grants to emerging communities, enabling them to strengthen and expand their presence and mission. These funds were matched with \$18,000 from the emerging communities.
- **Standardized Practices:** We have developed processes and structures to fiscally sponsor emerging communities. This enables them to focus on the relationships and work to enable thriving peace-church communities while building the supporting infrastructure over a longer timeframe.
- **Collaboration:** We are working with Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Mission Network as we seek to systematically strengthen and align our denominational support for church planting.
- **Established Community Renewal:** As we continue to support established congregations seeking opportunities and resources for renewal, we've been talking with partners throughout MC USA to develop ways to better equip pastors and leaders as they help their churches thrive in our changing world.

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, 2024 – May 31, 2025

ORDINATIONS

Georgia Metz, Shalom Mennonite Congregation, affirmed March 4, 2025, service will be October 25, 2025, by Doug Luginbill

Philip T Yoder, First Mennonite Church Bluffton, March 23, 2025, ordained by Doug Luginbill

Karla Minter, Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, affirmed April 15, 2025, service June 1, 2025

LICENSINGS

*Charles Baraka, Madison Mennonite Church - Amahora Ministries, License for Specific Ministry, June 30, 2024

*Ralph Ferguson III (Trey), The Intention Church, License Toward Recognition of Ordination, affirmed June 11, 2024, service on December 15, 2024 by Matt Pritchard

*Lauren Satchwell, Mennonite Church of Normal, License Toward Ordination, September 15, 2024

*Carrie Wenger, Shalom Mennonite Congregation, License Toward Ordination, March 9, 2025

*Dennis Miller, Silverwood Mennonite Church, License Toward Ordination, May 25, 2025

CREDENTIAL TRANSFERS

*Seth Miller, Oak Grove Mennonite Church from Central Plains Mennonite Conference, July 28, 2024

*Moriah Hurst, Assembly Mennonite Church from Virginia Mennonite Conference

*David Elkins, Peace Mennonite Fellowship, from Ohio Conference, July 10, 2024

*Gloria Beck, Peace Mennonite Fellowship for Ohio Conference, July 10, 2024

*Deanna Custer, Peace Mennonite Fellowship from Ohio Conference, July 10, 2024

*Pat McFarren, Knoxville Mennonite Church, from Virginia Mennonite Conference, September 4, 2024

*Steven Heatwole, Peace Mennonite Fellowship, from Ohio Conference, October 29, 2024

*Teresa Dutchersmith, Faith Mennonite Church, to Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, January 5, 2025

INSTALLATIONS

Teresa Dutchersmith, Keller Park Church, August 4, 2024

Seth Miller, Oak Grove Mennonite Church, September 1, 2024

Lauren Satchwell, Mennonite Church of Normal, September 15, 2024

Moriah Hurst, Assembly Mennonite Church, September 29, 2024. She began on Sept 8.

James Rissler, Atlanta Mennonite Church, October 20, 2024. He began on October 1, 2024.

Anita Rediger, Michael Spath, and Rena LeBlanc, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship,

Stan Shantz, Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, April 6, 2025

CHANGE OF CREDENTIAL

*Anton Flores-Maisonet, Atlanta Mennonite Church, License for Specific Ministry expired, July 31, 2024

*John Kampen, Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, voluntary withdrawal due to conversion to Judaism, November 2024.

*Kevin Farmwald, Hively Avenue, withdrawn at his request, December 31, 2024

*Karla Minter, Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, license toward ordination extended to Dec 31,

2025

*Jonathan Larson, Atlanta Mennonite Church, from active without charge to retired, Jan 1, 2025

RESIGNATIONS

*Jason Kuniholm, Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Jan 26, 2025

*David Cramer, Keller Park Church, March 30, 2025

*Donna Mast, Silverwood Mennonite Church, March 23, 2025

ANNIVERSARIES / SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL EVENTS

*Paoli Mennonite Fellowship, 50 years, June 6-8, 2024

*Camp Friedenswald, 75 years, July 13, 2024

*Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, 50 years, October 13, 2024

INTERIM / TRANSITIONAL PASTORS

*Michael Spath, Interim, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, July 19, 2024

*Rena LeBlanc, Interim, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, July 19, 2024

*Anita Rediger, Interim, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, July 19, 2024

*Gwen Gustafson-Zook, ended at Manchester Church of the Brethren, July 31, 2024. She began as program director at Camp Friedenswald on Sept 9, 2024.

*Teresa Dutchersmith, Keller Park Church, August 1, 2024 - November 30, 2024

*Stan Shantz, Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, April 6, 2025 -

RETIREMENTS

*Russell Jensen, Maplewood Mennonite Church, August 31, 2024

DEATHS

*Ron Ropp, Mennonite Church of Normal, June 4, 2024

*Gary Martin, Faith Mennonite Church, March 21, 2025

CONGREGATIONAL TRANSITIONS

*Agora Ministries to Evana

In Search Processes

*Keller Park Church

*Raleigh Mennonite Church

*Covenant Mennonite Fellowship

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
2025	Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio

Conference Presidents, 1957-2025

1957-	Lotus E Troyer	1999-2001	Janeen Bertsche Johnson
1958	Ernest J Bohn	2001-2003	Kevin Farmwald
1959-1960	Harry Yoder	2003-2005	Mick Sommers
1961-1962	Gordon J Neuenschwander	2005-2007	Alice Roth
1963-1964	Jacob T Friesen	2007-2009	Gordon Oyer
1965-1966	Lorris A Habegger	2009-2011	Karl Shelly
1967-1968	Claude F Boyer	2011-2013	Joyce Schumacher
1969-1970	Leonard Wiebe	2013-2015	Ron Guengerich
1971-1973	Larry Voth	2015-2017	Lisa Weaver
1974	Lloyd L Ramseyer	2017-2019	Arman Habegger
1975-1976	Howard Raid	2019-2021	Anna Yoder Schlabach
1977-1978	James Dunn	2021-2023	James Rissler
1979-1980	Roger Siebert	2023-2025	Jan Lugibihl
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		

CDC Wave (wave bw)



Part III

Conference Committee Reports

CDC Annual Report 2024

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 over 200 youth and sponsors from across the conference. Congregations participating in these weekend retreats included: Assembly, Columbus, Eighth Street, Faith, FMC Bluffton, Keller Park, Maplewood, Milwaukee, Paoli, Silverwood, Southside Fellowship, and FMC Sugarcreek.
- Camp was the host site for the spring and fall **CDC board and leadership meetings**.
- Hospitality was extended to seven 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, Silverwood, Open Table, Grand Rapids, Hively Avenue, and Faith.
- We welcomed 699 campers (youth and family) in the summer of 2024. Roughly **50% of youth campers came from 22 different CDC congregations**.
- Of the 30-summer staff, 12 came from six different CDC churches including Assembly, Atlanta, Eighth Street, Faith, FMC Bluffton, and Maplewood. Camp Friedenswald continues to be a place that **cultivates leadership gifts within young adults across CDC**.
- The 2024 summer theme was "**Animal Kin-dom**" and explored human relationship with all God's creatures as well as themes of interconnection and relationship with all creation. Camp pastors related to CDC included: Kiva Nyce-Webb, Joel Miller, David Moser, Carrie Mast, and Matthew Prichard.
- The **Campaign to Sustain Friedenswald** was publicly launched in summer 2024, with goals of increasing and improving staff housing; renovating lodges to meet guest/camper needs and to improve energy efficiencies; growing endowment funds; and ultimately sustaining Camp's mission for the next 75 years! By year-end, over \$1.8 million had been pledged or given towards these efforts.
- In 2005, Camp Friedenswald barred Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests from hosting Queer Camp at Camp in response to increased backlash to queer visibility. In the fall of 2024, **Camp and BMC held a narrative ritual of repair**, marking a two-year process of truth-telling and repair. The ritual coincided with a CDC leadership council meeting, and several leaders from across the conference were invited to attend.
- Throughout the year \$47,600 in financial support was given through CDC or directly from congregations in support of Camp Friedenswald and nearly 1,000 days of total volunteer time.

Thank you for your support!



Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

This year's Journey program includes twenty participants and twenty mentors in our English-language program and twenty-one participants and nine mentors in our Journey Southeast Asia program. Two participants are from Central District Conference: **April Lo** of Chicago Community Mennonite (mentor **Anne Munley**, Mundelein, Illinois; North Suburban) and **Rachel Stolpe** of Milwaukee Mennonite (mentor **Mariah Martin**, Goshen, Indiana; Faith Mennonite). In addition, we are pleased to have two Journey instructors from Central District Conference: **James Rissler** (Atlanta Mennonite Church) teaching Unit 2: The Biblical Story; and **Karla Minter** (Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Indiana) teaching Unit 4: Leadership: The Ministry of Reconciliation.

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 sessions 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 continue to meet bi-weekly in mentor-mentee pairs.

The winter Weekend Learning Event was held on the AMBS campus January 24-26, 2025, with the theme, Biblical Interpretation. 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, including April Lo and Rachel Stolpe, and their mentors shared a reflection, and their conference minister 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 or someone you know wants to develop or deepen their ministry gifts or is 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 • ambbs.edu

Ministerial Committee

Members: Brian Bolton (Shalom, Harrisonburg), Kevin Chupp (Mennonite Church of Normal, IL), Gayle Gerber Koontz (chair; Assembly, Goshen, IN), Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street, Goshen, IN), Robin Walton (Columbus, OH), Matthew Yoder, (Grace, Pandora, OH), Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister (ex officio).



New member. This year the Ministerial Committee was pleased to welcome Matthew Yoder from Pandora, Ohio, as a new member, adding to the years of congregational pastoral experience among us.

Intercultural awareness. Matthew has been serving as our representative on a Board-wide group reviewing ways to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives in our CDC work. In response to this concern, the Ministerial Committee decided to require completion of the Intercultural Development Inventory for all future ordination candidates and to cover the cost for this.

Licensing and ordination. This past year through March 2025 the Ministerial Committee completed two interviews of candidates preparing for ordination and four interviews of candidates recommended for licensing toward ordination. In response to a suggestion, we agreed that if a candidate for licensing toward ordination desires, they may invite a support person to join the interview. Including a support person has been standard procedure for ordination interviews.

Educational Debt and Clergy Development grants. We have been deeply grateful for the two anonymous donors who contributed \$50,000 and \$8,000 respectively for education debt relief for pastors, making it possible to create an Education Debt Grant fund this year. The Ministerial Committee developed a grant process that the CDC Board affirmed. We distributed 12 grants totaling \$36,000. The remaining \$32,000 in grants will be available this year. In addition, we approved three Clergy Development Grants totaling \$1084.

Church Leadership trainings. Twenty-five people participated in the Ministerial Committee-sponsored Healthy Boundaries Training 201 led by Michael Danner and Nancy Kauffmann on the Thursday before Annual Meeting last year. We will offer the training again on June 19. The Committee also supported the Our Whole Lives human sexuality curriculum training at Camp Friedenswald in November with 16 participants.

Theological Education Graduates. We warmly congratulate the four 2024 CDC Anabaptist Biblical Seminary graduates (Alaina Dobkowski, MDiv, Grand Rapids; Melika Hershberger, MDiv, Normal; Carrie Mast, Grad Certificate, Bluffton; John Zirkle, MA Christian formation, Goshen); and the two Journey participants who will graduate in June 2025 (April Lo from Chicago Community Mennonite Church and Rachel Stolpe from Milwaukee Mennonite Church).

Submitted by Gayle Gerber Koontz

Central District Conference Missional Church Committee Highlights for 2025 Annual Meeting



Supporting Emerging Communities

- Consistently focused on supporting emerging congregations through funding, non-monetary resources, and mentoring. This includes providing grants to support their work and exploring best practices for their development and ongoing sustainability.
- Covered costs for emerging community representatives to attend the CDC Annual Meeting.
- Explored ways to connect emerging communities within the larger conference.

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- Noting that the emerging communities and newcomers desire to join a peacemaking tradition and that these folks are more diverse than long standing conference congregations, efforts were dedicated to advancing DEI education and awareness within the conference. These DEI efforts include recognizing subtle biases against persons who did not grow up in a Peace Church tradition or any Christian tradition.
- Reviewed and revised a DEI proposal, discussed implementation strategies, and formed a task group to continue this important work in consultation and collaboration with the Board and Ministerial Committee.

Policy Development

- Reviewed and updated various policies and procedures and secured legal review for:
 - The Fiscal Sponsor MOU Policy between CDC and MCUSA and Emerging Communities. This allows Emerging Communities to come under the CDC umbrella for bookkeeping, insurance, and 501c3 status until they are better established.
 - The Child Protection Policy for CDC and any entity under the fiscal sponsorship of CDC.

Grant Updates: Community Amount and Program Year

- Granted \$3,650 to other missional initiatives connected with the conference.
- Renewed four Emerging Communities Grants for a total of \$32,000 in grants matched with \$18,000 from the Emerging Communities.

Committee Functions and Changes

- Reviewed our overall work and priorities since Matt Pritchard joined in his role as Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities (January 2023). We've experienced new energy and focus.
- Our work entails imagining the emerging *future* church. It can be messy with a bit of ambiguity, experimenting with new models of being a Peace Church. We considered the gifts and talents necessary for committee members engaging in this work. This year, we will welcome 4 new members: 2 term limit replacements, 1 due to the resignation of Anton Flores with increased demands of immigrant ministry, and, sadly, 1 due to the death of Gary Martin.

Submitted by Elizabeth Kelly, Missional Church Committee Chair

CDC Wave (wave bw)



Part IV

Reports by Related Institutions



Women in Leadership



MC USA Executive Board



MC USA Staff

As we reflect on 2024, we give thanks for God's abundant blessings and the ways we, as MC USA, continue to live out our [Renewed Commitments](#) of following Jesus, witnessing to God's peace and experiencing the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Together, we live into our mission as a denomination that equips, empowers and inspires.

Church Vitality: Equipping healthy congregations

In 2024, MC USA's Church Vitality team worked diligently to nurture thriving congregations and support pastors and leaders. From practical tools, such as [pastor salary guidelines](#) and [The Corinthian Plan](#) healthcare program, to initiatives such as our [Wellbeing in Ministry](#) resources, we continue to prioritize the health of our churches and the wellbeing of those who serve them.

Our [Safe Church Ministry](#) empowers faith communities to prioritize safety for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Engagement with our webinars and the updated Circle of Grace curriculum reached new heights, extending even beyond our denomination. Additionally, we introduced background checks for church employees and volunteers, demonstrating our commitment to safe spaces for worship and ministry.

Through our [Thrive church planting grants](#), we provided financial support to five new missional peace churches, breaking down barriers for church plants to proclaim the gospel and engage their communities.

We also launched two new podcasts: ["Lead/Follow"](#) with Executive Director Glen Guyton, in which leaders explore how to follow Jesus boldly, and ["The Competent Pastor."](#) hosted by Church Vitality's Michael Danner and Rachel Ringenberg Miller, which offers practical wisdom for pastors.

Peace and Justice: Living into our Anabaptist faith values

As a historic peace church, MC USA continues to lead the way in nonviolence and justice. Through our 2024 ["Learn, Pray, Join" campaigns](#), we educated congregations on climate justice and conflict transformation, calling us to connect faith and action.

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](#).



PeaceMail 
Mennoite Church USA

[Subscribe](#) to MC USA's weekly email newsletter.





2024 Bring the Peace honorees



Glen Guyton's "Lead/Follow" podcast



2024 Hope for the Future attendees

This past year, the [Justice Fund](#) supported nine churches dismantling racism, addressing police brutality or combating poverty, while the [Bring the Peace](#) award recognized individuals who are bringing God's peace to their communities. The [Church Peace Tax Fund](#) rallied our collective voice against the destructive powers of militarism in our congregations by supporting education, grassroots activism and [Peaceful Options for Training and Careers](#).

Additionally, the [Pam De Young Net Zero Energy Fund](#) helped several congregations take bold steps toward renewable energy. Youth-led innovation shined through the [Gen Z Energy and Spirit Challenge](#), celebrating young leaders committed to climate justice.

Finally, [Women in Leadership](#) continued its work of dismantling patriarchal systems, laying the groundwork for the Women's Summit, "Beholding It Together," July 8, 2025, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Racial Ethnic Engagement: Fostering Solidarity and Transformation

Our 11th [Hope for the Future](#) conference in Dallas, Texas, Feb. 9-11, 2024, brought together 70 Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) leaders under the theme, "Breaking Chains, Mending Walls." This sacred space for dialogue and solidarity inspires hope for systemic transformation in our church and communities.

Additionally, MC USA, in partnership with the [Racial Ethnic Council](#) and the [Historical Archives](#), launched a groundbreaking initiative to preserve and amplify BIPOC stories within our denomination's history. This effort includes workshops, resource kits, and digitization projects, ensuring these voices are honored and heard for generations to come.

Looking Ahead with Hope

Together, we are building a church that embodies Jesus' radical love and justice. Thank you for your prayers, participation and support. We are stronger together, united by our call to follow Christ and transform the world.

Our Mission

To share with others the gift of God's love through our worship, witness and life together. We claim Jesus as the center of our faith, community as the center of our lives and reconciliation as the center of our work.

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.

**FOLLOW
JESUS²⁵**

CONVENTION.MENNONITEUSA.ORG



Join us for [Follow Jesus '25](#)
Greensboro, North Carolina
July 8-12, 2025. Scan for info:



www.MennoniteUSA.org



Mujeres en el liderazgo



Junta Ejecutiva de MC USA



Personal de MC USA

Al reflexionar sobre el año 2024, agradecemos las abundantes bendiciones que Dios nos ha concedido y las maneras en que, como Iglesia Menonita de EE. UU. (MC USA por sus siglas en inglés), continuamos llevando a la práctica nuestros [Compromisos renovados](#) de seguir a Jesús, ser testigos de la paz de Dios y experimentar el poder transformador del Espíritu Santo. Juntos y juntas, vivimos plenamente nuestra misión como denominación que equipa, empodera e inspira.

Vitalidad de la Iglesia: equipar congregaciones saludables

En 2024, el equipo de Vitalidad de la Iglesia trabajó diligentemente para nutrir congregaciones prósperas y apoyar a pastores/as y líderes. Desde herramientas prácticas como los [lineamientos para salarios pastorales](#) y el programa de cuidado de la salud [El Plan de Corinto](#), hasta iniciativas como nuestros recursos de [Bienestar en el ministerio](#), continuamos priorizando la salud de nuestras iglesias y el bienestar de quienes las sirven.

Nuestro [Ministerio de Iglesia Segura](#) empodera a las comunidades de fe para priorizar la seguridad de la infancia, juventud y adultez vulnerable. La participación en nuestros seminarios en línea y del currículo actualizado Círculo de Gracia alcanzó nuevos niveles, extendiéndose aún más allá de nuestra denominación. Además, introdujimos las revisiones de antecedentes para as y voluntarios/as de la iglesia, manifestando nuestro compromiso con espacios seguros para la adoración y el ministerio.

A través de nuestras [donaciones para la plantación de iglesias prósperas](#), brindamos apoyo económico para cinco iglesias misionales de paz nuevas, derribando así las barreras que encuentran las plantaciones de iglesias para proclamar el evangelio e involucrarse con sus comunidades.

Además, lanzamos dos *podcasts* nuevos: [“Lead/Follow”](#) (Liderar/Seguir) con el director ejecutivo Glen Guyton, en el cual líderes exploran cómo seguir a Jesús con valentía, y [“The Competent Pastor”](#) (El Pastor competente), presentado por Michael Danner y Rachel Ringenberg Miller, de Vitalidad de la Iglesia, que ofrece sabiduría práctica para pastores/as.

Paz y justicia: llevar a la práctica los valores de fe anabautista

Como Iglesia de paz histórica, MC USA continúa liderando el camino en la no violencia y la justicia. A través de nuestras [“campañas de ‘Aprende, ora, únete’](#) en 2024, educamos a congregaciones sobre la justicia climática y la transformación del conflicto, haciendo un llamado a conectar la fe y la acción.

Nuestros compromisos

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

Vitalidad de la Iglesia

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





Ganadores 2024 del premio Trae la Paz



El podcast "Lead/Follow" de Glen Guyton



Asistentes al evento Esperanza para el futuro 2024

Este año pasado, el [Fondo de Justicia](#) apoyó a nueve iglesias en la desmantelación del racismo, el abordaje de la brutalidad policial o para combatir la pobreza, mientras que el premio de [Traer la paz](#) reconoció a individuos que están trayendo la paz de Dios a sus comunidades. El [Fondo impositivo de Iglesia de Paz](#) canalizó nuestra voz colectiva en contra de los poderes destructivos del militarismo en nuestras congregaciones a través del apoyo a la educación, el activismo comunitario y las [Opciones pacíficas de carreras y capacitación](#).

Adicionalmente, el [Fondo de Energía cero red Pam De Young](#) ayudó a varias congregaciones a dar pasos valientes hacia la energía renovable. La innovación guiada por la jóvenes brilló en el [Desafío energía y espíritu Generación Z](#), que celebra el compromiso de líderes jóvenes con la justicia climática.

Finalmente, [Mujeres en Liderazgo](#) continuó su labor en la desmantelación de sistemas patriarcales, generando la base para la Cumbre de Mujeres "Contemplantas juntas", que se realizará el 8 de julio de 2025 en Greensboro, Carolina del Norte.

Involucramiento racial y étnico: promover la solidaridad y la transformación

Nuestra onceava conferencia de [Esperanza para el futuro](#) en Dallas, Texas, del 9 al 11 de febrero de 2024, reunió a 70 líderes de raza negra, indígena y de color (BIPOC por sus siglas en inglés) bajo el lema: "Romper cadenas, remendar muros". Este espacio sagrado para el diálogo y la solidaridad inspira la esperanza de transformación sistémica en nuestra Iglesia y en nuestras comunidades.

Además, en un trabajo de coparticipación, MC USA, el **Concilio Racial y Étnico** y los **Archivos históricos**, lanzaron una iniciativa revolucionaria para preservar y amplificar las historias BIPOC dentro de la historia de nuestra denominación. Este esfuerzo incluye talleres, paquetes de recursos y proyectos de digitalización, para asegurar que estas voces sean honradas y oídas en las generaciones venideras.

Mirar hacia Adelante con Esperanza

Juntos y juntas, estamos construyendo una Iglesia que encarna el amor y la justicia radicales de Jesús. Gracias por tus oraciones, tu participación y apoyo. Somos más fuertes juntos/as, unidos/as por nuestro llamado de seguir a Cristo y transformar el mundo.

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.

**FOLLOW
JESUS²⁵**

CONVENTION.MENNONITEUSA.ORG



Sigue a Jesús '25
Greensboro, North Carolina
July 8-12, 2025.



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

– Proverbs 16:9 (CEB)

Your Ministries. Your Finances.

Everence 2025 report

Central District Conference
Annual Meeting
June 19-21, 2025

Building strong stewardship ministries

At Everence®, we believe Christian stewardship encompasses all we are and all we have, aligning our lives with God's purposes.

Through our Stewardship Partners program, we help churches build vibrant stewardship ministries that address both congregational and personal financial needs. With faith-driven resources, we equip stewardship leaders to help your church manage finances in alignment with Christian values, fostering both financial well-being and spiritual growth.

Let us help you build a strong stewardship ministry! Visit everence.com/partners to learn more.

Churches supporting community through Sharing Funds



Faith communities can be a vital support in times of hardship – and the Everence Sharing Fund helps churches assist members in need.

Over the past six years, Everence has distributed nearly \$5 million in Sharing Fund grants, on top of additional matches from churches,

to help thousands facing hardship. You can support this important work with a fully tax-deductible donation – 100% of your gift will go directly to those experiencing financial challenges. To donate or learn more, visit everence.com/sharing-fund.

Boost your church's ministries with MyNeighbor



If your church is seeking an easy, low-cost way to boost financial support, consider the MyNeighbor credit card from Everence Federal Credit Union.

This program lets individuals contribute to your church or favorite nonprofits with every purchase. Whether for groceries, bills, or other everyday expenses, 1.50% of each purchase made using the MyNeighbor card goes directly to the charity of the cardholder's choice, such as your church. Then, in January, Everence sends checks to the selected 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, with no additional work required on your end.

Since 2017, we have donated \$2.8 million through the MyNeighbor program. It's an easy way to foster stewardship engagement and

create additional revenue for your church's ministries. Learn more at everence.com/myneighbor.

Strengthening your church's endowment fund



As of 2021, over 40% of religious organizations reported challenges in managing their endowment funds, highlighting the need for sustainable financial planning (National Philanthropic Trust, 2021). While updated data is expected, this trend emphasizes the importance for churches to actively manage their endowments for long-term stability.

Your church can develop a strategy to grow and manage its endowment to create a reliable income stream to support ministries – especially in uncertain times. By engaging your congregation and implementing thoughtful giving practices, you can lay the groundwork for lasting financial growth. Talk to your Everence stewardship consultant or visit everence.com/churches for more information.

*"El ser humano proyecta su camino,
pero es el Señor quien dirige sus
pasos."*

— Proverbios 16:9 (BLPH)

Sus Ministerios. Sus Finanzas.

Reporte de Everence 2025

Conferencia del Distrito Central
Reunion anual
19 a 21 de junio de 2025

Construyendo ministerios fuertes a través de la mayordomía

En Everence®, creemos que la mayordomía cristiana abarca todo lo que somos y todo lo que tenemos, alineando nuestras vidas con los propósitos de Dios.

A través de nuestro programa de Socios de Mayordomía, ayudamos a las iglesias a construir ministerios de mayordomía vibrantes que abordan las necesidades financieras tanto congregacionales como personales. Con recursos impulsados por la fe, equipamos a los líderes de mayordomía para ayudar a su iglesia a administrar las finanzas en consonancia con los valores cristianos, fomentando tanto el bienestar financiero como el crecimiento espiritual.

¡Permítanos ayudarle a construir un ministerio de mayordomía fuerte! Visite everence.com/partners para obtener más información.



Las iglesias apoyan a la comunidad a través del Fondo Compartido

Las comunidades religiosas pueden ser un apoyo vital en tiempos de dificultad, y el Fondo Compartido de Everence ayuda a que las iglesias puedan apoyar a miembros con necesidades.

En los últimos seis años, Everence ha distribuido casi \$5 millones en subvenciones del Fondo Compartido,

además de contrapartidas adicionales de las iglesias, para ayudar a miles de personas que enfrentan desafíos. Usted puede apoyar este trabajo importante con una donación totalmente deducible de impuestos: el 100% de su donación se destinará directamente a aquellos que estén atravesando dificultades financieras. Para donar u obtener más información, visite everence.com/sharing-fund.



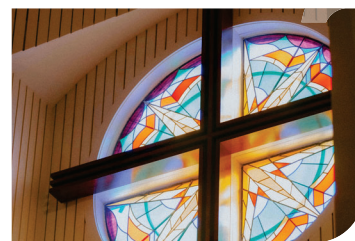
Impulse los ministerios de su iglesia con la tarjeta MyNeighbor

Si su iglesia está buscando una manera fácil y de bajo costo de aumentar el apoyo financiero, considere la tarjeta de crédito MyNeighbor de Everence Federal Credit Union.

Este programa le permite contribuir a su iglesia o a sus organizaciones sin fines de lucro favoritas con cada compra. Ya sea para la despensa, facturas u otros gastos diarios, el 1.50% de cada compra realizada con la tarjeta MyNeighbor va directamente a la organización benéfica elegida por el titular de la tarjeta, como su iglesia. Luego, en enero, Everence envía cheques a las organizaciones sin fines de lucro 501(c)(3) seleccionadas, sin que se requiera trabajo adicional de su parte.

Desde 2017, hemos donado \$2.8 millones a través del programa MyNeighbor. Es una manera fácil de

fomentar el compromiso de la mayordomía y crear ingresos adicionales para los ministerios de su iglesia. Más información en everence.com/myneighbor.



Fortaleciendo el fondo de dotación de su iglesia

A partir de 2021, más del 40% de las organizaciones religiosas reportaron desafíos en la gestión de sus fondos de dotación, lo que destaca la necesidad de una planificación financiera sostenible (National Philanthropic Trust, 2021). Si bien se esperan datos actualizados, esta tendencia pone énfasis en la importancia de que las iglesias gestionen activamente sus dotaciones para la estabilidad a largo plazo.

Su iglesia puede desarrollar una estrategia para hacer crecer y administrar su dotación para crear un flujo de ingresos confiable para apoyar a los ministerios, especialmente en tiempos inciertos. Al involucrar a su congregación e implementar prácticas de donación reflexivas, puede sentar las bases para un crecimiento financiero duradero. Hable con su consultor de mayordomía de Everence o visite everence.com/churches para obtener más información.



2025 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 2025 MHS Assembly will be held March 18 – 20 in Pittsburgh, PA. Registration will begin on December 17, 2024. For more information and to register please [visit the MHS Association website](#).
- MHS Association provides monthly webinars on a variety of topics. The 2025 themes include leadership, strategy, governance, industry experts, faith, and work. All upcoming webinars can be found [here](#) on the MHS Association website.
- MHS Association members continue to utilize our tools and resources to support their ministries. For a breakdown of MHS Association member services, please [visit our website](#).
- [MHS Consulting](#) continues to serve MHS Association members and nonmembers in the health and human services arena; primarily providing resources in governance, executive search, executive coaching, interim placement, and strategic planning and positioning.
- The MHS Association Board of Directors and MHS Association Staff continue to advance diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion initiatives.
- MHS Association is currently exploring affiliation with Friends Services Alliance, in anticipation of finalization in 2025.
- MHS Association members enjoy access to our variety of network groups. View all network groups offered, [here](#).

For Thanksgiving and Prayer

- Continued prayer for staffing retention and recruitment. Finding and keeping qualified and compassionate employees is a significant concern for MHS Association member organizations and the vulnerable populations they serve across the country.
- We are grateful for the financial gifts, gifts in kind, prayer, and volunteer support to MHS Association member organizations.

Report to Central District Conference 2025

Helping Mennonite Church USA fulfill its educational mission

2024-25 SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

The selection sub-committee for the MEA Scholarship for BIPOC Students granted 13 scholarships, totaling \$28,000, to students from MEA partner colleges, universities and seminaries.

The deadline for scholarship applications for the 2025-26 academic year was April 1. Check MEA's website to see if this year's awardees have been announced! You can learn more about this scholarship at <http://www.MennoniteEducation.org/schools/mea-scholarship-for-bipoc-students>.

SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATORS

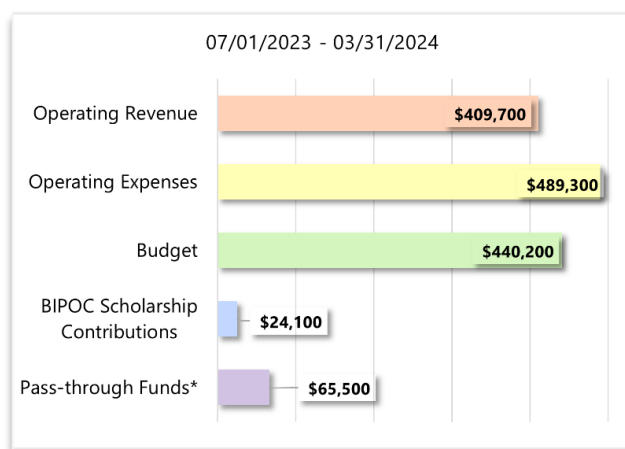
MEA supports the **Mennonite Public Educators group**. This group of public school teachers named some unique challenges that Mennonites face in public education. This led to a series of virtual gatherings for conversation, support and learning. MEA helps promote the group and broaden its reach. The next meeting is set to take place in person at MC USA's Follow Jesus '25 convention in July. Participation is free but registration is required. **Contact info@MennoniteEducation.org for more information.**

2023-24 ENROLLMENT REPORT

MEA produces an enrollment report annually, to identify enrollment trends across all its partner schools. The data includes the total number of students enrolled in the institutions, the number of Mennonite and non-Mennonite students enrolled, racial/ethnic diversity, and other demographics. Based on headcount in the fall of 2023, **Mennonite schools are impacting the lives of 8,971 students.** To view the 2023-24 report and previous reports, visit <http://www.mennoniteeducation.org/about-us/>.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The chart below shows the financial activity for MEA operations for the 2023-24 fiscal year to date, July 1, 2023, through March. 31, 2024. *Pass-through Funds are donated for schools, colleges and seminaries, sent through MEA.



POSSIBLE INTERGRATION WITH MENNONITE CHURCH USA

In January, the MEA Board of Directors made the unanimous decision to pursue integration with MC USA. Now, the MC USA Executive Board, as well as the MEA board of directors, are reviewing plans for possible integration. Upon the approval from both boards, integration is expected to be completed by June 30. Read more here:

<https://www.mennoniteeducation.org/news-events/news/2025/01/29/mea-board-votes-to-integrate-with-mc-usa-pending-mc-usa-board-approval/>

Thank you for supporting Anabaptist Mennonite education.

Grace & peace,
Michael Danner, Executive Director

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 you can join in, 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 in: MennoniteMission.net/Prayer.



Explore which service options might be 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.



"I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds" (Psalm 9:1, NIV). We, at Mennonite Mission Network, are full of gratitude for the wonderful deeds of Central District Conference. We have been blessed by our continued partnership and your active support through prayers, participation and financial gifts. We look forward to our continued journey together, as we respond to the call to be part of God's reconciling movement in the world.

Marisa Smucker

Marisa Smucker, Executive Director



Thank you for your generous support toward the work of Mennonite Mission Network. Blessings to each congregation and your ministries!

Eric Frey Martin

Eric Frey Martin, Director of Constituent Engagement

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

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

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
- » Maplewood Mennonite Church

Toni and Matthew Krabill, serving in Accra, Ghana

- » Oak Grove Mennonite Church
- » Eighth Street Mennonite Church
- » Silverwood Mennonite Church

Christy Harrison and Peter

Sensenig, serving in N'Djamena, Chad

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

Barbara Thuma, served at *La Casa Grande*, Benin (self-funded)

- » Maplewood Mennonite Church

Kate Widmer, serving in Montbéliard, France

- » Oak Grove Mennonite Church

Ben and Laurel Woodward-Breckbill, serving in Paris, France

- » First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.

Rebekah York, served in Bogota, Colombia

- » Silverwood Mennonite Church

Prayer partners

36

Service participants



Service sites

Mennonite Voluntary Service unit

- » Chicago, Illinois

SOOP

- » Camp Friedenswald

Just Peace Pilgrimage

Christ at the Border Pilgrimage

- » Eliza Herber
- » Gaige and Leah Hochstetler
- » Denise and Russell Jensen
- » Ruth Liechty
- » Stephen Lowe
- » Isaya and Shemaya Magatti
- » Layton Rothshank
- » Quinn Shreiner Landes
- » Adam Siemens-Rhodes
- » Barbara Thuma
- » Anna Yoder Schlabach
- » Claude Schrock

Civil Rights Pilgrimage

- » Mary and Tom Blosser
- » Jeff Boehr
- » Jo Ann and Milton Borntrager

» Julie and Philip Hart

» Barbara and Daniel Lehman

» Doug Luginbill

South Africa Pilgrimage

» Jo Ann and Milton Borntrager

Mennonite Voluntary Service

Conrad Liechty, serving in San Francisco, California

Service Adventure

Mir Knego, serving in Anchorage, Alaska

Aviva Setiawan, serving in Anchorage, Alaska

SOOP

Joy Kauffman King and Titus King, Tucson, Arizona

Shirley and Vernon King, Tucson, Arizona

Gayle Gerber Koontz and Ted Koontz, Tucson, Arizona

John and Kay Reimer, Gotha, Florida

Congregational giving to Mission Network



During Mission Networks' past fiscal year, August 1, 2023, through July 31, 2024, Central District Conference congregations gave **\$128,496 Thank You!**

Sé local. Sé global. Sé el evangelio.

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

En medio de guerras y conflictos, Dios sigue obrando y nosotros nos comprometemos a unirnos a él en su labor. Estas son algunas formas en que Ud. también puede unirse:



Participe con obreros/as del otro lado de la calle y alrededor del mundo apoyándoles económicamente. Contáctese con KarenH@MennoniteMission.net para brindar su ayuda económica.



Apoye los ministerios de la Red de Misión y sus obreros/as como compañero de oración. Visite nuestro sitio web para unirse: MennoniteMission.net/Prayer.



Conozca las opciones de servicio más adecuadas para los adultos y jóvenes de su congregación: MennoniteMission.net/Serve.



Aprenda sobre la justicia social mirando a través de una lente espiritual al participar en un Peregrinaje por la Paz Justa: MennoniteMission.net/JustPeace.



"Te alabaré, Señor, con todo mi corazón; contaré de las cosas maravillosas que has hecho" (Salmo 9:1, NTV). Como Red Menonita de Misión estamos muy agradecidos por las cosas maravillosas que ha hecho la Conferencia Central District. Hemos sido bendecidos por la constante colaboración y por su apoyo activo en forma de oraciones, participación y ofrendas. Esperamos seguir caminando juntos, respondiendo al llamado a formar parte del movimiento reconciliador de Dios en el mundo.

Marisa Smucker
Marisa Smucker, Directora Ejecutiva



Estamos agradecidos por su generoso apoyo al trabajo de la Red Menonita de Misión. Bendiciones a cada congregación y a sus ministerios.

Eric Frey Martin
Eric Frey Martin,
Director de Relaciones con los Constituyentes

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

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

Coparticipación de la Conferencia Central District

Nota: Las palabras subrayadas indican enlaces activos.

Apoyo a obreros/as alrededor del mundo



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

- » Lima Mennonite Church
- » Paoli Mennonite Fellowship

Joseph y Rachel Givens, sirven en Calais, Francia

- » Grace Mennonite Church
- » Maplewood Mennonite Church

Toni y Matthew Krabill, sirven en Accra, Ghana

- » Oak Grove Mennonite Church
- » Eighth Street Mennonite Church
- » Silverwood Mennonite Church

Christy Harrison y Peter Sensenig, sirven en N'Djamena, Chad

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

Barbara Thuma, sirvió en La Casa Grande, Benín (autofinanciada)

- » Maplewood Mennonite Church

Kate Widmer, sirve en Montbéliard, Francia

- » Oak Grove Mennonite Church

Ben y Laurel Woodward-Breckbill, sirven en París, Francia

- » First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.

Rebekah York, sirvió en Bogotá, Colombia

- » Silverwood Mennonite Church

Comprometidos en oración

36

Participantes y lugares de servicio



Sitios de Servicio Cristiano

Unidad de Mennonite Voluntary Service (Servicio Voluntario Menonita)

- » [Chicago, Illinois](#)

Sitio de SOOP

- » [Camp Friedenswald](#)

Just Peace Pilgrimage (Peregrinaje por la Paz Justa)

Peregrinaje de Cristo en la frontera

- » **Eliza Herber**
- » **Gaige y Leah Hochstetler**
- » **Denise y Russell Jensen**
- » **Ruth Liechty**
- » **Stephen Lowe**
- » **Isaya y Shemaya Magatti**
- » **Layton Rothshank**
- » **Quinn Shreiner Landes**
- » **Adam Siemens-Rhodes**
- » **Barbara Thuma**
- » **Anna Yoder Schlabach**
- » **Claude Schrock**

Peregrinaje por los derechos civiles

- » **Mary y Tom Blosser**
- » **Jeff Boehr**

- » **Jo Ann y Milton Borntrager**

- » **Julie y Philip Hart**

- » **Barbara y Daniel Lehman**

- » **Doug Luginbill**

Peregrinaje en Sudáfrica

- » **Jo Ann y Milton Borntrager**

Mennonite Voluntary Service (Servicio Voluntario Menonita)

Conrad Liechty, sirve en San Francisco, California

Service Adventure

(Servicio Aventurero)

Mir Knego, sirve en Anchorage, Alaska

Aviva Setiawan, sirve en Anchorage, Alaska

SOOP (Oportunidades de Servicio con Nuestros Hermanos)

Joy Kauffman King y Titus King, Tucson, Arizona

Shirley y Vernon King, Tucson, Arizona

Gayle Gerber Koontz y Ted Koontz, Tucson, Arizona

John y Kay Reimer, Gotha, Florida

Aporte congregacional a la Red Menonita



Durante el último año fiscal de la Red de Misión, desde el 1 de agosto de 2023 al 31 de julio de 2024, las congregaciones de la Conferencia Central District ofrendaron **\$128.496 ¡Gracias!**

Anabaptist Disabilities Network

Annual Report for the year ending January 31, 2025

Serving the Anabaptist Community:

- **Breaking Down Barriers Study Committee** — CoB Annual Conference 2024
- **Workshops and Trainings** at Bethany Theological Seminary, CoB Annual Conference, and Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center
- **Webinar** with Mosaic Mennonite Conference on *Nurturing Accessible Family Ministry*
- Disability & Theology articles in, ***Vision: A Journal of Church and Theology***

Resourcing Congregations:

- **Consulting, preaching, teaching** in 7 congregations
- **Online Accessibility Audit:** In FYE 2025, three congregations received a seal of accessibility and on-going support from ADN to keep increasing access and belonging.
- **Barrier Free Grants:** In FYE 2025, we gave 8 grants.
- **Launched a Redesigned Website** with increased accessibility, refreshed resources, and information on removing barriers in the congregation.



Sharing Your Stories:

- **Connections Newsletter**
 - Chronic Illness, Winter 2024
 - Cerebral Palsy, Summer 2024
 - Baptism & Intellectual Disabilities, Fall 2024
- **Opening Doors Blog** stories of belonging, tips for inclusion



Be Involved

- **Become a Partner Congregation.**
 - Designate a **congregational disability advocate** in your congregation.
 - Give a **congregational donation** of \$500 to \$1000 annually.
- **Become a Building the Future Partner:** As an individual, donate \$1,000 per year.

Current Staff

Jeanne Davies, Executive Director
Chika Sunoto, Office Administrator
Emily Hunsbaker, Communications Director

Current Board

Mitch Stutzman, President
Laura Stone, Vice President
Lyle Miller, Secretary
Chris Stauffer, Treasurer
Rebekah Flores
Jon-Erik Misz, **Emily Krabill**

Financial Summary:

Income:	\$111,492	Expenses:	\$126,242	Assets (End of Year): ..	\$62,105
Individual Contributions	\$87,444	Staffing	\$78,685	Operating Fund:	\$25,105
Congregational Contributions...	\$20,185	Barrier Free Grants	\$4,000	Reserve Fund:	\$37,000
Other Income.....	\$3,863	Resources & Other	\$43,557		

Anabaptist Disabilities Network

Informe anual para el año que finaliza el 31 de enero 2025

Sirviendo a la comunidad anabautista:

- **Comité de Estudio Rompiendo Barreras** — Conferencia Anual CoB 2024
- **Talleres y capacitaciones en el Seminario Teológico Betania**, la Conferencia Anual de CoB y el Centro Ministerial Susquehanna Valley
- **Seminario web** con la Conferencia Menonita Mosaica sobre *El Cuidado de la Familia Pastoral*
- Artículos sobre la Discapacidad y Teología en, ***Visión: Una Revista de la Iglesia y la Teología***

Proveyendo recursos para las congregaciones:

- **Consultando, predicando, enseñando** en 7 congregaciones
- **Auditoría de accesibilidad en línea:** En el año fiscal 2025, tres congregaciones recibieron un sello de accesibilidad y apoyo continuo de ADN para seguir mejorando el acceso y la pertenencia.
- **Subvenciones sin barreras:** En el año fiscal 2025, otorgamos 8 subvenciones.
- **Rediseñamos nuestro sitio web** con mayor accesibilidad, recursos actualizados e información sobre cómo eliminar barreras en la congregación.



Compartiendo tus historias:

- **El Boletín de Conexiones**
 - Enfermedades Crónicas, invierno 2024
 - Parálisis Cerebral, verano de 2024
 - Bautismo y Discapacidades Intelectuales, Otoño 2024
- **El Blog: Abriendo Puertas** historias de pertenencia, consejos para la inclusión



Involúcrate

- **Conviértete en una congregación asociada.**
 - Designa a un **promotor congregacional de personas con discapacidades** en tu congregación.
 - Háza una **donación congregacional** anual de \$500 a \$1,000.
- **Conviértete en un socio de Construyendo el Futuro:** Como individuo, puedes donar \$1,000 por año.

Personal actual

Jeanne Davies, Directora Ejecutiva
Chika Sunoto, Administrador de Oficina
Emily Hunsbaker, Directora de Comunicaciones

Junta Directiva actual

Mitch Stutzman Presidente
Laura Piedra Vicepresidente
Lyle Miller Secretario

Chris Stauffer Tesorero
Rebeca Flores
Jon-Erik Misz, Emily Krabill

Resumen Financiero:

Ingresos:	\$111,492	Gastos:	\$126,242	Activos (fin de año):	\$62,105
Contribuciones Individuales	\$87,444	Personal	\$78,685	Fondo Operativo:	\$25,105
Contribuciones Congregacionales ...	\$20,185	Subvenciones sin barreras ...	\$4,000	Fondo de Reserva:.....	\$37,000
Otros Ingresos	\$3,863	Recursos y otros	\$43,557		

Report to Central District Conference

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 Global Anabaptism*
- Master of Arts: Theology and Peace Studies
- Doctor of Ministry in Leadership*
- Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction*
- Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies* (choose your own courses)
- Mennonite Education Agency Hispanic Ministries – AMBS Graduate Certificate in Theology* (in Spanish)
- Journey Missional Leadership Development Program* (undergraduate-level certificate)

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. 23–26, 2026

Offerings of one to two years

- Transition to Leadership*: program for new pastors
- Ministry Reflection Circles*: reflect on current ministry challenges with the support of a group
- Spiritual Direction Seminars*

ambs.edu/leadership-and-enrichment



(Above) In April 2024, 13 women and nine men from four countries — Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania and the U.S. — graduated from AMBS.

Central District Conference connections

- **Doctor of Ministry students:** Charles Buller (Silverwood), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth St), Doug Luginbill (First – Bluffton), James Rissler (Atlanta)
- **Master of Divinity students:** Scott Coulter, Stephen Lowe, Kyle Schlabach (Assembly); Melika Kauffman Hersherberger (Normal); Rena LeBlanc (Emmaus Road); Daniel Teye Nuerter (Hively Ave)
- **Master of Arts students:** Andrea Cramer (Keller Park), Mir Knego (Chapel Hill), Christian Nawai (Hively Ave)
- **Graduate Certificate student:** Maria Renée Martinez-Sywulka (Assembly)
- **Journey participants/mentors:** April Lo (Chicago Community)/Anne Munley (Illinois Conf), Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee)/Mariah Martin (Faith)
- **Board member:** John Daniels (Covenant)

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
 - Transforming Congregational Conflict and Communication
 - Challenging Christian Nationalism
 - Biblical Interpretation Across the Two Testaments
- 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 about 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

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 Hispanos 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 en Línea*: seis semanas, basados en la discusión, sin crédito
- Invite a AMBS*: solicite un/a orador/a
- Conferencia de Pastores/as y Líderes*: 23–26 de febrero del 2026

Ofertas de uno a dos años

- La Transición al Liderazgo*: un programa para nuev@s pastores/as
- Círculos de Reflexión Ministerial*: reflexione sobre los desafíos actuales del ministerio con el apoyo de un grupo
- Seminarios de Dirección Espiritual*

ambs.edu/leadership-and-enrichment



(Arriba) En el 2024, 13 mujeres y 9 hombres de 4 países —los EE. UU., Etiopía, Sudáfrica, Tanzania— se graduaron de AMBS.

Conexiones a la Conferencia Central District

- **Alumn@s (Doctorado en Ministerio):** Charles Buller (Silverwood), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth St), Doug Luginbill (First – Bluffton), James Rissler (Atlanta)
- **Alumn@s (Maestro de Divinidad):** Scott Coulter, Stephen Lowe, Kyle Schlabach (Assembly); Melika Kauffman Hershberger (Normal); Rena LeBlanc (Emmaus Road); Daniel Teye Nuerthey (Hively Ave)
- **Alumn@s (Maestro de Artes):** Andrea Cramer (Keller Park), Mir Nkego (Chapel Hill), Christian Nawai (Hively Ave),
- **Alumna (Certificado de Posgrado):** Maria Renée Martinez-Sywulka (Assembly)
- **Participantes/mentor@s en Journey:** April Lo (Chicago Community)/Anne Munley (Conferencia Illinois), Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee)/Mariah Martin (Faith)
- **Miembro de la Junta:** John Daniels (Covenant)

¿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
 - Desafiar el Nacionalismo Cristiano
 - Interpretación Bíblica a través de los dos Testamentos
- 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



2025 Report to Central District Conference

ANABAPTISM AT 500

During the spring 2025 semester, Bluffton University hosted numerous events in conjunction with the celebration of Anabaptism at 500. During this time of commemoration, Bluffton reflected on its faith heritage as a Mennonite institution. **Dr. John D. Roth**, emeritus professor of history at Goshen College and project director for Anabaptism at 500 for MennoMedia, was a featured speaker at many of these events. Bluffton will continue its commemoration of Anabaptism at 500 in the **fall semester**. A full list of events can be found at www.bluffton.edu/anabaptism500

BLUFFTON COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Bluffton College Foundation, a newly established 501(c)(3) charitable organization dedicated to supporting the long-term success and development of the Bluffton campus was launched Feb. 14, 2025. **Edward Diller '69** was named chairman of the board, which will be made up of Bluffton alumni and Mennonite-affiliated friends and donors. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.bluffton.edu/foundation

SPIRITUAL LIFE WEEK

Rev. Dr. Maxwell Kennel, pastor, Hamilton Mennonite Church, and director, Pandora Press, was the spring semester's Spiritual Life Week speaker. Rev. Kennel spoke at Forum on Tuesday, March 25, and also at Chapel on Thursday, March 27, focusing on the theme "Faith and Memory" in connection to the university's commemoration of Anabaptism at 500.

THE LION AND LAMB PEACE ARTS CENTER

The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center hosted a Taiko Japanese drumming workshop, Feb. 18, open to students, faculty, staff and community members. Additionally, the **"Teaching Peace to Children"** program, a series of sessions on issues such as conflict resolution and cultural understanding, began again in early March. The Lion and Lamb also welcomed **interim assistant director Georgia Adams** in early February.

EARLY ANABAPTIST BIBLES

Dr. John D. Roth, **Dr. Gerald J. Mast**, **Dr. Raymond F. Person, Jr.** and local participants in Anabaptist Bible study groups celebrated the release of the Anabaptist Community Bible Sunday, March 9, as part of Bluffton's Anabaptism at 500 series. **Musselman Library** also hosted an exhibit "Pages of Persistence: An exhibit of early Anabaptist Bibles," March 9-23.

125TH COMMENCEMENT

Bluffton University welcomed its 125th graduating class this May. **Dr. Perry Bush**, emeritus professor of history, was chosen to be the Commencement speaker during the May 3 ceremony in Sommer Center.

MERGER STOPPED

Bluffton University was informed that the University of Findlay Board of Trustees voted on Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2025, not to proceed with the joint application to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for merger approval and to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding signed on March 19, 2024. To learn more visit www.bluffton.edu/strategic-faq

Dr. J. Alexander Sider appointed Interim President

Bluffton University announced Feb. 26, 2025, that **Dr. J. Alexander Sider** was named interim president effective immediately. Dr. Sider, a longtime member of the Bluffton faculty and previously Dean of Academic Affairs, has served the university in various roles since joining in 2006. His leadership, deep knowledge of the institution and dedication to Bluffton's mission make him well-qualified to guide the university through this transition. The university's Board of Trustees will work closely with Dr. Sider to ensure a smooth transition and continue to advance Bluffton's mission of "preparing students of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation."

Save the date

"Grace and Peace" Concert

Oct. 26, 2025, Yoder Recital Hall

Bluffton University Homecoming

Oct. 4, 2025

MC USA Convention

July 8-12, 2025, Greensboro, N.C.

Stay tuned for more information about the Bluffton University Alumni Meetup.

Meet with fellow alumni and visit with Interim President Sider.

Thank you for visiting the
Bluffton University Campus
during the CDC gathering!

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

Shalom Collaboratory Equips Faith Leaders and Congregations

EMS recently established the Shalom Collaboratory for pastors, lay leaders, nonprofit and community partners, parents and caregivers to learn and experiment with practices to build peace for restored relationships. The Shalom Collaboratory at EMS offers training in conflict transformation, trauma resilience, adaptive leadership, spiritual direction, and secure parenting. Learn more or request a custom training at emu.edu/seminary/shalom



Adam Russell Taylor, president of Sojourners, speaks at 2024 Shalom Academy (formerly SLT)

EMS Receives \$1.25 Million to Support Secure Parenting

EMU has established *Conectere* with a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. Each summer starting in 2024, cohorts of parents and caregivers will start meeting for free attachment-based training to grow in sharing faith and values with their children. *Conectere* is directed by Dr. Sarah Bixler, EMS associate dean, in collaboration with faculty in practical theology and counseling at Yale Divinity School and EMU. Parents and caregivers may apply for cohorts, and pastoral and lay leaders can register interest in *Conectere* resources at emu.edu/conectere

New 36-Credit Master of Arts in Theological Studies (MATS)

EMS's new MATS is designed for leaders in non-pastoral settings to explore the intersection of theology and another field, to pursue further graduate study or study for personal enrichment. The MATS offers concentrations in theology and culture, biblical studies, or peacebuilding. As with all EMS degree programs, courses can be completed online or on campus, with up to 100% tuition scholarships. Inquire for further information or apply at emu.edu/seminary/admissions



Rev. Chidi Ihezuoh, MACL '24 speaks at May 5 commencement

EMS Celebrates 2024 Graduates

"The relationships and what we have learned are a lifetime treasure," reflected Rev. Hilarion Chidi Ihezuoh, a 2024 Master of Arts in Christian Leadership graduate. Chidi, a pastor in Mosaic Mennonite Conference originally from Nigeria, was the featured graduate student speaker at EMU commencement. He testified to the power of relationships and knowledge he experienced while studying at EMS. On May 5, five graduates earned

master's degrees in Christian leadership and divinity; and certificates in Christian studies and faith-based peacebuilding. This small graduating class, following 19 EMS graduates in 2023, reflects extended time for degree completion resulting from the impact of the global pandemic.

EMS Mission

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, on location and online. Custom-designed trainings available!

[emu.edu/seminary/
training](https://emu.edu/seminary/training)



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

SPRING 2025

CENTRAL DISTRICT MENNONITE CONFERENCE

EMU ANNUAL REPORT

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

In May, on a beautiful spring day, we sent forth 347 graduates to new opportunities and new communities with a charge to witness faithfully, serve compassionately, and walk boldly in the way of peace. This was the “COVID Class of 2024” --- many of whom entered in 2020 as we were engulfed in a pandemic and had never experienced a high school graduation or an in-person visit to campus. Two weeks later, EMU hosted the Marpeck Dean’s Conference. This biennial Mennonite Higher Education Conference brought nearly 90 faculty and staff from Mennonite and Marpeck Fund institutions of higher education across the US and Canada.

During the spring semester, students traveled to Guatemala and Cuba where they lived with host families, studied Spanish, and traveled to other parts of the country. This summer, EMU students are experiencing intercultural learning in Switzerland and Italy, at the US/Mexico border, and in Washington, DC.

Two Key milestones for EMU:

1. The EMU at Lancaster campus moves to a new location in Lititz, PA in July. The facility, owned by the eCommerce tech company Litrak, Inc., will provide a more visible location, closer access to our flight training partner, the Lancaster Airport, and a growing network of partnerships with long-term care facilities.
2. The PBS Viewpoint Series with Dennis Quaid did a documentary on us. Their research revealed that we do diversity, equity and inclusion very well for a Christian university. You can go to [EMU’s Viewpoint with Dennis Quaid website](#) to read the national news article and watch the 30-second commercial and the 6-minute documentary with the Dennis Quaid segment.

Finally, Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS) will launch a Doctor of Ministry in Peacemaking and Social Change in the fall of 2025, our second doctoral program at EMU (after Doctorate of Nursing Practice). This fully asynchronous doctoral program draws on EMU’s reputation as a leader in peace and justice and taps into one of the few growing areas in theological education. 33% of current students are actively serving in pastoral leadership roles while attending seminary, half of our students are Mennonite, and half are preparing for ministry as a second or third career.

Thank you for your partnership in prayer and support,

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 2025 has seven undergraduates, three seminary, and five graduate students enrolled from the Central District Mennonite Conference.

Giving

Central District Mennonite churches gave over \$35,300 in matching church grants to their students during the year ending June 2024.

- ▶ **Susan Schultz Huxman**,
president
- ▶ **Kirk Shisler**, *vice president for advancement*
- ▶ **Laura Daily**, *director of advancement operations*
- ▶ **Braydon Hoover**, *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.

2024-25 Report to Central District Conference

MISSION

Goshen College transforms local and global communities through courageous, creative and compassionate leaders. Shaped by Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, we integrate academic excellence and real-world experience with active love for God and neighbor.

VISION

Goshen College will cultivate joy, growth and purpose, preparing students to thrive in life, leadership and service. Rooted in the way of Jesus, we will seek inclusive community and transformative justice in all that we do.



Rebecca J. Stoltzfus '83

President

president@goshen.edu

► Read the president's blog at:
goshen.edu/president-blog



Dan Koop Liechty '88

*Director of alumni engagement
& international student adviser*

alumni@goshen.edu



Jen Shenk '94

Campus pastor

jshenk@goshen.edu

► Watch past campus
chapels and convocations at:
goshen.edu/podcasts

CAMPUS NEWS

Our Campus Ministries 2024-25 theme: *Rooted in Love*

Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbor as we love ourselves. We get better at love by practicing it — first by receiving God's love and then extending it to others. Practicing love is a lifelong process, and it isn't easy! But the choice to start with love will bear fruit over time. May we commit ourselves to the active practice of loving well, so that we can take root, grow and flourish!

Academic Success Center Offers Holistic Support

A new Academic Success Center has expanded student services in new space at the campus' Good Library. Michelle Blank, director of academic success, said, "We have greater capacity to journey alongside our students as they strive toward success." The center offers accessibility services, testing, tutoring, writing support, coaching, advising, Hispanic and inclusive student programs. The center is already popular with students.

New Master of Arts in Teaching addresses teacher shortage

A new Master of Arts in Teaching program will admit students in fall 2025. The program addresses the significant need for teachers amid shortages nationwide. It also includes a bonus, an English Learners License. The curriculum and format are tailored to the school schedule. The evening classes are remote, slowing down during the school year and accelerating during the summer.



CONFERENCE CONNECTIONS

\$77,991

Amount Central District Conference churches are giving 23 students for the 2024-25 school year.

The Goshen College Church Aid Matching Grant program provides a dollar-for-dollar match of the first \$1,000 per student and a 1:4 match after that, up to full tuition.

GLOBAL EDUCATION

Students from the conference are involved on- and off-campus in many edifying ways, but we specifically recognize students who have studied and served through GC's Global Education program. **Isaac Bontrager** from Assembly Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN), **Henry Meyer** from Maplewood Mennonite Church (Fort Wayne, IN) and **Emily Hershberger** from Normal Mennonite Church (IL) all spent the summer of 2024 studying and serving in Ecuador.

FEATURED LINKS

Campus News
goshen.edu/news

Campus Events
goshen.edu/calendar

Music Center Events
gcmusiccenter.org/events

Athletics Events
goleafs.net/calendar

Study-Service Term Blogs
goshen.edu/sst

Informe 2024-25 para Central District Conference

MISIÓN

Goshen College transforma las comunidades locales y globales a través de sus líderes valientes, creativos y compasivos. Moldeados por la tradición anabautistamenonita, integramos la excelencia académica y la experiencia del mundo real con el amor por Dios y el prójimo.

VISIÓN

Goshen College cultivará la alegría, el crecimiento y el propósito, preparando a los estudiantes para prosperar en la vida, el liderazgo y el servicio. Arraigados en el camino de Jesús, buscaremos una comunidad inclusiva y una justicia transformadora en todo lo que hagamos.



Rebecca J. Stoltzfus '83
Presidenta

president@goshen.edu

► Lea el blog de la presidenta en:
goshen.edu/presidentblog



Dan Koop Liechty '88
Director de Participación de
Alumnos Egresados y Asesor de
Estudiantes Internacionales
alumni@goshen.edu



Jen Shenk '94
Pastor del Campus
jshenk@goshen.edu

► Ver capillas anteriores y
convocatorias del campus:
goshen.edu/podcasts

ENLACES DESTACADOS

Noticias del Campus
goshen.edu/news

Eventos en el Campus
goshen.edu/calendar

Eventos del Centro de Música
gcmusiccenter.org/events

Eventos Deportivos
goleafs.net/calendar

Blogs del Servicio Estudiantil
goshen.edu/sst

NOTICIAS DEL CAMPUS

Enraizados en Amor es el tema de nuestros Ministerios en el Campus para 2024-25

Jesús nos llama a amar a nuestro prójimo de la misma manera que nos amamos a nosotros mismos. Nosotros mejoramos en el tema de amar con la práctica al recibir el amor de Dios y después extendiendo hacia otros. La práctica de amar es un proceso de toda la vida y no es fácil! Sin embargo, la elección de comenzar con amor trae frutos con el tiempo. La esperanza es que podamos comprometernos a practicar a *amar de verdad* de una manera activa para que podamos enraizarnos, crecer y florecer!

El Centro de Éxito Académico ofrece apoyo integral

Un nuevo Centro para el Éxito Académico ha expandido sus servicios a estudiantes en un nuevo espacio en la Biblioteca Good del campus. La Directora del programa para Éxito Académico Michelle Blank dijo "Tenemos mayor capacidad para caminar al lado de nuestros estudiantes en su esfuerzo para alcanzar el éxito". El centro ofrece servicios de accesibilidad, evaluación, tutorías, apoyo para la escritura, formación, asesoramiento académico y programas destinados para estudiantes hispanos y con trasfondos diversos. El centro ya es popular entre los estudiantes.

Nueva Maestría de Artes en Enseñanza que aborda la escasez de maestros

Un nuevo programa de Maestría de Artes en Enseñanza comenzará a admitir estudiantes en el otoño del 2025. El programa aborda la aguda necesidad de maestros en el contexto de escasez

CONEXIONES DE CONFERENCIAS

\$77,991

Cantidad que el Distrito Central de iglesias están proporcionando a 23 estudiantes para el año escolar 2024-2025.

En el programa de dolar por dolar de ayuda financiera de Goshen College, las iglesias igualan las donaciones contribuyendo con un dólar por cada dólar recaudado hasta llegar a los primeros \$1,000. Después de esta cantidad, las donaciones son de un dólar por cada 4 dólares contribuidos hasta pagar la matrícula completa.

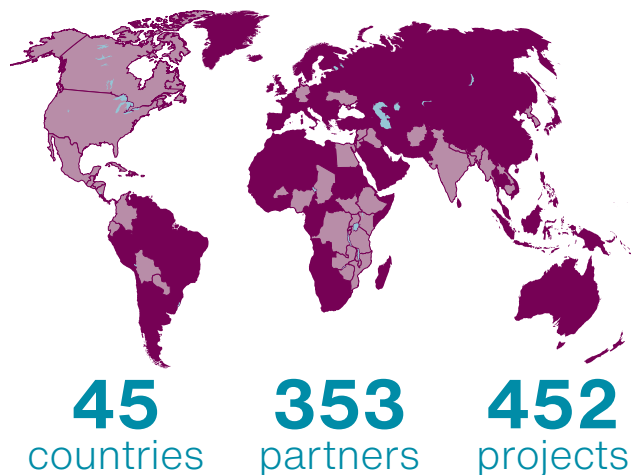
EDUCACIÓN GLOBAL

Los estudiantes de la conferencia participan dentro y fuera del campus de muchas maneras edificantes, pero reconocemos específicamente a los estudiantes que han estudiado y servido a través del programa de Educación Global de GC. **Isaac Bontrager** de Assembly Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN), **Henry Meyer** de Maplewood Mennonite Church (Fort Wayne, IN) y **Emily Hershberger** de Normal Mennonite Church (IL) todos pasaron el verano del 2024 estudiando y sirviendo en Ecuador.

nacional. El programa además incluye como bono una Licencia de Aprendizaje de Inglés. El currículo y el formato se adaptarán al horario escolar. Las clases serán por la noche y en línea, con un ritmo menos intenso durante el año escolar que se intensificará durante el verano.

2025 report for Central District Conference

MCC U.S. and MCC Great Lakes
(574) 534-4133 • GreatLakes@mcc.org • mcc.org



At left, Mary Nyashin Tsief, 70, who receives monthly food packages of sorghum, beans and oil through an MCC-supported project, leads visitors to her dwelling in a camp in Rubkona, South Sudan, for families displaced by conflict or flooding. (MCC photo/Mackenzie Schwarz)

MCC's 2025 guiding scripture

"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him.

John 1:39 (NIV)

"Come and see," said Jesus. MCC's partners often invite us to spend time learning about the people we serve and the realities they face. People like Mary Nyashin Tsief, living in a camp for displaced people in South Sudan. Around the world, more than 120 million people have been displaced by conflict, drought, disaster, or economic conditions. With your help, MCC is responding to the refugee crisis by providing food, clean water, shelter, education, trauma healing and much more. 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, you are part of sharing God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ. Thank you!

With thanksgiving,

Eric Kurtz, *MCC Great Lakes Executive Director*

MCC and Central District Conference connections

- Central District Conference congregations play important roles in MCC relief sales, thrift shops, My Coins Count fundraisers and meat canning. They also help with comforter bashes and material resources drives, like the school kit challenge.
- Various CDC congregations hosted MCC speakers.
- Groups from Columbus Mennonite Church and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship volunteered with Appalachia Build (formerly SWAP) in Kimball, West Virginia.
- MCC has connected on various levels with Moveable Feast faith community in Chicago, including partnering on immigration work.
- MCC staff are also developing a relationship with the newly emerging Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship.
- CDC churches and families are hosting International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) participants.
- Peter Martin represents Central District Conference on the MCC Great Lakes Board.**

“'Come and see' is an invitation to approach our work with humility and curiosity.”

- Eric Kurtz

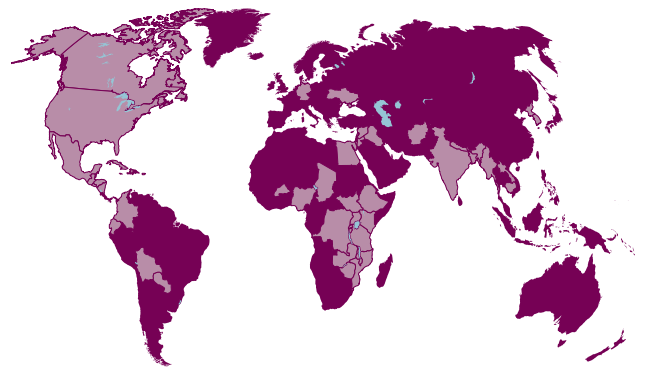
We are grateful to the many churches, businesses and individuals who have supported the building of a new MCC Material Resources Center in Kidron, Ohio, over the past several years.

We are excited about the opportunity to partner with local communities and increase the amount of kits and comforters from our region that will spread relief and hope to people around the world.



Informe 2025 para Conferencia del Distrito Central

MCC U.S. y MCC Great Lakes
(574) 534-4133 • GreatLakes@mcc.org • mcc.org



45 países
353 asociados
452 proyectos



A la izquierda, Mary Nyashin Tsief, de 70 años, que recibe paquetes mensuales de alimentos de sorgo, frijoles y aceite a través de un proyecto apoyado por la CCM, conduciendo a visitantes al lugar donde vive, dentro de un campamento en Rubkona, Sudán del Sur, para familias desplazadas por conflictos o inundaciones. (Foto del CCM/Mackenzie Schwarz)

Conexiones con la CCM y la Conferencia del Distrito Central

- Las congregaciones de la Conferencia del Distrito Central desempeñan un papel importante en las ventas de ayuda- Relief Sale de la CCM, las tiendas de segunda mano, la recaudación de monedas My Coins Count y el enlatado de carne. También ayudan con las campañas para recaudar materiales, para poder hacer edredones y crear más kits escolares.
- Varias congregaciones de la CDC han invitado a representantes de la CCM para hacer presentaciones públicas.
- Grupos provenientes de la Iglesia Menonita de Columbus y de la iglesia Menonita de Chapel Hill dieron servicio voluntario en el programa Appalachia Build (antes llamado SWAP) ubicado en Kimball, al Oeste de Virginia.
- La CCM se ha conectado en múltiples formas con la comunidad de Fe Moveable Feast de Chicago, esto incluye colaboraciones en el trabajo de inmigración.
- El personal de la CCM también está desarrollando nuevas colaboraciones con la Iglesia recién creada Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship.
- Las iglesias y familias de la CDC están proveyendo alojamiento a nuestros participantes del Programa Internacional de Intercambio de Voluntarios (IVEP).
- Peter Martin representa a la Conferencia del Distrito Central en la Junta Directiva del MCC Great Lakes.**

Escritura guía del CCM para 2025

—Vengan a ver — contestó Jesús. Ellos fueron, pues, y vieron dónde se hospedaba. Ese mismo día se quedaron con él.

Juan 1:39 (NVI)

“Ven a ver” dijo Jesús. Los socios de la CCM a menudo nos invitan a pasar tiempo aprendiendo sobre las personas a las que servimos y las realidades a las que se enfrentan. Personas como Mary Nyashin Tsief, que vive en un campamento para personas desplazadas en Sudán del Sur. En todo el mundo, más de 120 millones de personas han sido desplazadas por conflictos, sequías, desastres o condiciones económicas. Con su ayuda, el CCM está respondiendo a la crisis de los refugiados, proporcionando alimentos, agua potable, refugio, educación, curación de traumas y mucho más. Ya sea por medio de donaciones de dinero, oraciones por la CCM, haciendo labor de voluntario en una de nuestras tiendas de segunda mano de la CCM, empaquetando los kits escolares, anudando edredones, enlatando carne o comprando en las subastas de la venta de ayuda-relief sale, usted está compartiendo el amor y compasión de Dios por todos en el nombre de Cristo. ¡Gracias!

Con un profundo agradecimiento,
Eric Kurtz, *Director Ejecutivo del MCC Great Lakes*

“'Ven a Ver' es una invitación para acercarse a ver nuestra labor con humildad y curiosidad.”

-Eric Kurtz

Estamos muy agradecidos con todas las iglesias, empresas y personas que en los años recientes nos han dado su apoyo para la construcción de un nuevo Centro de Recursos Materiales de la CCM en Kidron, Ohio. Nos da una

gran emoción esta nueva oportunidad para que en esta región podamos unirnos más en colaboración con nuestra comunidad para incrementar las cantidades de kits escolares y edredones que llevarán alivio y esperanza a personas de todo el mundo.



2024 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.

Steve Thomas, Mennonite Men U.S. Co-Coordinator
stevet@mennonitemen.org | (574) 202-0048

Jon Zirkle, Mennonite Men U.S. Co-Coordinator
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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.

This year we funded tree planting with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) to restore trees on properties destroyed by destructive fires and floods. This is part of our partnership with MDS to respond to natural disasters like these that are projected to increase with climate

change.

We continue to work with large-scale agroforestry projects in the global south for climate action and assisting vulnerable communities experiencing environmental injustice. In these settings, trees help sequester carbon, cool the planet, regenerate soils, and provide fruit and nut crops to support these communities.

For our next projects, we plan to assist seven Mennonite communities in DR Congo and Angola with a second round of planting 50,000 trees. We now need to raise \$60,000 for these projects.

Along with individual donations to make these grants, we invite carbon offset contributions from households, churches, and businesses seeking to reduce their carbon footprint and support climate action. To learn how you can participate in this campaign to restore God's Earth, visit mennonitemen.org/jointrees.

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.

We recently presented a \$40,000 JoinHands grant to Chin Emmanuel Church in Houston, Texas for purchasing

a church building. This young congregation founded by refugees from Myanmar fleeing ethnic and religious persecution, is now part of Western District Conference in Mennonite Church USA and flourishing with more than 200 people.

Congregations like this are prominent among new churches in Mennonite Church USA. Approximately half of all new MC USA congregations are from ethnic-racial backgrounds. This trend reflects the church's increased racial and ethnic diversity where congregational growth has been most significant.

Mennonite Men is the only Mennonite organization that makes grants to new churches for their first meeting places. We are now raising funds to make our next \$40,000 grant for a new church

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.

On a weekend in November, eleven men ages 31-55 from six different Mennonite congregations gathered at The Hermitage (Michigan) for retreat. Our time together included eating meals in silence, small group discussions, wider group reflection, prayer, deep sharing, and wandering the woods. There was also journaling, drumming, a campfire, sketching, and rituals. We are moved to witness firsthand that men in their younger years want these experiences.

Please support Mennonite Men and our efforts to join men together through retreats, workshops, book studies, and online resources. Gifts designated to JoinMen support these offerings and make it possible to reach more men who want to engage, grow, and serve in the ways of Jesus for God's shalom.

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

CDC Wave (wave bw)



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

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.

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
Updated June 2024

Policies and Procedures:

Communities of Faith Joining CDC

For Congregations Already Part of an MC USA Conference

Congregations which are members of another MC USA conference are expected to follow the process for changing conferences as outlined by MC USA leadership.

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.

Congregations Which Are Not Part of an MC USA Conference

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.

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

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, 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: _____

Child Safety Policy

Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA (CDC)

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CDC Child Safety Policy Overview

- Policy [does not permit any abuse](#) and includes procedures designed to prevent acts of sexual misconduct that are communicated to all employees and volunteers working with children.
- No minor is ever [alone with only one adult](#) unless in a [counseling or one-on-one mentoring](#) situation under the guidance of policy.
- We conduct nationwide and statewide criminal or sex offender [background checks](#) on all employees and volunteers working with children and keep signed release forms on file that allows CDC or partner organizations to request a criminal background check.
- At least two organizational [reference checks](#) are conducted on all employees and volunteers working with children.
- All volunteers are required to be [involved with CDC or a CDC member congregation for at least six months](#) before they are allowed in any position involving contact with children.
- We provide guidance and [training](#) on [what constitutes abuse/molestation and how to respond](#).
- CDC's Child Safety Policy provides detailed guidance on
 - [Prevention](#) (listing of detailed ways to minimize occurrences)
 - [At least two adults at all times.](#)
 - [Restroom safety.](#)
 - [Identification](#) (events, patterns, or trends that can indicate abuse)
 - [Reporting](#) (how and whom to report concerns or incidents without fear of retribution).
 - [Investigation](#) (identifying responsibilities of all parties, which include reporting to police as indicated)
 - [Protection](#) (of victims from harm during investigation)
 - [Response](#) (analysis of occurrences to determine what changes are needed, if any, to policies and procedures to prevent further occurrences)
- CDC programs and emerging communities will confirm that all volunteers/staff have:
 - received, read and signed the policy in the last year.
 - received appropriate training in the last year.
 - had a background check and cleared.
 - Had 2 organization references checked and cleared.
- CDC programs and emerging communities will ensure that a [Site Specific Child Safety Assessment](#) will be conducted at each location.

Preface

For the purposes of this policy “Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA,” “Central District Conference” or “CDC” means any CDC activities, events, meetings and conferences along with initiatives and programs directly under CDC. It also includes emerging communities/church plants/groups under the fiscal sponsorship of CDC. It does not include emerging communities/church plants/provisional members/member congregations or their activities when they are **not** directly functioning under the EIN of CDC or under the fiscal sponsorship of CDC.

General Purpose Statement

Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA (CDC) is committed to being a compassionate conference working together toward peace and wholeness. We desire to create a safe space where adults and children are welcome to worship and learn together. We recognize that physical, sexual and emotional abuse are serious problems that undermine healthy relationships in homes and communities. CDC does not tolerate abuse in CDC or during CDC-sponsored activities. We will respond as a conference to reports of abuse involving people within CDC as defined below. In an effort to reduce the risk of abuse, particularly to our youngest and most vulnerable participants in the community, and to promote congregational support for survivors of abuse, we commit to follow the procedures outlined in this document and to foster mutual accountability.

Mennonite Church USA and CDC function within a congregationalist polity. When utilizing a space under the authority of a congregation or other entity with a Safe Church Policy or equivalent or with staff and volunteers (care providers) from a congregation or other entity with a Safe Church Policy or equivalent, CDC may opt to use said entity’s Safe Church Policy, Child Safety Policy or equivalent through the use of a [Memorandum of Understanding](#).

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the terms “child” or “children” include all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

The term “care provider” includes both paid and unpaid persons who work with children.

The term “volunteer” means anyone with responsibilities directly involving children such as during worship or childcare at meetings, in overnight activities involving children, in counseling of children, or in one-on-one mentoring of children.

The term “adult” means anyone eighteen (18) years old or older.

For the purposes of this policy “Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA,” “Central District Conference” or “CDC” means any CDC activities, events, meetings and conferences along with initiatives and programs directly under CDC. It also includes emerging communities/church plants/groups under the fiscal sponsorship of CDC. It does not include emerging communities/church plants/provisional members/member congregations or their activities when they are **not** directly functioning under the EIN of CDC or under the fiscal sponsorship of CDC.

Selection of Care Providers

All persons who desire to work with the children participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

Six Month Rule

No person will be considered for any volunteer position involving contact with children until they have been involved with CDC (including a church, an emerging community or church plant of CDC) for a minimum of six (6) months. This time of interaction between the people of CDC and the applicant allows for better evaluation and suitability of the applicant for working with children.

Written Application

All persons seeking to work with children must complete and sign a [written application](#) in a form to be supplied by CDC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous CDC affiliation, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The application form will be maintained in confidence on file at the CDC.

Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview (in-person or virtual) may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss their suitability for the position.

Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants’ references will be checked. To the extent reasonably possible, these references should be of an institutional nature (employer, organization they

volunteer with, church, etc.) as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children in the past. References may be checked by CDC, Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Church USA congregation or partner organization. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at CDC or the partner organization that did the reference checks.

Criminal Background Check

A nationwide and statewide criminal or sex offender [background check](#) is required for all care providers and employees aged eighteen (18) years or older. Background checks are not required for people under the age of eighteen (18) years. A nationwide and statewide criminal or sex offender background check run by Mennonite Church USA during the credentialing process or nationwide and statewide criminal or sex offender background check run by Mennonite Church USA church or partner organization will be accepted as meeting this requirement.

Before a background check is run, prospective care providers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the CDC to run the check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, they will be unable to volunteer or serve on staff.

A disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by staff of CDC or authorized entity conducting background checks on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form may also be a disqualifying event.

The background check authorization form and results will be maintained in confidence in the files of organization that runs it.

Training

CDC will require and provide training on child safety protection to all new care providers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All care providers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events.

Teenage Care Providers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for care providers (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under age eighteen (18) to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage care providers:

1. Must be at least age 14.
2. Must be screened as specified above.
3. Must be under the supervision of two adults and must never be left alone with children.
4. Teenage care providers do not count as an adult for the purposes of the two adult policy.

Child Protection Policies

Two Adult Policy

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult care providers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs and activities. While less preferred, a second unrelated adult actively monitoring multiple adjacent rooms that have open doors is permitted. We do not allow children to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling or one-on-one mentorship situation.

For small communities, you may consider a few strategies to comply with the “two adult” requirement:

1. Children’s programming could be conducted in a room adjacent to the main gathering space with the door open and the ability for multiple adults in the main gathering space to actively monitor the adjacent room at all times. Adults unrelated to the care provider should routinely, randomly, and physically visit the room.
2. A video camera can be used to actively monitor a nearby room where multiple people can watch what’s happening at all times on a TV screen. Video should be recorded and archived for at least twenty-four (24) months in case an issue arises. Adults unrelated to the care provider should routinely, randomly, and physically visit the room.
3. Children’s programming can be conducted in a well-utilized public space (i.e. a public park) where other adults are present at all times.

Counseling and One-on-One Mentoring

CDC programs or emerging communities doing counseling or one-on-one mentoring will meet with Associate Conference Minister Matt Pritchard (matt@mcusacdc.org) to plan compliance before any meetings occur.

1. This full Child Safety Policy will be provided to all parents of children receiving counseling or one-on-one mentoring.
2. Program leadership will conduct random audits of the program where leadership can check in to make sure things are going well.
3. Mentor and counseling sessions will be held in areas where other staff and/or volunteers are present and can see you. For example, have pairs break up in a large room so that each meeting can be seen, but not heard. Use of a video camera can be a helpful tool for accountability and recordings should be archived for at least twenty-four (24) months in case an issue arises.
4. If meeting outside of organization space, always attempt to meet outdoors, or in public places. If this is not possible, approval from a supervisor, program leadership, and/or parents/guardians is required before changing locations.
5. Inform Parents and mentees that they may report red flag behaviors to CDC office at office@mcusacdc.org or (574) 534-1485.
6. Program leadership will ensure check-ins with participants are documented by someone other than their direct mentor.
7. Mentors will copy parents, staff, or other children (when appropriate) on written and/or electronic communications.
8. Virtual meetings should be recorded and archived for at least twenty-four (24) months.

Open Door Policy

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Except during an emergency lockdown, doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of CDC not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care. Medications should be administered by a parent.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) or in the case of an overnight or extended event. Parents of such children should address their situation with CDC staff or emerging community leadership to develop a plan of action.

Child Release Policy

Children will only be released to a guardian or person explicitly authorized by a guardian. Guardians may explicitly authorize children aged eleven (11) or older to be released without a guardian or authorized person.

Discipline Policy

It is the policy of CDC not to administer corporal punishment, even if parents have suggested or given permission for it. There should be no spanking, grabbing, hitting, or other physical discipline of children. Care providers should consult with onsite leadership if assistance is needed with disciplinary issues.

Restroom Policy

Children five (5) years of age and younger should use a classroom restroom if one is available. If a classroom restroom is not available, care providers should escort a group of children to another restroom. They should always go in a group, never taking a child to the restroom alone. The care providers should check the restroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The care providers should then remain outside the restroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the care provider should open the restroom door and call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the care providers should prop open the restroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child.

For children over the age of five (5) but under the age of eleven (11), the care provider should check the restroom first to make sure that the restroom is empty, and then allow the children inside. The care provider should then remain outside the restroom door and escort the children back to the classroom.

For the protection of all, care providers should never be alone with a child in a restroom with the door closed and never be in a closed restroom stall with a child. Parents are strongly encouraged to have their children visit the restroom prior to releasing them into the care of care providers.

Accidental Injuries to Children

In the event that a child is injured while under our care, the following steps should be followed:

1. For minor injuries, scrapes, and bruises, care providers may provide First Aid (Band-Aids, etc.) as appropriate and will notify the child's parent or guardian of the injury at the time the child is picked up from our care.
2. For injuries requiring medical treatment beyond simple First Aid, the parent and/or guardian will immediately be summoned in addition to the care provider's supervisor. If warranted by circumstances, transport to a medical facility will be arranged.
3. Once the child has received appropriate medical attention, an incident report will be completed in the case of injuries requiring treatment by a medical professional.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, "child abuse" is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

Physical abuse – any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.

Emotional abuse – emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.

Sexual abuse – any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.

Spiritual abuse - emotional and psychological abuse of a child in a religious context characterized by the use of Scripture or other religious materials to coerce and control the behavior, thoughts or feelings of others. Spiritual abuse may occur as a systematic pattern of harmful behaviors within the faith community, or as isolated instances of spiritual abuse by an individual.

Neglect – depriving a child of his or her essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Care providers may have the opportunity to become aware of abuse or neglect of the children under our care. In the event that an individual involved in the care of children for CDC becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of a child under their care, this should be reported immediately to civil authorities and the Conference Minister or the President of CDC's Board of Directors for further action.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred during the sponsored programs or activities of CDC, the following procedure shall be followed and implemented by the CDC Conference Minister and/or Board of Directors President:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The care provider or church member alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from CDC premises during the investigation. They should be instructed to have no contact with the victim or with witnesses.
3. All allegations of abuse should be reported to the civil authorities, and the organization will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The organization will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The insurance company will be notified, and the organization will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.
5. Conference Minister (or Board President if conflict of interest) will designate a spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect. With the goal of maximum transparency and care for victims, advice of legal counsel will be sought before responding to media inquiries or releasing information about the situation to the involved community as defined situationally by the CDC Board of Directors. All other representatives of CDC should refrain from speaking to the media.
6. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children and their church community shall be notified.
7. Allegations of abuse will be investigated with care not to disrupt or compromise the investigation by civil authorities.
8. If a credentialed leader is accused, we will abide by the Pastoral Sexual Abuse Policies and Procedures of Mennonite Church USA.

9. If someone other than a credentialed leader is accused we will proceed as follows guided by the Mennonite Church USA's "[Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-Credentialed Individuals](#)" or it's successor. (In the event of a conflict, we will default to the Mennonite Church USA's guidance at the discretion of CDC's board of directors.):
 - a. An investigation will be initiated.
 - b. CDC leadership will contact a trained investigator or investigative team to complete the investigation.
 - c. The investigator(s) will establish a schedule for the investigation, and keep CDC Board of Directors informed of the investigation's progress. CDC leadership will continue to communicate progress with the complainant and affected communities.
 - d. At the conclusion of the investigation, the complainant and the accused individual will be informed of the results in writing, as well as by phone and/or in person. The affected communities will also be informed of the outcome in writing.
 - e. We will analyze any occurrence to determine what changes are needed, if any, to policies and procedures to prevent further occurrences.
 - f. In addition to the procedures outlined in sections a-e, above, the following actions will be taken:
 - i. Pastoral care will be made available to all. This should be for the purpose of providing pastoral support during the time of crisis and not for the purpose of investigating the incident or influencing the investigation.
 - ii. CDC leadership will attend to the need for healing and processing within the entire affected community. This could look like informational meetings, circle processes, prayer meetings, and task forces to address future concerns.
 - iii. CDC leadership will maintain a record of events in the affected communities process, from the first report through the outcome. This will include meetings and major communications that took place. CDC leadership will help keep this timeline complete.
 - iv. If the complainant agrees, and following all applicable confidentiality laws, CDC leadership will make available public written communication about the case. This information can be requested by people within the affected community, or outside of

it. Examples of this public written communication are letters from CDC leadership to the affected community about the complaint, investigation process, or results, as well as other records.

Reporting of Violations of this Policy

Care providers agree to promptly report violations of this policy. Report violations of this policy to the CDC office at office@mcusacdc.org or (574) 534-1485.

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 Osawatimie, 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 Laurelvile 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

54 Original Authors & Sponsors Team (Please note that this resolution has been modified by MC
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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
<input type="checkbox"/>	25 or less	1	0
<input type="checkbox"/>	26-50	1	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	51-75	1	2
<input type="checkbox"/>	76-100	1	3
<input type="checkbox"/>	101-150	1	4
<input type="checkbox"/>	151-200	1	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	201-300	1	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	301-400	1	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	401-500	2	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	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***

CDC Wave (wave bw)



Part VI

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