



Leadership and Accountability In Mennonite Church Canada

D. Nighswander
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LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY
in
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A. HOW WE WORK TOGETHER AND HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS

About this collection

The following collection of documents brings together several statements that govern “how we do business” in Mennonite Church Canada. They bring together elements of scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recent pieces of our tradition, and slices of recent experience. They are not comprehensive and they are not “written in stone” like the laws of the Medes and Persians “which cannot be revoked” (Daniel 6:12). But they are the guiding documents for leadership and accountability in the national church and in its relationship with area conferences and congregations. Here to introduce these guiding documents are some comments about how we work together and how we make decisions in Mennonite Church Canada.

Introduction:

The church is the body of Christ, bound together by a common faith and commitment, anticipating the fullness of God’s Reign. The church is also a community of human Christians who encourage each other in faith and faithfulness and who covenant to work together for the sake of God’s Kingdom. Only in the combined strength of many members can the body function as God intended it should (see Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12).

In any human community it is necessary to have agreed-upon ways of relating to each other and working together. So also in the church it is necessary to define, agree to, practice and uphold some common understandings of “how we work together and how we make decisions” in order to organize our work for harmony, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Our understanding of organizations, our definitions of “productivity” and “effectiveness,” our assumptions about “how things ought to be done” are shaped by our theological convictions and also by our secular experiences and expectations. How the members of the body of Christ organize for service depends upon current theories of business management, and also upon our understanding of God’s intentions. The church’s activities flow out from God’s work in the world, and the church’s internal and external relationships are a reflection of the unity of the Trinity (John 17:21).

The affairs of the church include managing the resources God has entrusted, organizing for service and mission, and providing programs to carry out the church’s mandate. For direction on how to conduct these affairs the church looks to its usual sources of authority: the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, tradition and experience. Using these resources various Christian denominations have organized themselves in a variety of patterns and conduct their affairs in different ways.

This statement is a summary of the ways that delegates and leaders have decided to work together in Mennonite Church Canada. Present practices and guidelines are not permanently fixed. They have changed throughout the years, some are currently undergoing revision, and they will always be subject to change. In order that all things in the church “should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40) it is necessary to conduct business according to agreed-upon processes and also necessary that any changes to those processes be made through appropriate procedures.

What shapes our structures and procedures?

a) Scripture

The Bible is the foundational document of the church, inspired by God and useful for shaping God’s people to be equipped and proficient for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It shapes

us in many ways, including direct teaching and example stories about the experiences of God's people. Alongside its many other instructions, the Bible teaches some organizing principles and gives some guiding examples about church organization.

Jesus organized his ministry around twelve disciples, to whom he assigned some ministry activities (Matt. 10; 28:18-20), and a larger crowd of companions who followed and served him (Luke 8:1-3). After Jesus' death the church organized itself in a variety of ways.

The church that gathered around the Beloved Disciple was a loose band held together by love (1 John 3:11) and worship (John 4:24). They seem to have had no other organizing principle than to follow their founder (John 21:24) under the leadership of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-21). Over an extended time, however, this (non)structure was not able to sustain the church. The Johannean congregation lost members to gnosticism and other heresies (2 John 7; 3 John 9-10) and eventually joined other churches to survive—though its theological contribution continues through the Gospel of John and three letters included in the New Testament canon.

The church reflected by Matthew's gospel (the only gospel to use the word "church") had a tighter structure that included instructions on conflict resolution (Matthew 18:15-20) and established an ecclesiastical authority (Matthew 16:18-19). This church subsequently established schools for teaching Jesus' instructions (e.g., Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) and honoured scribes as authoritative teachers.

The book of Acts reflects further elaboration on church structures, including appointing a person to replace Judas among the disciples (1:15-26) and appointing deacons (6:1-6). It also includes a detailed report of how a church conflict was settled (15) and how new people were incorporated into the church (10-11).

The letters of the New Testament reflect continuing development of organizations, including the appointment of various church officers (Philippians 1:1) and instructions for the selection, appointment and responsibilities of the offices of leadership (1 Timothy 3, 5; Titus).

The New Testament demonstrates that there are many different ways to organize the church and provides some basic principles for doing so (e.g., Mark 9:33-37). But it doesn't answer all the questions we might have about how to organize ourselves for the work God is calling us to do in our context.

b) The Holy Spirit

Since the Scriptures do not provide detailed instructions for organizing and making decisions, the church has looked to the Holy Spirit for additional guidance. Indeed, the scriptures themselves attest to this in stories that report how the early church was led by the Holy Spirit to go beyond the written text they had received (e.g., Acts 6:1-6; 10-11; 15).

Through the Spirit's intervention God has provided leaders with the right gifts at the right time to guide God's people in the face of all manner of challenges. The charismatic gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-8) have often exceeded the instructions of scripture, the inertia of tradition and the wisdom of experience in eliciting creative organization. It has often been the experience of Christians that through prayer, fasting and worship God's Spirit speaks a word and the church discerns God's desires in unpredicted ways.

Many examples of this could be cited. Throughout the history of the church there have been many renewal movements that led to new ways for Christians to work together in following God.

The origins of the Anabaptist movement were permeated with consciousness that the Holy Spirit was leading in new directions. Many more recent examples can be recalled where particular persons were divinely inspired to give the right leadership at the right time, and where God's hand has been evident in bringing people together for their spiritual growth and more effective ministry. It has been said that "the sign of God's presence is that we will be led where we did not plan to go." While we expect God to act consistently through time, we also need to be open to new and unexpected stirrings of the Spirit.

Not every innovation, of course, is a result of the Holy Spirit's activity. Experience has reminded us of that it is important to test claims that the Holy Spirit is leading in one way or another. Various persons have come forward with words of prophecy, counsel on what the church should do and offers of leadership that have proven to be unwise and even dangerous. But the importance of careful discernment should not cause us to reject the possibility that the Holy Spirit is indeed speaking a new word in a new time to the church.

c) Tradition

A full account of the churchly tradition that shapes us would need to move from Biblical times to the very recent past. Within that scope the more important traditional influences for us are the Mennonite experiences and convictions on leadership and accountability. For Mennonite Church Canada, the traditions of our immediate predecessor organizations, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church are most significant.

Some of the tradition is embedded in constitutions, policies, bylaws and official records of meetings and some is reflected in theological statements—in particular, in Confessions of Faith. Much of the traditional influence is embodied in persons, so important sources for understanding are biography, oral traditions and written history¹. Memories of the authority granted to the Aeltester, bishop or pastor in various places and times, of theological debates and personality conflicts, or of suspicions between different immigrant groups all shape current assumptions and expectations. In recent decades the influx of new ethnic groups has introduced other traditions around leadership, authority, accountability and churchly organization to Mennonite Church Canada.

The first official Mennonite statement of shared convictions is the Schleithem Confession of 1527. It addressed leadership and accountability in articles on the ban (which is applied against those who "somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken") and "shepherds in the church of God." It does not speak to authority beyond that exercised by the congregation.

Subsequent confessions follow similar lines. The Mennonite Church confession of 1963 moves beyond congregational authority with this paragraph:

¹ See especially the three volumes of *Mennonites in Canada* (vols. 1 [1974] and 2 [1982] by Frank H. Epp; vol. 3 by T. D. Regehr, 1996) and the forthcoming history of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada by Adolf Enns; also David Toews Was Here 1870-1947 (Helmut Harder; CMBC Publications, 2002); JJ Thiessen: a leader for his time (Esther Epp-Tiessen; CMBC Publications, 2001) and Four Earthen Vessels: biographical profiles of Oscar Burkholder, Samuel F. Coffman, Clayton F. Derstine, and Jesse B. Martin (Urie Bender; Herald Press, 1982) and other biographies. Many other biographical notes and essays are available on the internet at Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (<http://www.mhsc.ca/>). Congregational and area conference histories and archive collections are also valuable. These are available through various denominational archives, and especially the MC Canada Heritage Centre Archives (<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/>).

The primary unit of the church is the local assembly of believers. It is in the congregation that the work of teaching, witnessing, and disciplining is carried on. In order to maintain the unity of the church it is Scriptural [sic] and profitable for congregational representatives to meet together in conferences. The concern for the welfare of the whole church calls for Spirit-led conferences to assist local congregations in maintaining Biblical standards of faith, conduct, stewardship, and missions. The decisions of such conferences should be respected by the individual congregations and members.

Several relevant sections of the current Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, printed below, serve to place our “practical” documents into a theological context. They are, of course, not complete without the full confession, but are selected to provide ready access to the most immediately relevant sections.

d) Experience

Throughout history the Christian church has been influenced by its cultural setting (just as Israel looked to the surrounding nations to determine its political organization—see 1 Samuel 8—and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament reflects the prevailing “best practices” of the time). When it has organized for ministry and discernment the church has learned from secular experience, especially from political models. Thus the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church’s structures reflect the political organization of the Roman Empire in its Eastern and Western expressions; the Anglican church reflects British monarchy (modified over the centuries as the monarchy has changed); and recently-formed North American Evangelical churches reflect the American expression of democracy.

In most North American Mennonite churches the principles of democracy are deeply-rooted assumptions. Every member expects to have a voice in discernment. Decisions are decided by a vote (often by secret ballot). *Robert’s Rules of Order*, written to apply “parliamentary law” to the work of “ordinary societies,” are consulted as the authoritative determinant of proper procedure. Leaders are generally elected for a fixed term of office, and elected leaders have authority over hired staff, just as parliamentarians have authority over the civil service.

Some Mennonite churches have rejected these models for making decisions. These usually use a consensus method and emphasize a less hierarchical leadership structure. While drawing from scripture, the Holy Spirit and Mennonite tradition, they also reflect some of the social critique of political structures in North America in the 1960’s and ’70’s.

In Canada, the particularities of our political system are assumed also to apply to the church. Area conferences are, for the most part, structured within provincial boundaries. The division of labour between federal and provincial jurisdictions in the political realm is reflected in the church. Assumptions about the role of government (until recently) in promoting the public good have been carried over into church structures. Regional loyalties and resultant tensions are seen in the church as much as in secular society.

More recently some people have been calling for the church to learn from the example of profit-based business for its organizational patterns. This usually implies competition with other churches for a greater “market share,” use of “marketing” techniques to achieve that goal, and the hiring of professional leaders to implement a goal-oriented program to serve a public defined as consumers of the church’s products. This trend, however, is not an exception to the influence of political systems on church systems, for the same pressure to function like a market-driven business is being applied to our political systems.

While there is much to be learned from the wisdom tradition of politics and business in conducting human affairs, Christians recognize that there are limitations to applying the practices of those systems to the church. The limitations include differences in values, goals and loyalties.

Conclusion

The documents contained in the following pages are a “snapshot” of how we work together in Mennonite Church Canada. Read them in light of this introduction, and engage them appropriately in understanding and participating in the work to which God has called us to participate together.

Dan Nighswander
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B. THE GUIDING DOCUMENTS

1. Excerpts from Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

The introduction to the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective explains how it is intended to be used in the church:

“How do Mennonite confessions of faith serve the church? First, they provide guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture. At the same time, the confession itself is subject to the authority of the Bible. Second, confessions of faith provide guidance for belief and practice. In this connection, a written statement should support but not replace the lived witness of faith. Third, confessions build a foundation for unity within and among churches. Fourth, confessions offer an outline for instructing new church members and for sharing information with inquirers. Fifth, confessions give an updated interpretation of belief and practice in the midst of changing times. And sixth, confessions help in discussing Mennonite belief and practice with other Christians and people of other faiths.”

The delegates to the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church joint meeting at Wichita, Kansas, July 25-30, 1995, who approved this confession did not intend that it should be used as a test of faith, as a creed might be, and they did not expect it to serve indefinitely—after all, it is but the latest in a long succession of Mennonite confessions. But they did accept it as a reliable guide and a representation of the current convictions of the church. They also recognized that the confession itself warrants elaboration, and so the commentary sections were endorsed as helpful clarification and illustrative application of the articles of the confession. (The confession was subsequently adopted by Conference of Mennonites in Canada and is part of the heritage that Mennonite Church Canada inherited from these predecessor organizations.)

The excerpts articles quoted in full below, including their commentaries, are those which most explicitly apply to questions of leadership and accountability in the church. The full confession is commended as a statement of the convictions of Mennonite Church Canada.

a) Article 9. The Church of Jesus Christ

We believe that the church is the assembly of those who have accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The church 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. The church is the new society established and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The church, the body of Christ, is called to become ever more like Jesus Christ, its head, in its worship, ministry, witness, mutual love and care, and the ordering of its common life (Eph. 4:13,15).

We acknowledge the church as the society of believers from many nations, anointed for witness by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-11) Through the work of the Holy Spirit, divisions between nations, races, classes, and genders are being healed as persons from every human grouping are reconciled and united in the church (Acts 11:1-18; 1 Cor. 12:12-12; Gal. 2:26-28). In times of suffering as well as tranquillity, the church depends on the Spirit's presence and power, rather than on the power or benevolence of government, for its preservation and mission.

The church is the assembly of those who voluntarily commit themselves to follow Christ in life and to be accountable to one another and to God, while recognizing that the church is imperfect and thus in constant need of repentance. The church's identity as God's people of faith is sustained and renewed as members gather regularly for worship. Here the church celebrates

God's boundless grace, reaffirms its loyalty to God above all else, and seeks to discern God's will.

The church is the household, or family, of God (Mark 3:33-35; Eph. 2:19). Commitment to one another is shown in loving one another as God loves, in sharing material and spiritual resources, in exercising mutual care and discipline, and in showing hospitality to all (Deut. 10:19; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2). The church welcomes all people who join themselves to Christ to become part of the family of God (John 20:21; Matt. 28:18-20; Matt. 5-7)

We believe that the church as the body of Christ is the visible manifestation of Jesus Christ. The church is called to live and minister as Christ lived and ministered in the world. As many members belong to one body, so all believers have been baptized in one Spirit into the one body of Christ. There are varieties of gifts and ministries in the church, all given for the common good. Believers are to love each other and to grow toward the likeness of Christ, who is the head of the church.

The church exists as a community of believers in the local congregation, as a community of congregations, and as the worldwide community of faith.

Commentary

1. New Testament references to the church as God's people (1 Pet. 2:10) show that the early church depended on the Old Testament for much of its self-understanding (Exod. 7:6; 2 Sam. 7:24). As in Old Testament times, the New Testament people of God see themselves as a covenant community, relying on God's promise of steadfast love and sustaining mercy. They are "a chosen race, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9; see Exod. 19:6). The word church is most often a translation of the Hebrew qahal or the Greek ekklesia, meaning "assembly." But the church is a new kind of assembly. Its identity is not rooted in a common biological heritage or tied to one geographical location. The church is made up of people from many nations and ethnic backgrounds. Thus the church is a new social and political reality, described in this article with terms like "society," "assembly," "household of God," and "community of disciples."

2. Mennonite emphasis on voluntary church membership, together with the modern focus on human potential, may tempt us to regard the church merely as a product of human effort. But the church is more than a human organization. The church depends on God for its very being and life (Eph. 3:20-21). Its foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). It relies constantly on the Holy Spirit.

3. One of the Anabaptists' favorite images for the church was the "body of Christ." Participation in church life is a participation in Christ. Following Christ in life, a response of faithfulness to the baptismal covenant and to communal loyalty, is a way of knowing Christ. Works of love and service are an extension of Christ's ministry in and through his body, the church. Joining in corporate worship regularly (Heb. 10:25) and sharing in the Lord's Supper are ways of participating in the life of Christ and encouraging each other.

4. The articles that follow give more detail concerning the church: its mission (Article 10); its practices of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and foot washing (Articles 11-13); discipline, ministry, and order and unity (Articles 14-16). Later articles (17-24) discuss the church in the world and the relation between the church and the reign of God.

b) Article 10. The Church in Mission

We believe that the church is called to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Christ has commissioned the church to be his witnesses, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20).

In his mission of preaching, teaching, and healing, Jesus announced, "The kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples, saying, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22; Acts 10:35). Empowered by that Spirit, we continue Jesus' ministry of gathering the new people of God, who acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior.

The church is called to witness to the reign of Christ by embodying Jesus' way in its own life and patterning itself after the reign of God. Thus it shows the world a sample of life under the lordship of Christ. By its life, the church is to be a city on a hill, a light to the nations, (Matt. 5:13-16; Isa. 42:6) testifying to the power of the resurrection by a way of life different from the societies around it.

The church is also to give witness by proclaiming the reign of God in word and deed. The church is to seek the lost, call for repentance, announce salvation from sin, proclaim the gospel of peace, set free the oppressed, pray for righteousness and justice, serve as Jesus did, and without coercion urge all people to become part of the people of God. The church is called to be a channel of God's healing, which may include anointing with oil (Mark 6:13; James 5:14-15). Even at the risk of suffering and death, the love of Christ compels faithful witnesses to testify for their Savior (2 Cor. 5:14).

Such witness is a response to Jesus' call to make disciples. As they are welcomed and incorporated into the church, new Christians learn to participate in the church's worship, in its fellowship, education, mutual aid, decision making, service, and continuing mission (Acts 2:41-47) New believers also help the church to learn new dimensions of its mission (Acts 10; 15)

God calls the church to direct its mission to people from all nations and ethnic backgrounds. Jesus commissioned his disciples to be his witnesses in "Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The apostle Paul preached to the Gentile nations. The church today is also called to witness to people of every culture, ethnicity, or nationality. The mission of the church does not require the protection of any nation or empire. Christians are strangers and aliens within all cultures. Yet the church itself is God's nation, encompassing people who have come from every tribe and nation. Indeed, its mission is to reconcile differing groups, creating one new humanity (Eph. 2:15-16) and providing a preview of that day when all the nations shall stream to the mountain of the Lord and be at peace (Isa. 2:2-4).

Commentary

1. Christ has commissioned the church to continue his mission. Missionaries and others with the gift of evangelism do not function independently, but as representatives of Christ and the church. The commissions by Jesus to his disciples (recorded in Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-22; and Acts 1:8) are given through the apostles to the community as a whole.

2. The mission of the church involves both word and deed, evangelism and service, proclaiming Christ's message and demonstrating, by the life of the church, the nature of the new creation in

Christ. Neither word alone nor deed alone is sufficient for mission. Word explains deed, and deed authenticates word.

3. In the ministry of Jesus, healing (in body and in spirit) and salvation are closely related. The same Greek word is used in the New Testament for healing and salvation. Jesus' words both to those whose sins were forgiven and to those who were healed were, "Your faith has saved you [made you well]; go in peace." (Compare Luke 7:50 and 8:48, where the same Greek words are used, but the NIV and NRSV use different English words.) The church continues Jesus' ministry of healing. The church may be a channel for healing through the service of prayer and anointing with oil.

4. Mission includes peace and evangelism. Peace is an integral part of the content of the church's message (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17; 6:15). Peace also describes the context of evangelism (John 20:21-22). The power of gospel is so strong and God's mercy is so wide that it is possible for any person to repent and be saved. No enemy is so evil as to be beyond God's love. The church lives and preaches reconciliation boldly, yet without coercion. The missionary church chooses to suffer rather than to force its way. In the language of the New Testament, the word for witness is the same as the word for martyr.

5. The church is called to live as an alternative culture within the surrounding society. Thus, the church is involved in cross-cultural mission whether it reaches out to people of the majority culture, to people of minority cultures within the society, or to various cultural groups in other countries. The church lives within the dominant culture, yet is called to challenge that culture's myths and assumptions when they conflict with Christian faith. Those cultural myths include individualism, materialism, militarism, nationalism, racism, sexism, and a worldview which denies the reality of anything beyond the grasp of the five senses and reason.

6. In its mission, the church claims Jesus Christ as the only Savior of the world (Acts 4:12). Some people feel that all ways to God are equally valid and that mission work by its very nature is intolerant and coercive. However, faithful witness to Christ is noncoercive; it does not force our point of view on anyone. It recognizes that God is not left without a witness anywhere (Acts 10:35; 14:17; 17:22-31; Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-16). It testifies to Christ's work in our lives and invites others to know him, follow him, and become part of his body. We engage in mission because of our love and concern for people and because the love of Christ urges us on. We understand also that mission helps us grow in our understanding of the gospel, just as the early church's mission to the Gentiles helped it understand the gospel in new ways.

c) Article 14. Discipline in the Church

We believe that the practice of discipline in the church is a sign of God's offer of forgiveness and transforming grace to believers who are moving away from faithful discipleship or who have been overtaken by sin. Discipline is intended to liberate erring brothers and sisters from sin, to enable them to return to a right relationship with God, and to restore them to fellowship in the church. It also gives integrity to the church's witness and contributes to the credibility of the gospel message in the world.

According to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles, all believers participate in the church's mutual care and discipline as appropriate. Jesus gave the church authority to discern right and wrong and to forgive sins when there is repentance or to retain sins when there is no repentance (Matt. 18:15-22; John 20:21-23; Gal. 6:1-2; Deut. 19:15). When becoming members of the church, believers therefore commit themselves to give and receive counsel within the faith community on important matters of doctrine and conduct.

Mutual encouragement, pastoral care, and discipline should normally lead to confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Corrective discipline in the church should be exercised in a redemptive manner. The basic pattern begins with "speaking the truth in love," in direct conversation between the erring person and another member (Eph. 4:15; Matt. 18:15). Depending on the person's response, admonition may continue within a broader circle. This usually includes a pastor or congregational leader. If necessary, the matter may finally be brought to the congregation. A brother or sister who repents is to be forgiven and encouraged in making the needed change.

If the erring member persists in sin without repentance and rejects even the admonition of the congregation, membership may be suspended. Suspension of membership is the recognition that persons have separated themselves from the body of Christ (1 Cor. 5:3-5). When this occurs, the church continues to pray for them and seeks to restore them to its fellowship (2 Cor. 2:5-11).

We acknowledge that discipline, rightly understood and practiced, undergirds the integrity of the church's witness in word and deed. Persistent and uncorrected false teaching and sinful conduct among Christians undermine the proclamation and credibility of the gospel in the world (Matt. 5:14-18; Rom. 2:21ff). As a sign of forgiveness and transforming grace, discipline exemplifies the message of forgiveness and new life in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a means of strengthening good teaching and sustaining moral conduct, it helps to build faithfulness in understanding and practice.

Commentary

1. Anabaptists and Mennonites in sixteenth-century Europe saw discipline as vital for pastoral care and for the well-being of the church. Indeed, they considered discipline to be as important for church renewal as believers baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper.

Mennonites have traditionally emphasized church discipline. Discipline has sometimes been neglected in many Mennonite congregations, in part because of some misuses, in part because of cultural and social influences.

Both the misuse and the neglect of discipline undermine the church's life and witness. Both misuse and neglect work against the important correcting, renewing, and redemptive purposes of church discipline in pastoral care, nurture, and congregational life.

2. In some church traditions, responsibility for church discipline has been limited to particular ministerial offices, such as pastor or bishop. From a Mennonite perspective, discipline is related, first of all, to the mutual care of members for one another. According to the rule of Christ (Matt. 18:15-18), all believers are to offer mutual encouragement, correction, and forgiveness to each other. For that reason, it is good to include a promise to give and receive counsel when persons are received into church membership.

Pastors and other church leaders have a special responsibility to give guidance and to carry out discipline in the life of the church (Acts 20:28-31; Tit. 1:5-11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17). They are to exercise their responsibility lovingly, in gentleness of spirit, and without partiality.

3. Pastors and other church leaders who move away from faithful discipleship or are overtaken by sin are not exempt from discipline in the church. Because of their representative ministries, their teaching and conduct can greatly help or hurt members of the church and the church's

witness in the world. They are therefore accountable to the congregation which they serve and to the broader church.

Pastors, teachers, and other church leaders may sometimes be victims of gossip and unjust accusations. Allegations against them should be tested carefully (1 Tim. 5:19). Not only do the failures of ministerial leaders damage the church's life and witness; unfounded accusations against them also do injury to them and the church.

4. The New Testament gives several reasons for suspending fellowship or for excommunication: denying that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, persisting in sinful conduct without repentance, and causing divisions in the church by opposing apostolic teaching (for example, 1 John 4:1-6; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Rom. 16:17-18).

5. For more discussion related to church discipline, see also "Discipleship and the Christian Life" (Article 17) and "Christian Spirituality" (Article 18).

d) Article 15. Ministry and Leadership

We believe that ministry continues 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 as they serve the church.

Christ invites all Christians to minister to each other in the church and on behalf of the church beyond its boundaries (Mat. 25:31-40; 1 Cor. 12:31-13:13). Christ enables them for ministry in response to specific needs and opportunities (Eph. 4:7; Rom. 12:4-6; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Such service is a participation in God's creative work of building up the body of Christ in love and of witnessing to God's righteousness in the world (Eph. 4:15-16; Luke 10:1-37).

The church calls, trains, and appoints gifted men and women to a variety of leadership ministries on its behalf. These may include such offices as pastor, deacon, and elder as well as evangelists, missionaries, teachers, conference ministers, and overseers (Eph. 4:11-13; 1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). The character and reputation of leaders is to be above reproach. Following the example of Christ, persons so appointed preach and teach with authority, interpret the Scriptures and the faith diligently, speak divine truth with boldness, equip the saints, relate with compassion to the needy, and lead the congregation in faithful living, so that the church may be "built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God" (Rom. 10:14-15; Matt. 7:29; Titus 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:13; Jer. 1:4-10; 2 Tim. 4:1-3; Eph. 4:11-13; Phil. 2:1-4; Eph. 2:22).

The confirmation of the call to a particular ministry is a sign of mutual accountability between the church and its chosen representative. A time of discernment may be followed by ordination or a similar act, accompanied by laying on of hands (1 Tim. 5:22; Exod. 29:35). This act symbolizes the person's responsibility as a servant of the Word. The congregation and the wider church or conference share in this act as an indication of their blessing and support and as a reminder of the person's accountability before God and the church, and of the church's responsibility toward the person.

Commentary

1. The Anabaptists called persons to special roles of spiritual leadership in the church. The study of the Bible, the need for order, and the recognition of giftedness led them to this practice. The purpose of such chosen leaders was not to relieve the other believers of responsibility, but

to represent Christ and the church in the congregation and on the church's behalf in the world. The Anabaptists did not use the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" to downplay the need for spiritual leaders with special roles in the church. Menno Simons mentioned the "priesthood of all believers" to encourage all believers, as "priests," to lead a holy life in order to be witnesses to the God who called them from darkness to light (1 Pet. 2:9).

2. In the New Testament the earliest references to leadership ministries mention disciples and apostles. Ephesians 4:11 mentions a fivefold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In 1 Timothy 3, bishops and deacons are named. We also see a threefold pattern emerging in the New Testament: bishops, elders, and deacons. In the Mennonite tradition this threefold pattern can be found as well. There have also been variations, such as sending out evangelists and missionaries. The church has adapted its leadership patterns from time to time and should have the freedom to continue to do so, including the recognition of evangelists, prophets, and teachers.

3. The act of ordination (or similar acts such as licensing and commissioning) symbolizes a combination of God's call, the congregation's affirmation, the recipient's dedication to ministry, and the blessing of the wider church. Ordination follows a process of discernment in the congregation and in the wider church or conference. It is a one-time event, kept active by continuing service in and for the church. Ordination is normally transferable from one congregation or conference assignment to another. Licensing for pastoral assignments is for a preliminary period of time. Commissioning is normally for a specific assignment.

e) Article 16. Church Order and Unity

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 (Eph. 2:21-22).

As God's people, the church is a holy temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17), a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), founded upon the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Church order is needed to maintain unity on important matters of faith and life (Ps. 133:1; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 4:3) so that each may serve and be served, and the body of Christ may be built up in love (Eph. 4:7, 12-16). Love and unity in the church are a witness to the world of God's love (John 17:20-24).

In making decisions, whether to choose leaders or resolve issues, members of the church listen and speak in a spirit of prayerful openness, with the Scriptures as the constant guide. Persons shall expect not only affirmation, but also correction. In a process of discernment, it is better to wait patiently for a word from the Lord leading toward consensus, than to make hasty decisions.

The church is a variety of assemblies which meet regularly, including local congregations and larger conferences. This diversity in unity evokes gratitude to God and appreciation for one another. According to the example of the apostolic church, the local congregation seeks the counsel of the wider church in important matters relating to faith and life, and they work together in their common mission (Acts 15:1-21). Decisions made at larger assemblies and conferences are confirmed by constituent groups (Acts 11:18), and local ministries are encouraged and supported by the wider gatherings. Authority and responsibility are delegated by common and voluntary agreement, so that the churches hold each other accountable to Christ and to one another on all levels of church life.

Commentary

1. Scripture does not prescribe one specific church polity, or government. At the same time, guidelines can be gleaned from both the Old and New Testaments. The priesthood and the temple in Israel's religious life are reminders of the importance of order and also of the concern for visible worship that upholds justice, kindness, and humility (Lev. 8-10; 1 Kings 6). The apostle Paul asked the church to do all things decently and in order to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:26, 40). The New Testament stresses that the church be organized in a way that encourages participation of all members and the use of their spiritual gifts--for worship, for decision making, for teaching and learning, for mutual care, and for furthering God's mission in the world. The Spirit of Christ leads the church in adapting its organization to the needs of its time and place.

2. Decision making by consensus is a way of coming to unity in the church (see Acts 15:22). Consensus means that the church has together sought for the unity of the Spirit. The church listens carefully to all voices, majority and minority. Consensus is reached when the church has come to one mind on the matter, or when those who dissent have indicated that they do not wish to stand in the way of a group decision. Consensus does not necessarily mean complete unanimity.

3. The church is the assembly of the people of God. The local congregation which meets frequently is the church. Larger conference groups which assemble less often are also the church (1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1). Church membership involves commitment to a local congregation as well as to a larger church family which may have more than one level of conference affiliation. More broadly, we are united through our common Lord to the universal church, which includes believers in every place and time. We appreciate this wider family of believers and seek to nurture appropriate relationships with them.

Mennonite church structures have upheld the centrality of the church as a community of believers. Some have emphasized the local congregation as the primary unit of the church. Others have seen the wider church (the conference) as the primary unit. The first case reflects a congregation-to-conference polity, where the local congregation determines the extent of its accountability to the larger church. The second has resulted in a conference-to-congregation polity, where the larger church carries more authority. Neither of our Mennonite bodies is clearly on one side or the other. One tendency has been to promote the congregation as the primary unit. This emphasis encourages local initiative, but it can detract from the church's wider mission and from broader church cooperation. The church should be viewed as one seamless garment, extending from the smallest unit ("where two or three are gathered," Matt. 18:20) to the worldwide church. Accountability and responsibility apply to every level of church.

2. LEGISLATION INCORPORATING MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

An Act to Incorporate Conference of Mennonites in Canada,
S.C. 1947, Chap. 91, as amended by
An Act to Amend the Act of Incorporation of the Conference of Mennonites in
Canada,
S.C. 2001, Chap. 42

1. (1) The Corporation created by chapter 91 of the Statutes of Canada, 1947, is continued as a body corporate under the name "Mennonite Church Canada."
 - (2) The Corporation consists of those congregations of Mennonites and conferences of Mennonites that are corporate members of the Corporation on the coming into force of this Act and such other congregations of Mennonites, conferences of Mennonites or other entities as may become corporate members thereof.
2. (1) The head office of the Corporation shall be at Winnipeg, in the province of Manitoba, or at such other place in Canada as may be decided by the Corporation.
 - (2) Notice in writing shall be given to the Minister of Industry by the Corporation concerning any change of the head office and a copy of such notice shall be published in the *Canada Gazette*.
3. (1) Subject to this Act, the Corporation has all the powers, rights and privileges of a natural person.
 - (2) The Corporation may carry on business throughout Canada.
 - (3) The Corporation has the capacity to carry on its business, conduct its affairs and exercise its powers in any jurisdiction outside Canada, to the extent that the laws of such jurisdiction permit.
 - (4) The objects of the Corporation are to
 - (a) promote the spiritual welfare and the unity of spirit of the members of the Corporation and, by mutual assistance, to foster, diffuse, encourage, advance and strengthen the work of the kingdom of God;
 - (b) build Christian communities in the Mennonite tradition;
 - (c) nurture the well-being of members of the Corporation, promote a spirit of unity and foster cooperation among them; and
 - (d) associate and work with selected organizations having one or more objects identical or similar to those of the Corporation.
4. The Corporation has, in carrying out its objects, all the powers necessary to
 - (a) admit, as a corporate member of such Corporation, any congregation of Mennonites, conference of Mennonites, or other entity that complies with, and qualifies under, the bylaws of the Corporation;

- (b) organize, maintain, carry on and assist, for or on behalf of any corporate member of the Corporation, churches, missions, schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, and any other institutions for religious, educational or congregational purposes;
 - (c) administer the property, business and other temporal affairs of the Corporation;
 - (d) receive and accept for its own use monies or other personal property subject to, and inconsideration of, payment of interest thereon or of an annuity in respect thereof; and
 - (e) generally, to do all such things as are likely to promote the objects of the Corporation.
5. The affairs of the Corporation shall be managed by a board of directors consisting of not less than three and not more than twenty directors, who shall be assisted by such other officers and agents as the Corporation may appoint.
 6. The Corporation may from time to time make bylaws, not contrary to law, for
 - (a) the prerequisites of admission and the qualifications respecting any congregation of Mennonites, conference of Mennonites, or other entity, desiring to become a corporate member of the Corporation, and the release or expulsion of any corporate member from the Corporation;
 - (b) the administration, management and control of the property, business and other temporal affairs of the Corporation;
 - (c) the election or appointment, and the functions, duties and remuneration, of all directors, and other officers, agents and servants of the Corporation;
 - (d) the creation of any special committee or board for the purpose of the Corporation, and the appointment or election of the members thereof;
 - (e) the calling of regular or special meetings of the Corporation, and of any committee or board thereof, and fixing the necessary quorum of, and the procedure to be followed at, all meetings of the Corporation, and of any committee or board thereof, and of all meetings of the directors of the Corporation;
 - (f) the general performance of the objects and purposes of the Corporation.
 7. (1) The Corporation may purchase, take, have, hold, receive, possess, retain and enjoy property, real and personal, corporeal and incorporeal, and any and every estate and interest whatsoever given, granted, devised or bequeathed to it, or appropriated, purchased or acquired by it in any manner or way whatsoever, to, for, or in favour of, the Corporation.

(2) The Corporation may also hold such real property or estate therein as is bona fide mortgaged to it by way of security, or conveyed to it in satisfaction of debts of judgments recovered.
 8. Subject always to terms of any trust relating thereto, the Corporation may also sell, convey, exchange, alienate, mortgage, lease or demise any real property held by the Corporation, whether by way of investment for the uses and purposes of the Corporation or not, and may also, from time to time, invest all or any of its funds or moneys and all or any funds or

moneys vested in or acquired by it for the uses and purposes aforesaid, in and upon any security by way of mortgage, hypothec or charge upon real property; and for the purpose of such investment may take, receive and accept mortgages or assignments thereof, whether made and executed directly to the Corporation or to any corporation, body, company or person in trust for it; and may sell, grant, assign, and transfer such mortgages or assignments either wholly or partly.

9. Repealed
10. In regard to any real property which, by reason of its situation or otherwise, is subject to the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada, a license in mortmain shall not be necessary for the exercise of the powers granted by this Act, but otherwise, the exercise of the said powers shall in any province of Canada be subject to the laws of such province as to the acquisition and holding of lands by religious corporations, in so far as such laws apply to the Corporation.
11. In so far as authorization by the Parliament of Canada is necessary, any person or corporation in whose name any property, real or personal, is held in trust or otherwise, for the uses and purposes aforesaid, or any such person or corporation to whom any such property devolves, may, subject always to the terms and conditions an any trust relating to such property, transfer such property, or any part thereof to the Corporation.
12. Any deed or instrument relating to real property, or any interest therein, shall be deemed to be executed if there is affixed thereto the seal of the Corporation and the signature of any officer of the Corporation duly authorized for such purpose.
13. The Corporation may make a gift of or lend any of its property, whether real or personal, for or to assist in the purchase, erection, leasing or maintenance of any building or buildings considered necessary for any church, college, school, hospital, orphanage or home for the elderly, or for any other religious, charitable, educational or congregational purpose, upon such terms and conditions as it considers expedient.
14. (1) The directors of the Corporation may, from time to time, for the purposes of the Corporation,
 - (a) borrow money upon credit of the Corporation;
 - (b) limit or increase the amount to be borrowed;
 - (c) make, draw, accept, endorse, or become party to promissory notes and bills of exchange; and it shall not be necessary to have the seal of the Corporation affixed to any such note or bill;
 - (d) issue bonds, debentures or other securities of the Corporation;
 - (e) pledge or sell such bonds, debentures or other securities for such sums and at such prices as may be deemed expedient;
 - (f) mortgage, hypothecate, charge or pledge all or any of the real or personal property, undertaking and rights of the Corporation to secure any such bonds, debentures or other securities or any money borrowed or any other liability of the Corporation.

- (2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize the Corporation to issue any note or bill payable to bearer thereof, or any promissory note intended to be circulated as money or as the note or bill of a bank, or to engage in the business of banking or insurance.
15. The Corporation may invest its funds, or any portion thereof, either directly in the name of the Corporation or indirectly in the name of trustees, in the purchase of securities as it considers advisable and may also led its funds or any portion thereof on any such securities.
16. (1) The Corporation shall meet at such times and places as the board of directors considers necessary, but it shall meet at least once every two years, and such meetings may be held in Canada or abroad.
- (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), at least three out of every four meetings held by the Corporation shall be held in Canada.
- (3) For greater certainty and notwithstanding section 158 of the *Canada Corporations Act*, section 102 of that Act does not apply to the Corporation.

3. BYLAWS

MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

GENERAL BYLAWS

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PART I - DEFINITIONS

Definition of Terms

- 1 In these bylaws:
 - (a) **“Act”** means *The Act of Incorporation of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada* as amended by *An Act to amend the Act of incorporation of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada*.
 - (b) **“area conference”** means a body of constituent congregations visibly grouped in a region of Canada not necessarily bounded by provincial borders;
 - (c) **“congregation”** means a body of persons who have responded to the call of Christ in repentance and in faith, who symbolize their unity through the practice of baptism and communion, and who are visibly grouped for the express purpose of implementing their obedience to Christ as head of the church;
 - (d) **“congregational member”** means a person who is a member of a constituent congregation;
 - (e) **“constituent congregation”** means a congregation which is a member of an area conference;
 - (f) **“MC Canada”** means Mennonite Church Canada; and
 - (g) **“MC USA”** means Mennonite Church USA.

PART II - MEMBERSHIP

Eligibility for Membership

- 2 (1) An area conference in Canada which accepts the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, supports the mission statement of MC Canada and accepts these bylaws is eligible to become a member of MC Canada.
- (2) Any area conference that wishes to become a member of MC Canada is invited to submit a request in writing to the General Secretary, who will submit it to the General Board which will, in turn, present the request and a recommendation to a delegate assembly.
- (3) A constituent congregation is a member of MC Canada as long as the area conference to which it belongs is a member of MC Canada.

Rights and Privileges of Members

- 3 (1) Membership in MC Canada entitles area conferences to:
 - (a) send delegates to a delegate assembly, as specified elsewhere in these bylaws, with the right to vote;
 - (b) representation on the General Board, as specified elsewhere in these bylaws; and

- (c) participate in programs and receive services from MC Canada.
- (2) Membership in MC Canada entitles constituent congregations to:
- (a) send delegates to a delegate assembly, as specified elsewhere in these bylaws, with the right to vote;
 - (b) have their congregational members serve on the General Board or stand for election to any elected positions except as otherwise provided in these bylaws; and
 - (c) participate in programs and receive services from MC Canada.

Expectations of Members

- 4** Area conferences and constituent congregations are expected to:
- (a) give faithful attention to the Scriptures;
 - (b) accept the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*;
 - (c) uphold statements of Christian faith and life made by MC Canada from time to time;
 - (d) respond to the invitation to become engaged in mission and service;
 - (e) participate in the church's life and mission through generous contributions of time and personal resources all in commitment to Jesus Christ in response to the grace of God and in loving service to the church in which the Holy Spirit lives and works; and
 - (f) assume all duties as defined in these bylaws.

Provisional Membership

- 5** (1) Provisional membership is open to any area conference which:
- (a) meets the eligibility requirement in bylaw 2(1);
 - (b) is not ready for full membership; but which
 - (c) wishes to evaluate the meaning of full membership for itself.
- (2) Provisional membership:
- (a) may be requested in writing to the General Secretary, and the process set out in bylaw 2(2) shall apply;
 - (b) is restricted to a maximum of five years;
 - (c) carries with it the expectations listed in bylaw 4;
 - (d) provides all the rights and privileges of membership listed in bylaw 3 except that:
 - (i) their delegates are not entitled to vote at delegate assemblies;
 - (ii) their congregational members may be elected to a Council, but may not serve on the General Board; and
 - (iii) participation in programs and services from MC Canada, and the costs associated with them, will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.
- (3) A constituent congregation is a provisional member of MC Canada as long as the area conference to which it belongs is a provisional member of MC Canada.

Removal of Members

- 6** An area conference may be removed from membership in MC Canada only on the recommendation of the General Board, and such recommendation may only be made after the General Board has followed procedures defined in *Guidelines for*

Building Faithful Relationships in the Church (1998) and *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love* (1995) to try to resolve matters with the area conference in a way that would avert the need for such a recommendation.

PART III - DELEGATE ASSEMBLIES

Representation at Delegate Assemblies

- 7** (1) Area conferences and constituent congregations may be represented at delegate assemblies as follows:
- (a) delegates appointed by constituent congregations:
 - (i) in the ratio of one delegate for every 50 congregational members or a portion thereof; but
 - (ii) not less than two per constituent congregation; and
 - (b) delegates appointed by the area conferences:
 - (i) in the ratio of one delegate for every 1,000 congregational members, or portion thereof, of their constituent congregations; but
 - (ii) not less than six and not more than 12 delegates per area conference.
- (2) Each delegate may represent only one of either an area conference, or a constituent congregation, but not both simultaneously.
- (3) Delegates must be congregational members. There are no other restrictions on who may be a delegate.

Duties and Powers of Voting Delegates

- 8** The delegates entitled to vote and present at a delegate assembly shall:
- (a) have the authority to act on behalf of MC Canada;
 - (b) discern MC Canada's participation in God's work as reflected in its mission statement;
 - (c) debate issues facing the church and, from time to time, issue statements, including, but not limited to, statements pertaining to faith and life, position statements, and statements to governments;
 - (d) review the work and ministry of MC Canada and of its mission agencies;
 - (e) approve the budgets of MC Canada;
 - (f) receive the General Board's recommendation on the appointment of an auditor to hold office until the close of the next regular delegate assembly, and accept or reject such recommendation;
 - (g) consider and accept or reject the financial statements of MC Canada and the auditor's report;
 - (h) receive the General Board's recommendation and accept, reject or remove area conferences as members or as provisional members;
 - (i) elect MC Canada's officers, members of the Councils and members of the Nominating Committee; and
 - (j) make the bylaws of MC Canada, amend bylaws as deemed appropriate, and monitor adherence to those bylaws.

Delegate Assemblies

- 9** (1) Regular delegate assemblies shall be held:
- (a) annually, beginning normally during the first two weeks of July,
 - (b) at a place determined by the General Board.
- (2) Elections shall be held at regular delegate assemblies except where the General Board determines that it is necessary to hold elections at a special delegate assembly. The General Board and all Councils shall provide written reports of their activities, plans and relevant financial statements for consideration by delegates at regular delegate assemblies.
- (3) A special delegate assembly may be called from time to time by the General Board at a time and place it may determine.

Notice of Delegate Assemblies

- 10** (1) The date and place of the next regular delegate assembly shall be announced at the conclusion of each regular delegate assembly.
- (2) Notice of a special delegate assembly shall be given to area conferences and to constituent congregations not less than 21 days in advance.

Voting at Delegate Assemblies

- 11** (1) The quorum for a delegate assembly shall be one half the total number eligible voting delegates from the area conferences plus 200 voting delegates from constituent congregations.
- (2) The business of a delegate assembly may be conducted:
- (a) by consensus without a formal vote;
 - (b) by a show of hands at the discretion of the chair or on the request of a voting delegate; or
 - (c) by ballot vote when directed by the chair, or when a motion to require a ballot vote is passed by a majority of votes cast on such motion.
- (3) Unless otherwise provided in these bylaws, or if a motion to require a larger number is passed by a majority of votes cast on such motion, a simple majority of the votes cast is sufficient to carry a resolution.
- (4) In the event of a ballot vote, the votes shall be counted by tellers who have been appointed in advance.

PART IV – NOMINATIONS, ELECTIONS, TERMS OF OFFICE AND VACANCIES

Qualifications for Elected Positions

- 12** (1) Each person nominated for an elected position must be a congregational member. However, congregational members of provisional constituent congregations are not eligible for election to the General Board.
- (2) In the event that an elected person ceases to be a congregational member, that person's term shall be deemed to have expired at that point.

- (3) No person may hold more than one elected position at the same time. Where a person who holds an elected position is elected to another elected position, that person is deemed to have resigned from the previously held elected position.
- (4) Staff of MC Canada are not eligible for election to an elected position in MC Canada.
- (5) Any question of eligibility for election shall be resolved by the General Board.

Nominating Committee

- 13** (1) Each area conference shall nominate one person to the Nominating Committee for election at a delegate assembly.
- (2) The Nominating Committee shall:
 - (a) in advance of a delegate assembly where elections are to be held, use its best efforts to prepare a slate of nominees consisting of one nominee for each elected position that needs to be filled;
 - (b) recommend, upon the request of a Council, persons to serve on its committees; and
 - (c) on request, suggest to the General Secretary names of candidates for vacant staff positions.

Election Procedures

- 14** (1) The Nominating Committee will receive further nominations at a delegate assembly if:
 - (a) it is endorsed by five voting delegates;
 - (b) the nominee has agreed to stand for the elected position; and
 - (c) it is presented to the Nominating Committee at least 24 hours before the scheduled election.
- (2) Twenty-four hours before the scheduled election, the Nominating Committee shall present its slate of nominees, including those nominated in accordance with 14(1) above, to the delegate assembly.
- (3) Where only one person has been nominated for a given elected position, that nominee shall be declared elected by acclamation.
- (4) Where multiple nominations have been received for any elected position, there shall be a ballot vote.

Terms of Office

- 15** (1) The terms of office:
 - (a) for the officers and the two General Board members at large not serving as appointees to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference:
 - (i) shall be two years; and
 - (ii) they shall be eligible to serve for up to three consecutive terms;

- (b) for members of the Christian Witness and Christian Formation Councils and General Board who serve as appointees to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference:
 - (i) shall be six years; and
 - (ii) they shall not be eligible to serve consecutive terms;
 - (c) for all other members of the Councils:
 - (i) shall be three years; and
 - (iii) they shall be eligible to serve for up to three consecutive terms.
- (2) A person's term shall begin at the end of the delegate assembly at which the person was elected.

Vacancies

- 16** (1) Where a vacancy occurs in any elected position between regular delegate assemblies, such vacancy may be filled by the General Board, at its discretion, until the next regular delegate assembly.
- (2) Where a person has been appointed to fill a vacancy, the time spent completing that vacant term of office shall not be considered as a portion of any succeeding term.

PART V - GENERAL BOARD

Composition of the General Board

- 17** The General Board shall consist of:
- (a) the officers;
 - (b) the moderator or a designate of each area conference;
 - (c) the chair of the Faith and Life Committee
 - (d) the following from the Councils:
 - (i) the chair of the Christian Witness Council and one other named by the Council;
 - (ii) the chair of the Christian Formation Council and one other named by the Council; and
 - (iii) the chair of the Support Services Council; and
 - (e) three members at large appointed by the General Board and confirmed by the delegate assembly, one of whom will be appointed by the General Board to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference.

Duties and Powers of the General Board

- 18** The General Board shall:
- (a) act on behalf of MC Canada between delegate assemblies;
 - (b) act as the legal representative of MC Canada, authorize such of its officers to sign contracts, cheques and other documents on behalf of MC Canada as the General Board may consider advisable, and prescribe the limits, if any, of such authority;
 - (c) report to, and be accountable to, its members at delegate assemblies;
 - (d) between delegate assemblies, continue the process of discerning MC Canada's participation in God's work as reflected in the Identity and Purpose Statement;
 - (e) lead MC Canada in developing its identity and vision;

- (f) create forums for interaction among the leaders of the area conferences;
- (g) direct and coordinate the work of the Councils;
- (h) review financial statements and direct the preparation of budgets;
- (i) make recommendations at regular delegate assemblies on the appointment of auditors for MC Canada;
- (j) appoint the General Secretary;
- (k) at its discretion, fill vacancies in elected positions that occur between regular delegate assemblies;
- (l) process issues of membership in MC Canada and make recommendations thereon at regular or special delegate assemblies;
- (m) foster relationships with other church bodies, including appointments as appropriate to:
 - (i) MC USA;
 - (ii) Mennonite World Conference;
 - (iii) other Mennonite church bodies;
 - (iv) Canadian Council of Churches; and
 - (v) Evangelical Fellowship of Canada;
- (n) in partnership with the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba and the Friends of Menno Simons College, oversee the work of Canadian Mennonite University;
- (o) in partnership with MC USA, oversee the work of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary; and
- (p) do any other thing which is likely to support and promote the mission of MC Canada.

General Board Governance

- 19** The General Board shall formulate and adopt rules of procedure and governance under which it shall operate.

PART VI - OFFICERS

Officers

- 20** (1) The officers of MC Canada shall be the:
- (a) Moderator;
 - (b) Assistant Moderator;
 - (c) Secretary; and
 - (d) Treasurer.
- (2) The officers shall be elected at a regular delegate assembly.

Duties of the Officers

- 21** (1) The Moderator shall:
- (a) preside at all delegate assemblies;
 - (b) chair all meetings of the General Board and the Executive Committee; and
 - (c) act as the official representative of and spokesperson for MC Canada.
- (2) The Assistant Moderator shall:
- (a) assume the duties of the Moderator:
 - (i) in the absence or incapacity of the Moderator; or
 - (ii) at the request of the Moderator or of the Executive Committee.

- (3) The Secretary shall be responsible for recording all minutes of delegate assemblies and meetings of the General Board and the Executive Committee.
- (4) The Treasurer shall oversee the Financial Policy and Audit Committee established by the General Board.

PART VII – GENERAL SECRETARY

Appointment

22 The General Secretary shall be appointed by the General Board.

Duties of the General Secretary

- 23** The General Secretary shall:
- (a) coordinate the total program of MC Canada;
 - (b) hire and supervise the MC Canada staff;
 - (c) participate, without a vote, in meetings of the Executive Committee and the General Board;
 - (d) receive and record the credentials of all voting delegates prior to each delegate assembly; and
 - (e) publish proceedings of each delegate assembly.

PART VIII - EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Composition of the Executive Committee

- 24** The Executive Committee shall consist of:
- (a) the officers; and
 - (b) one member at large of the General Board appointed by the General Board from among its members.

Duties and Powers of the Executive Committee

- 25** The Executive Committee shall:
- (a) act on behalf of the General Board between its meetings;
 - (b) report its activities to the General Board; and
 - (c) between meetings of the General Board, continue the process of discerning MC Canada's participation in God's work as contained in the Identity and Purpose Statement.

PART IX - JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Composition of the Joint Executive Committee

- 26** The Joint Executive Committee shall consist of:
- (a) the Executive Committee of MC Canada; and
 - (b) the Executive Committee of MC USA.

Duties of the Joint Executive Committee

- 27** The Joint Executive Committee shall meet at least annually to:
- (a) foster relationships between MC Canada and MC USA; and

- (b) oversee binational partnership programs.

PART X – FINANCIAL POLICY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Composition of the Financial Policy and Audit Committee

- 28** The Financial Policy and Audit Committee shall consist of 3 people, namely:
- (a) the Treasurer, as chairperson; and
 - (b) two other persons appointed by the General Board whose term shall be three years; and who shall be eligible to serve for up to three consecutive terms.

Duties of the Financial Policy and Audit Committee

- 29** The Financial Policy and Audit Committee shall meet in person at least once annually and otherwise by teleconferencing as required to:
- (a) Review the financial statements (YTD) prepared by the Director of Finance and report to the General Board.
 - (b) Recommend financial policies and procedures as needed.
 - (c) Recommend investment policies and procedures as needed.
 - (d) Ensure that MC Canada has implemented appropriate systems to identify, monitor and mitigate significant business risks.
 - (e) Monitor the review of senior management's expense claims.
 - (f) Provide initial recommendations regarding the budgeting process for the upcoming year and review proposed budgets before submission to the General Board.
 - (g) Act as an audit committee with the following responsibilities:
 - (i.) Review and recommend the appointment of the external auditor.
 - (ii.) Review annually the audit plan and fees presented by the external auditor.
 - (iii.) Review the annual audited financial statements prior to submission to the General Board for their approval.
 - (iv.) In camera meeting with the auditor.
 - (v.) Review and report to the General Board the results of the external auditor's annual audit including the management letter and significant issues encountered during the audit and how they were resolved.
 - (vi.) Review with management and the external auditors MC Canada's systems of internal control to ensure compliance with legal, ethical, regulatory and financial reporting requirements and report to the General Board as required.

XI FAITH AND LIFE COMMITTEE

Composition of the Faith and Life Committee

- 30** The Faith and Life Committee shall consist of 5 people, namely:
- (a) a chairperson, who will be a member of the General Board, elected at a regular delegate assembly;
 - (b) two additional persons elected at a regular delegate assembly;
 - (c) one additional person appointed by the General Board
 - (d) one staff member appointed by the General Secretary

Duties of the Faith and Life Committee

- 31** The Faith and Life Committee shall meet at least three times annually,

and one of the meetings will be together with a Reference Council which shall include of the Moderators, Secretaries and Conference Ministers and faculty members appointed by our higher education institutions, to:

- i. Attend to the interface among Scripture, the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* and our identity as MC Canada.
- ii. Give leadership to Mennonite Church Canada in discerning God's will on issues of theology, ethics, polity and practice.
- iii. Work cooperatively with educational institutions and other church agencies to facilitate, create and distribute resources for study by and guidance for the church.

PART XII - MINISTRIES OF MC CANADA

Christian Witness Council

- 32** (1) The core activities of the Christian Witness Council shall focus on carrying out mission work together with area conferences and their constituent congregations including, but not limited to:
- (a) evangelism and church planting;
 - (b) international missions;
 - (c) multicultural ministries;
 - (d) Native ministries;
 - (e) peace and justice advocacy; and
 - (f) service ministries.
- (2) The Christian Witness Council shall consist of 10 people, namely:
- (a) a chairperson elected at a regular delegate assembly;
 - (b) one member elected at a regular delegate assembly to serve as an appointee to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference; and
 - (c) eight other persons elected at a regular delegate assembly.
- (3) The Christian Witness Council shall have authority to:
- (a) select any other officers from among its members that it deems desirable;
 - (b) hire staff to oversee its programs;
 - (c) modify the organization of its programs to adapt to the needs of MC Canada and the availability of resources;
 - (d) oversee its programs, staff and budgets;
 - (e) delegate parts of its authority to various committees, and
 - (f) appoint representatives to related organizations.
- (4) The Christian Witness Council shall prepare financial budgets for its own programs, with assistance from the Financial Policy and Audit Committee, and reports for presentation at regular delegate assemblies, covering their activities since the last regular delegate assembly, and shall prepare and provide to the General Board such other statements or reports as the General Board may request.
- (5) The Christian Witness Council shall, on behalf of MC Canada, relate to:
- (a) Mennonite Central Committee;
 - (b) Canadian Women in Mission;
 - (c) Christian Peacemaker Teams; and

- (d) any other organization or group assigned to it by the General Board.

Christian Formation Council

- 33** (1) The core activities of the Christian Formation Council shall focus on providing leadership and resources to enable area conferences and their constituent congregations to promote the Christian formation of their members, including, but not limited to:
- (a) congregational and ministerial leadership;
 - (b) youth and young adult ministry;
 - (c) Christian education and nurture; and
 - (d) resources and publishing.
- (2) The Christian Formation Council shall consist of 10 persons, namely:
- (a) a chairperson elected at a regular delegate assembly;
 - (b) one member elected at a regular delegate assembly to serve as an appointee to the General Council of Mennonite World Conference; and
 - (c) eight other persons elected at a regular delegate assembly.
- (3) The Christian Formation Council shall have authority to:
- (a) select any other officers from among its members that it deems desirable;
 - (b) hire staff to oversee its programs;
 - (c) modify the organization of its programs to adapt to the needs of MC Canada and the availability of resources;
 - (d) oversee its programs, staff and budgets;
 - (e) delegate parts of its authority to various committees, and
 - (f) appoint representatives to related organizations.
- (4) The Christian Formation Council shall prepare financial budgets for its own program, with assistance from the Financial Policy and Audit Committee, and reports for presentation at regular delegate assemblies, covering their activities since the last regular delegate assembly, and shall prepare and provide to the General Board such other statements or reports as the General Board may request.
- (5) The Christian Formation Council shall, on behalf of MC Canada, relate to:
- (a) Mennonite Publishing Network;
 - (b) Mennonite Camping Association;
 - (c) Elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools related to MC Canada; and
 - (d) any other organization or group assigned to it by the General Board.

Support Services Council

- 34** (1) The activities of the Support Services Council shall focus on structures and staff to provide support services to MC Canada including, but not limited to:
- (a) planning delegate assemblies;
 - (b) communication;
 - (c) information technology;
 - (d) human resources management;
 - (e) pension plan;
 - (f) property management; and

- (g) development and constituency relations.
- (2) The Support Services Council shall consist of six persons, namely:
 - (a) a chairperson elected at a regular delegate assembly;
 - (b) and five other persons elected at a regular delegate assembly.
 - (3) The Support Services Council shall have authority to:
 - (a) select any other officers from among its members that it deems desirable;
 - (b) hire staff to oversee its activities;
 - (c) modify the organization of its programs to adapt to the needs of MC Canada and the availability of resources;
 - (d) oversee its programs, staff and budgets;
 - (e) delegate parts of its authority to various committees; and
 - (f) appoint representatives to related organizations.
 - (4) The Support Services Council shall prepare financial budgets for its own program, with assistance from the Financial Policy and Audit Committee, and reports for presentation at regular delegate assemblies, covering their activities since the last regular delegate assembly, and shall prepare and provide to the General Board such other statements or reports as the General Board may request.
 - (5) The Support Services Council shall, on behalf of MC Canada, relate to:
 - (a) Mennonite Foundation of Canada;
 - (b) Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service; and
 - (c) any other organization or group assigned to it by the General Board.

Council Governance

- 35** Each Council shall formulate and adopt rules of procedure and governance under which the Council shall operate.

PART XIII – MODERATORS, SECRETARIES AND CONFERENCE MINISTERS MEETING

Membership

- 36** The members of the Moderators, Secretaries and Conference Ministers meeting shall consist of the moderator or a designate, leading staff member and conference minister of Mennonite Church Canada and each of its member conferences.

Functions

- 37** The Moderators, Secretaries and Conference Ministers will meet annually to:
- (a) Report to each other the ministries and state of health of the national church body and its area conferences.
 - (b) Serve, together with others, as a reference council for the Faith and Life Committee.
 - (c) Discuss issues of common concern in order to provide mutual counsel and support and to seek common approaches where appropriate.
 - (d) Develop relationships of trust, respect and mutual subordination.
 - (e) Other functions that may be helpful to building up the unity and faithfulness of the church.

PART XIV – OPERATIONAL MATTERS

Fiscal Year

38 MC Canada's fiscal year shall end on the 31st day of January in each year.

Corporate Seal

- 39** The Corporate seal shall:
- (a) have inscribed thereon *Mennonite Church Canada*; and
 - (b) be affixed to such signed documents as the General Board considers necessary or advisable.

Indemnities

- 40** Every officer, member of the General Board and member of a Council of MC Canada, and their heirs, executors and administrators shall at all times be indemnified and saved harmless, out of the funds of MC Canada, from and against
- (a) all costs, charges and expenses whatsoever which such officer or member sustains or incurs as a result of any claim, demand or proceedings made or brought against him or her for anything done, or omitted or permitted to be done, in the course of carrying out his or her responsibilities as an officer or member, except for any costs, charges and expenses sustained or incurred by the officer or member because of the wilful neglect of such officer or member; and
 - (b) all reasonable costs, charges and expenses incurred by such officer or member in the course of carrying out his or her responsibilities as an officer or member.

PART XV – AMENDMENTS OF BYLAWS

Amendments to the bylaws

- 41** (1) These bylaws may be amended at any regular or special delegate assembly; provided that the proposed amendments have been sent to the member area conferences and their constituent congregations at least two months in advance.
- (2) In order to pass, bylaw amendments require a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

Coming into force

- 42** (1) These bylaws come into force at the conclusion of the delegate assembly at which they are adopted.
- (2) Any subsequent amendments to these bylaws come into force at the conclusion of the delegate assembly at which they are adopted.

Approved:
July 14, 2001
Amended:
July 6, 2002
Amended:
July 9, 2005

4. GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERSHIP IN MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

I. Basis for membership

The new integrated Mennonite Church desires to be a people of God characterized by a commitment to biblical foundations and to Anabaptist perspectives. While the integrating churches are of various backgrounds and formations, we believe the Holy Spirit has called the new Mennonite Church to unite in faith and in mission (Acts 1-2).

Membership signifies a mutual commitment to build on the true foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11); to become “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22); to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14).

Covenant

Membership is a voluntary covenant between and among four inter-related communities of faith: congregations, area conferences, country church bodies, and international fellowships.

Congregations are formed of individual members; area conferences are constituted by member congregations; area conferences and their constituent congregations join together to form country church bodies; country church bodies join for international affiliations. Once made, a covenant of membership is nurtured in a spirit of mutual commitment to Jesus Christ and to the body of Christ, the church.

Accountability

Membership assumes accountability before God and toward one another. Accountability has an inward and an outward dimension, with a biblical commission supporting both aspects. Looking inward, the church is commissioned to be a ‘binding and loosing’ fellowship (Matthew 16:13-20; 18:15-20; John 20:23; Ephesians 4:15-16).

The joyful obligation of membership includes the calling to build up the body of Christ through mutual discernment of the will of God. Looking outward, the church is commissioned to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 10; Acts 1:8). Membership includes the invitation to become a community engaged in mission and service.

Unity

Members are called to unity in Spirit, “so that the world may believe that [the Father] has sent [the Son]” (John 17:21; see also Ephesians 2:14-22). The church is called to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and love, as it strives to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-6).

As witness to God who is one, and to Jesus Christ who was sent to reveal the will of God, the new Mennonite Church desires that members give faithful expression to their unity as the body of Christ. The Mennonite churches have heard this call to unity ever more clearly in recent years.

Diversity

Within the context of unity, the new Mennonite Church welcomes diversity among its constituent entities (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12). The church is an interdependent and diverse body of believers who together form the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 3:25-29; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

This body includes people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9), creating a colorful multicultural family of God.

“No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).

II. Policy and practice of membership

1. Our vision for the Mennonite Church includes the invitation to Christian church bodies of common faith and mission to affiliate with the Mennonite Church in order to support and strengthen the fellowship and mission of an Anabaptist witness in North America and around the world.

2. Based upon the decision made at Wichita '95 to integrate, the congregations and conferences that are currently members of The Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and/or of an area conference of one of these three bodies, are welcomed and received into the membership of the new Mennonite Church.

(An “Attachment” to these Guidelines addresses the current dilemma of congregations that have been disciplined by one area conference and are no longer members of that conference, but continue to hold membership in another area conference.)

3. Members of the Mennonite Church are expected to give faithful attention to the Scriptures, to accept the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,” and to uphold statements of Christian faith and life made by the Mennonite church from time to time. They are also expected to participate in the church’s life and mission through the generous contributions of time and personal resources, all given in commitment to Jesus Christ, in response to the grace of God, and in loving service to the church in which the Holy Spirit lives and works.

4. Congregations have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process for membership of persons joining their congregation. They do so in consultation with their area conference and in consideration of expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain congregational decision making regarding members as part of the legacy of congregational polity.

5. Conferences have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process for membership of congregations within their area conference. They do so in consultation with their country church body and in consideration of expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain conference decision making regarding member congregations as part of the legacy of conference polity.

6. Country church bodies (Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church U.S.) are formed as area conferences and their congregations join together. Country church bodies have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process whereby conferences become members of the Mennonite Church U.S. or the Mennonite Church Canada. They do so in consideration of the expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain church-wide decision making regarding member conferences as part of the legacy of denominational polity.

7. Congregations attain membership in the Mennonite Church through their membership in an area conference. Congregations that currently are members only of the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, or the Conference of Mennonites in Canada but not of an area conference need to take steps to join an area conference. They shall do so within two years of the adoption of these guidelines. Also, congregations that are presently members of an area conference only but not of the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, or the Conference of Mennonites in Canada will become members of the country church bodies of the Mennonite Church through their membership in their area conference.

8. Congregations will hold membership in only one area conference. Where dual affiliation of a congregation with more than one area conference already exists and is perceived to serve the best interests of the congregation and their conferences at this time, dual conference membership may be retained for a period not to exceed five years. We also recognize that certain congregations will find it beneficial to maintain ties to other conferences and/or church bodies.

9. We recognize the possibility that from time to time a congregation may seek a new area conference relationship. Out of mutual respect for one another, no congregation shall separate or be separated from one conference nor subsequently be accepted by another conference without consultation among the conferences and congregations concerned.

10. In recognition of the differences in how conferences process issues, we offer the option of provisional membership (non-voting participation) to conferences that are not ready for full membership. This permits participation as such conferences continue to evaluate their membership status. A five year limit is placed on provisional membership.

11. A congregation or conference that is currently a member of one of the integrating church bodies, but is hesitant about becoming a member of the Mennonite Church, should process its concerns with the church body in which it presently holds membership. Given the voluntary nature of the Mennonite Church, conferences and congregations that choose not to join the Mennonite Church are free to sever their current connections and unite with a church body of their choice. It is hoped this would take place in a cordial spirit, by mutual agreement of the groups involved, and only as a last resort.

accepted July 27, 1999, at St. Louis, MO

5. EXCERPTS FROM A MENNONITE POLITY FOR MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP²

A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership includes chapters on theology, history, qualifications for ministry and ethics in ministry. The section that lays out the current polity (pp. 73-98) includes substantial detail on procedures for ministerial credentialing, classification of credentials and processes to support ministerial leaders. The following excerpts speak to the general matters of relationship for accountability and leadership.

[p. 73] The purpose of polity is to enhance the exercise of ministry so that the church is blessed and God is glorified. While all members are ministers, this polity describes several ministerial offices which are vested with the authority to lead a congregation.

A Mennonite polity understands the relationship between congregations and their ministerial leaders and the relationship between congregations within the conferences / denomination to be one characterized by covenant with each other before God. The relationship, built on promises made, is one of interdependence and mutuality. This covenant is affirmed each time a congregation joins the conference / denomination. It is made real in the ongoing life of the church as it lives out its common confession of faith and as it carries out programs that were decided upon jointly.

As Mennonites, we desire to live with each other in a covenant relationship. "You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27, RSV). We want connections which help us to be accountable to each other for our life and mission. The governance aspect of polity flows out of this understanding of and respect for covenant. Covenants, which are made voluntarily, lie at the heart of Anabaptist understandings of the church.

[74] Governance authority granted to leaders, then, is in the context of this larger covenant between the constituent elements of church: congregation, conference and denomination. Authority is built on a strong sense of mutual accountability (Heb. 13:17). Those chosen to lead are given support, but they also are accountable. They are entrusted with authority with the understanding that they too are under authority. Leaders are accountable within the congregation, but also beyond it within the whole church. Both ordination and installation are covenanting services between the minister and the congregation, made in the presence of God. All members make a covenant at the time of baptism.

² Sponsored by Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries (Mennonite Church) and Ministerial Leadership Services (General Conference Mennonite Church), Everett J. Thomas, ed., Faith and Life Press, 1996. As a successor, along with Mennonite Church USA, to Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church, and as a successor to Conference of Mennonites in Canada, whose General Board had previously approved this as its statement, Mennonite Church Canada has adopted this as its own statement of ministerial polity.

The ministerial leadership polity that grows out of this covenant relationship recognizes three offices of ministry:

1. Oversight ministries (conference ministers, overseers, and a denominational department of ministerial leadership).
2. Pastoral Ministries.
3. Deacon / elder ministries.

Congregational leadership, then, is a responsibility shared by persons duly discerned and called to these three offices; it is worked out within a spirit of mutuality and covenant. Normally, pastors and those called to offices of oversight are ordained, while those called to the role of deacon / elder are usually not ordained.

In setting this polity alongside the three main polities of other communions, we find that it shares some characteristics with each of them, but is also distinct from each.

Episcopal: This polity has a more hierarchical structure, [75] with the preponderance of authority resting with the bishops, especially historically. The emphasis on apostolic succession ... reinforced this clergy-centered authority. In modern times, the laity have been increasingly included in the councils where decisions are made.

Presbyterian: This tradition accords leadership authority to a group of elders (presbytery) which is comprised of lay and clergy members representing a group of congregations. Decisions made at this level are subject to revision by the two higher bodies, namely the synod and the general assembly. Ministerial credentials are processed at the presbytery level.

Congregational: Churches which are ordered through a congregational polity ... invest decision-making authority primarily in the congregation. Conferences or assemblies of congregations within this polity generally have only advisory power over any one congregation.

A **Mennonite polity** respects and takes seriously the congregation, but understands church to include conferences and the denomination.... Authority is shared and exercised at the various levels. Such a polity is intended to serve not only in ordering the ministerial leadership of the congregation but also the polity for ministerial leadership in area conferences and in [Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA]. ...

[79] Women and men may be granted *credentials* to Christian ministry. These credentials are granted only by the area conference, but are respected by all Mennonite congregations, and conference and churchwide organizations. The credential is granted by a conference, and the credentialed person is accountable to the conference for the ministry credential.

...

[106] Ethics for ministers, congregational leaders, and conference and denominational staff are based on the covenant relationship with God expressed in Jesus Christ, a covenant which is renewed at the Lord's Supper. This

covenant is formed with Christ and the church at baptism, and is strengthened through every moment of grace experienced in the body of Christ.... Ethical standards are set to create and maintain loving, caring, responsible relationships within the church. ...

6. AGREEING AND DISAGREEING IN LOVE:

Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement

From the General Conference Mennonite Church and Mennonite Church General Boards, March-April 1995

"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. (Rom. 14:1-8, 10-12, 17-19; 15:1-7) |
| Affirm hope | 2. Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict we can work through to growth. (Eph. 4:15-16) |
| Commit to prayer | 3. Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution (no prayers for my success or for the other to change but to find a joint way). (James 5:16) |

In Action

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Go to the other... | 4. Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism. * (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-20) |
| 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'. (Gal. 6:1-5) |
| 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. (James 1:19; Prov. 18:13) |
| Be slow to judge, | 7. Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats, and act in a non-defensive, nonreactive way. (Rom 2:1-4; Gal. 5:22-2) |
| Be willing to negotiate. | 8. Work through the disagreements constructively. (Acts 15; Phil. 2:1-11) <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. (Col. 3:12-1) |
| 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. (Phil. 4:1-3) |
| 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. (Acts 15) <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. (1 Cor. 6:1-6)

*Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between.

7. GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING FAITHFUL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

The General Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) presented the following to delegates to the CMC annual conference at Stratford, Ontario, in 1998 as its position statement, and commended the statement to all within the CMC as a basis for processing issues that arise within the CMC constituency from time to time.

A. Introduction

1. In recent years the CMC has made significant changes in structure, especially in relation to area conferences. These changes have implications for how we process issues and make decisions that arise concerning our common faith and life. Relationships between congregations, area conferences and the CMC continue to evolve as we engage in the process of integration.

2. Because of our commitment to engage in ministry together, we do well to seek agreement on guidelines for polity. In this quest, questions such as the following arise: On what basis and by what process do we discuss issues and agree on guidelines for faith and life? On what basis and by what process do we resolve differences when they occur among us? On what basis and by what process do we re-examine issues around former agreements?

3. While the Bible is the basis for faith and life, our answers to questions of faith and life are also informed by various statements we have agreed upon. These include: 1) "Vision: Healing and Hope;" 2) *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*; 3) the constitutions and bylaws of congregations, of area conference, of the CMC, the General Conference, and the Mennonite Church; 4) the statement, "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love;" and 5) the CMC Mission Statement (1990). It is understood that these statements often develop over time and undergo change from time to time.

4. Our history has demonstrated that proper procedures are important servants of our mutual accountability. The following assumptions and procedures are set forth to provide a framework for fostering wholesome relationships, and for processing issues among us, to the end that we may become and be a faithful part of the church of Jesus Christ.

B. Assumptions

1. We accept the authority of the Bible in all matters of faith and life, and we continue, in the context of the community of faith, to study the teachings of Scripture and to submit to its instructions.

2. We uphold our Confession of Faith and the statements accepted at delegate sessions of the church.

3. We seek consensus on a polity and procedure to guide us in processing issues.

4. The constitutions of the CMC, of area conferences, and of congregations within the CMC imply that the congregation assumes the primary responsibility for its affairs. At the same time, our constitutions assume that matters of faith and order are developed together and are supported on a church-wide basis.

5. Even in the midst of a diversity of interpretations of understanding and expressions of ministry, we pray and strive for a spirit of Christian unity in the Body of Christ. We differentiate between unity in essentials and diversity in non-essentials. The CMC Mission Statement (1990) states: "The CMC is a united and uniting body of Mennonite congregations."

6. We covenant together as church entities (congregations, area conferences, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, General Conference Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church) to respect one another as Christians and as members of the body of Christ as we discern together how the Spirit of God is guiding us and working among us.

C. Procedures

1. When a point of disagreement arises among congregations or conferences, the first obligation is for the concerned parties to engage in loving dialogue in a spirit of mutual accountability. In the process of dialogue we come to understand one another's motivations, assumptions, and interpretations. The goal of dialogue is to gain forgiveness and reconciliation (Matthew 18:15), and to seek the mutual good of the church (Hebrews 10:24).

2. Issues may be noted and dialogue may be initiated by congregations, by the area conference, or by the CMC.

3. When an issue or a disagreement involves congregations in one area conference, dialogue is usually facilitated by the leadership of the area conference in which the congregation is a member. The CMC stands ready to assist and to participate in these processes.

4. When disagreement involves congregations in more than one area conference, each area conference confers with its respective congregation(s), and the area conferences involved confer with one another. CMC leadership stands ready to facilitate such conversation. Correspondence and reports are shared with all congregations and conferences named and involved in the process.

5. Only as a last recourse of action, and when all attempts to resolve differences and find reconciliation have failed, would separation of congregations and conferences be considered. See Matthew 18:17 and the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, on "Church Discipline" (Art.14).

6. The CMC General Board, which includes area conference representatives, assumes responsibility for developing procedures and statements to deal with matters of disagreement that arise among us from time to time.

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