

missionalseeds

indiana-michigan mennonite conference
Spring 2012 | vol 4 no 1

Congregations in Transition

Indiana-Michigan supports congregations undergoing leadership transitions.

with **Doug Kaufman**

1. How many of the 77 congregations in conference are currently in leadership transition?

19 total. 12 congregations are engaged in 14 pastoral search processes. 7 have a pastor resigning but have yet to begin their search. We are also working with the transition of a related congregation that is not a member of conference..

2. How does conference staff support these congregations during their transitions?

As conference pastor for leadership transitions, I try to connect with congregational leadership as soon as possible after a retirement or resignation is announced. I help the leadership know that we want to walk with them through this pro-



Doug Kaufman, Conference Pastor for Leadership Transitions



Doug Kaufman (right) installs the pastoral team at Prairie Street Mennonite Church. (left to right: Anne Mitchell, pastor; Nelson Kraybill, lead pastor; Frances Ringenberg, pastor; Doug Kaufman)

cess. I talk to them about what they need to do during the transition. In some cases the congregation would do best to call a transitional pastor to help them work specifically at five transitional tasks:

- coming to terms with history
- discovering a new identity
- allowing needed leadership changes
- rethinking denominational linkages
- committing to new leadership and a new future.

This is especially needed if the pastor served for a long time (over 10 years), if there was a lot of conflict in the congregation or if the ending was in some way difficult—

perhaps because of death or ethical misconduct. In other congregations there is still some basic work of discerning if the pastoral role will change or if the congregation needs to do some significant re-visioning of its ministry. This can be done with current leadership in the congregation or with the aid of a consultant. When a congregation decides to work with a transitional

pastor or consultant, I help them find people to call.

Once a congregation has worked on these congregational transition issues and is ready to call a new pastor, they form a search committee. I come to the first search committee meeting and orient them to their

As a **Missional Seeds Giving Club member**, your quarterly donations help Indiana-Michigan Conference serve God and support a variety of ministries, including those in this *Missional Seeds*. Please respond in the enclosed envelope. **Thank you for your continued support.**

role and how we work at pastoral searches within Mennonite Church USA. Their first task is to complete a Congregational Information Form (CIF) that is distributed to people interested in the pastorate. We ask anyone who is interested in a pastorate in the denomination to complete a Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) file. At any given time I may be aware of 10 – 15 people interested in a pastorate in the conference. I also have access to a national list of 20 – 55 names of people who have completed the MLI.

I work at networking between the people interested in pastorates and those searching for pastors. I share CIFs with potential pastors and then the next meeting I attend with the search committee is usually when I have several people expressing interest in pursuing that role. I help the committee prioritize the people interested and then share MLIs of those who they think are best suited for their congregation.

After that I stay in contact with the committee though I may not come to any more meetings. I share new MLIs as I discover them, and offer

counsel especially to the chair as they start interviewing people, and then move to bringing one person to the congregation as a pastoral candidate. Finally, once the pastor begins, I or Dan install the pastor in the congregation, again as a way of acknowledging our mutual accountability within the conference. Congregations with overseers often have them take part in the installation as well, and some overseers attend most search committee meetings as a way of bringing in a wider conference perspective to each discussion.

3. Doug and Dan, can you explain how the Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT) and Leadership Enhancement Team (LET) work to support congregations?

Doug Kaufman:

When congregations call people who are new to the pastorate, the MCT joins the congregation in discerning whether someone is a potential fit as a Mennonite pastor. We interview new pastors and decide whether or not to license them for this ministry. This is a way of gaining a wider discernment than

that of the congregation, and a way that we support and provide accountability for pastors in the conference. If someone is indeed called as a pastor, then we provide ongoing support primarily through the LET. However, if a pastor is accused of engaging in unethical conduct, then the MCT investigates and can remove a credential if the pastor is found guilty of a serious violation.

Dan Miller, conference pastor:

LET gives oversight to area councils and overseers. It is currently revamping the overseer system around the idea of soul care and being a learning church. Items under LET oversight include Journey, Pastoral Leadership Team Weekend and a Pastoral Care Series at AMBS. LET “is to be a catalyzing group that pays attention to generative work in conference.” It works with the Mennonite colleges to underwrite costs for Ministry Inquiry students. In case of conflict, LET can create a listening committee to be a listening ear in the congregation and make some suggestions for addressing the conflict.

From our conference pastor



Dan Miller,
Conference Pastor

Announcements. Farewell conversations. Celebrations. Guest speakers. Transitional pastors and transition teams. Search committees. Questions. Paperwork. Candidates. Beginnings. These are elements of pastoral change for many congregations. Changes in pastoral leadership are a time of distinctive experiences and fresh learnings.

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference provides helpful resources to congregations during changes in pastoral leadership. This newsletter highlights these services for Missional Seeds members. While all staff participate in some way with congregations during change, Doug Kaufman as conference pastor for leadership transitions is a primary contact. Indiana-Michigan Conference congregations benefit from his thoughtful support as they navigate the unfamiliar waters of pastoral change. We are grateful for Doug’s presence and work on conference staff.

Thank you for your regular financial support, which allows us to continue providing these services to congregations in transition.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Miller".