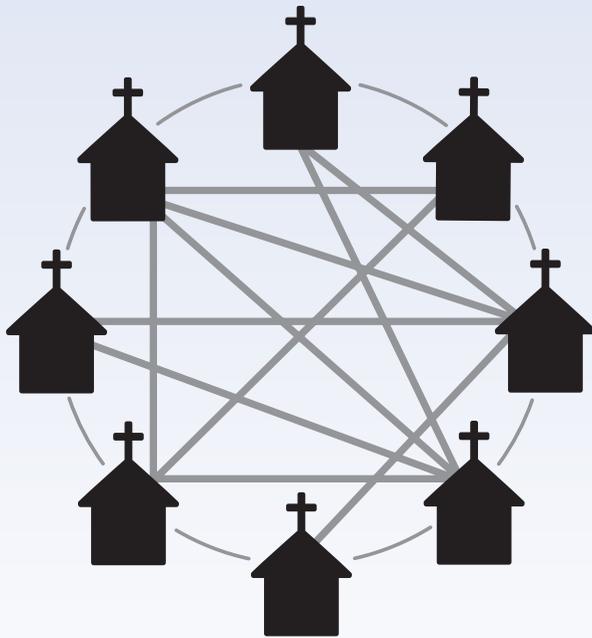


Introduction

For 100 years, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) has sought to be faithful in following Jesus as a community of congregations. Our story involves congregations retaining, as well as adopting, the richness of Anabaptist history and theology. Our story is also one of innovation in mission and seeking to live out the gospel in new and ever-changing times.

As we reflect on the current state of our conference and the Church, we feel called to articulate for this present time how we sense God calling us to be together as a conference, and to act as brothers and sisters, and disciples in the world. This involves retaining much of what we value from our past and present, as well as making some changes in the way we conceptualize ‘conference.’ The diagram below depicts our relating to one another as “a community of congregations.”

The vision puts emphasis on the centrality of Jesus in our life (at individual, congregational, and corporate levels); places a high value on our relationships with one another; and expresses a commitment to respond to God’s love for us by sharing God’s love in the world.



Covenant for congregations and credentialed leaders

Congregations and credentialed leaders who want to be part of this conference will be asked to sign a covenant every three years. In brief, the covenant asks us to commit to: engaging the shared spiritual practices, to participate in conference affairs (via volunteers, delegates, finances, prayers, and communications), to use the communal discernment process as needed, and to foster inter-congregational relationships.

A congregational representative will sign the covenant on the church’s behalf. Pastors and others who desire their credentials to be held by IMMC will also sign the covenant.

This covenant will help us to maintain accountability and create an environment of trust as we, the community of congregations, commit and periodically recommit to the relationship. Does it take some effort? Yes, but we believe there is benefit to intentionality as it helps us be mindful of our voluntary commitment to the people, congregations, values and spiritual practices of IMMC. When we commit to and connect with those who know and care whether we succeed, we are better able to effectively serve our communities and the world, to the glory of God.

Conclusion

Jesus sent his disciples out in his name and they returned to report all they had done. Our hope is that when we gather as a community of congregations it will be a time to share all that we have done in Jesus’ name, and a time to support and equip one another in how the Spirit is leading.

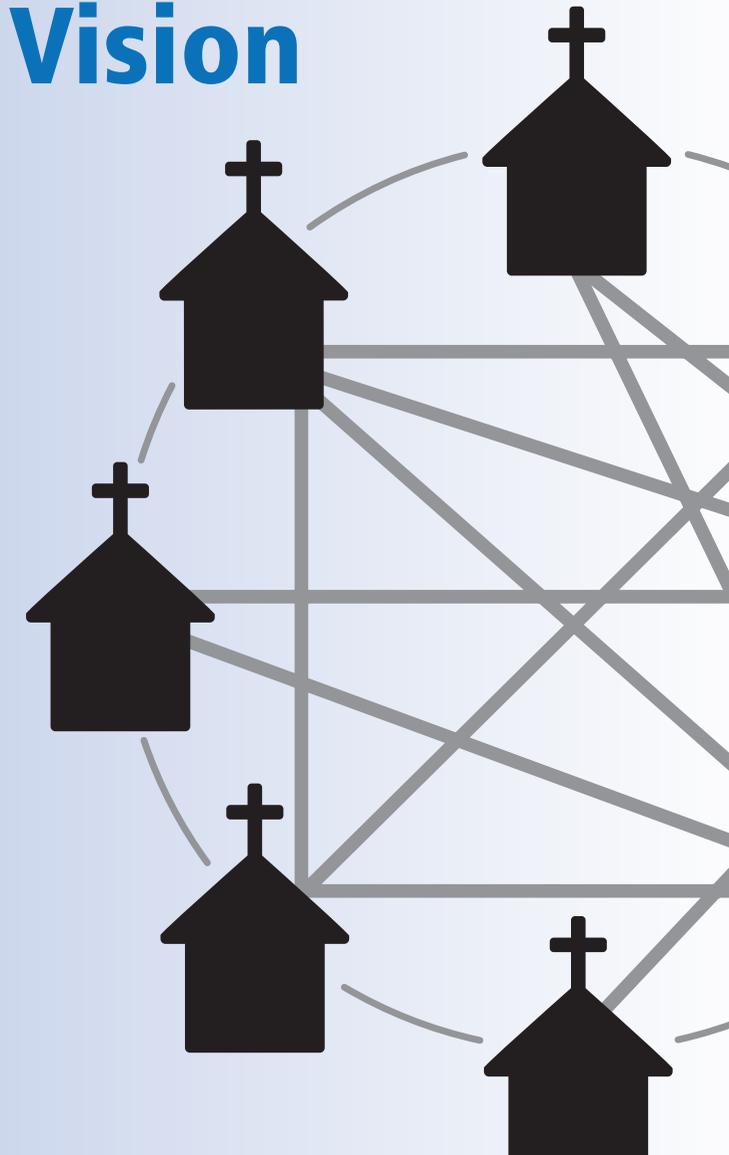
As a conference, we want to live in such a way that when we stand before our Lord and humbly ask, “When did we see you hungry and thirsty?” that we will hear the words, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).



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Renewing a Vision



Mission statement

**We are a community of congregations
Centered on Jesus
Guided by the Holy Spirit
Acting through Grace, Love and Peace
Engaging the world God loves.**

As IMMC congregations live into this vision, we hope for and anticipate the following:

- Congregations will strengthen their relationships with each other to foster greater affection, understanding, and mutual sharing.
- Conference activities will equip congregations to be spiritually and biblically grounded, led by Spirit-filled leaders, and telling stories and celebrating God-with-us.
- Each congregation and its members will grow in capacity for God-centered worship, Christ-like love, and reaching out to their neighbors in Spirit-led witness and service.

Centering conference life around Jesus

Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. This simple confession unites the church across cultural, national, racial, denominational and every other human-made boundary that separates people from each other. As one, the church proclaims faith in Jesus for salvation from sin and service to God.

Jesus is a person, the fullest expression we have of our Creator and the original intent for the salvation of the world. We follow this Jesus whom God sent into the world (Colossians 2:6). Jesus is not a theology or belief construct. While Jesus is not bound by Anabaptist traditions, we believe the Anabaptist stream of faith contributes to a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus here and now.

Shared spiritual practices

We are shaped over time by what we pay attention to and the habits we form. Thus we want to pay attention to and enact several

spiritual practices that will continually bend us toward Christ, and form us over time as Christ followers. These practices help us stay centered on Jesus even in the midst of differences.

This vision proposes we agree to be accountable to one another for implementing the following set of common spiritual practices. These practices are currently embedded within our Confession of Faith (related COF article numbers listed after each).

- We will worship God as the central act of our common life whenever gathered (*COF 1, 9*).
- We will practice prayer, fasting and generous giving (*COF 18, 21*).
- We will prayerfully study the Bible together whenever we gather to increase our competence in reading, interpreting, and applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective to our everyday lives and to issues we face in the world (*COF 3, 4, 15, 17, 18*).
- We will accept and offer hospitality, believing it creates the context for God's kingdom to appear in our midst (*COF 10, 18*).
- We will study the Bible with neighbors and strangers, inviting them to become disciples of Jesus (*COF 10, 8*).
- We will practice peacemaking by extending loving-kindness and forgiveness (*COF 17, 22*).

We believe that by committing ourselves, together, to work at these spiritual practices, God will bring transformation toward Christ-likeness and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Process of discernment

Communal biblical discernment is another spiritual practice; it is a discipline for us to listen to the Spirit, scripture and one another, to exercise patience, and to come to common understandings.

Missional Leadership Team desires to create space for discernment at the congregational level, while offering the following discernment process for ways to confer together.

In brief, when a congregation is considering beliefs or practices that differ from the beliefs and practices outlined in IMMC and MC USA documents* the congregation will engage in a process of discernment that includes guided conversation and study with another congregation.

After fully participating in the process, the congregation may come to embrace the belief or practice as articulated by the conference. Alternately, if the congregation still believes it must differ, it will either be freed to pursue their course, or the congregation and

conference can evaluate the continuation of the relationship.

The discernment process is not intended specifically or solely as a disciplinary process; rather it is hoped it will build understanding, and reinforce our sense of being a “community of congregations” who belong to and are responsible to and for one another.

* Conference by-laws, *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995)*, *Mennonite World Conference: Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists, Missio Dei: What is an Anabaptist Christian?*, *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love, or A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership* (the MC USA polity manual)

Breadth of variance—in general and specifically

As we consider many issues that continue to challenge us (such as women in leadership, our practice of peacemaking, racism) we have congregations who address these very differently. Yet we value our relationships with one another and our common faith understanding centered on Jesus.

Regarding questions about how congregations relate to LGBT persons, some congregations have already given significant time and study. There are significant questions about whether congregations are willing to invest time in a discernment process generally, and regarding this question in particular. Because we have been unable, as a conference or as a denomination, to decide on a stable and consistent understanding of LGBT inclusion, we hope that more stable and consistent understandings can occur within individual congregations as we strengthen our relationships with our God, one another, and our communities.

The following statements reflect the discernment of the Missional Leadership Team in light of the Unity Variance Task Group process, its recommendations, and the 2015–2016 delegate and Annual Sessions meetings.

- *Individual congregations may, without fear of censure, receive or not receive single LGBT people or LGBT people in covenant relationship as members and non-credentialed leaders in their congregations.*
- *Pastors, with the affirmation of their congregations, may, without fear of censure, officiate or refuse to officiate same-sex covenanted unions.*
- *IMMC will not credential or hold credentials of a person in a same-sex relationship unless Mennonite Church USA changes its polity and IMMC Conference delegates affirm the change.*

(Continued on back panel.)