

Appendix A: Shared Spiritual Practices, Process of Discernment, Covenant

1. Shared Practices

These are the common covenantal practices through which we seek transformation toward Christ-likeness and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

- 1) We will worship God¹ as the central act of our common life whenever the church is gathered. (Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (COF) Article 1 God, and Article 9 The Church of Jesus Christ)
- 2) We will practice prayer, fasting and generous giving to separate ourselves from the influence of the principalities and powers of this age and to make us available to fully participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. (COF Article 18 Christian Spirituality and Article 21 Christian Stewardship)
- 3) We will prayerfully study the Bible together weekly in our congregations and whenever the conference gathers, guided by qualified teachers² for the purpose of increasing our competence in reading, interpreting, and applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective to our everyday lives and to the critical issues of faith we face in the world.³ (COF Article 3 Holy Spirit, Article 4 Scripture, Article 15 Ministry and Leadership, Article 17 Discipleship and Christian Life, and Article 18 Christian Spirituality)
- 4) We will accept and offer hospitality,⁴ believing it creates the context for God's kingdom to appear in our midst, particularly as we minister to the poor, the hungry, the prisoner and the stranger. (COF Article 10 The Church in Mission and Article 18 Christian Spirituality)
- 5) We will study the Bible with neighbors and strangers, inviting them to become disciples of Jesus.⁸ (COF Article 10 The Church in Mission and Article 8 Salvation)
- 6) We will practice peacemaking by extending loving-kindness and forgiveness to our brothers and sisters as well as to our neighbors and enemies. (COF Article 17 Discipleship and Christian Life and Article 22 Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance)

2. Process of Discernment

¹ Worship of God includes adoration, thanksgiving, confession of our sins to God and one another, assurance of forgiveness, intercession and communion.

² One might ask how this practice is different than attending Sunday School. By naming this a basic practice of our covenantal life, our conference would need to re-appropriate *significant* structural and program resources to calling and equipping qualified Bible teachers and assessing teaching. Developing common understandings around what it means to be a teacher will be an important next step in this process. There would be good biblical basis for doing so. See James 3:1, I Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, II Timothy 4:3, Hebrews 5:12.

³ Applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective is often referred to as the "hermeneutic of obedience." (See Stuart Murray's *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*, 2000).

⁴ Genesis 18:1-8; I Kings 17:8-24; Luke 10:1-20; Luke 24:13-35; Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 13:2

⁶ Applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective is often referred to as the "hermeneutic of obedience." (See Stuart Murray's *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*, 2000).

⁷ Genesis 18:1-8; I Kings 17:8-24; Luke 10:1-20; Luke 24:13-35; Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 13:2

⁸ The teaching of the Word was the highest priority to which the apostles gave themselves (Acts 6:1-7). It was the basic means of sharing the Gospel. In the places in the world where the church is growing, biblical and theological education are the primary methods of calling people to Christ.

We commit to submit to clear and reliable pathways for communal biblical discernment when considering beliefs and practices that differ from the broader church.

- 1) Begin by articulating how the beliefs and practices we hold in common bear witness to God's intended purposes for the church and the world.*
- 2) Accept guidance from the Missional Leadership Team in designing a trustworthy process of discernment.*
- 3) Articulate the differing belief or practice to brothers and sisters in the conference in terms of how it bears witness to God's intended purposes for the church and the world.*
- 4) Enter into a thorough and substantive process of biblical discernment with a peer congregation that embraces the conference's articulated beliefs and practices.*
- 5) Be led in their study by a qualified teacher offered by the conference leadership in consultation with participating congregations.*

If after the full commitment of a congregation to the conference discernment process the congregation embraces the conference's articulated beliefs and practices, the process is considered complete. If that is not the case, there are two options for the Missional Leadership Team to consider as the outcome of this discernment process:

First, the congregation will be blessed to follow that course of the teacher Gamaliel, "If the path is of human origin it will fail, but if it is of God it will flourish." (Acts 5:38-39)

Second, that if after the full commitment to the process the congregation still believes it must differ, the conference and congregation can evaluate the continuation of the relationship.

3. Covenant for Congregations and Credentialed Leaders

As a community of Anabaptist congregations and credentialed leaders we center our life together around Jesus, extending to the world God loves an invitation to discipleship. As we connect with and commit to those who know and care whether we succeed, we are better able to effectively engage our communities and the world. This covenant will help us to maintain accountability and to prevent laxity as we, the community of congregations, commit and periodically recommit to the relationship.

As members of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, we commit ourselves to:

- Embrace Conference vision as expressed in relevant documents, currently “Renewing a Vision.”
- Engage the conference shared spiritual practices.
- Submit to the conference discernment process.
- Participate in conference affairs by putting forth volunteers to the various committees, functions, and special groups.
- Participate regularly in Annual Sessions by having delegates attend and report back.
- Support conference financially at whatever level your congregation is able to sustain.
- Indicate our commitment by having congregational representatives and credential leaders sign this covenant document and its periodic continuance thereafter.

To enhance and strengthen our relationship, covenanting congregations and credentialed leaders can agree to engage in inter-congregational activities as listed below. The following ideas are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, but a list of possible ways to relate more closely as a community of congregations, or a community of leaders.

Covenanting congregations and credentialed leaders:

- Learn from each other. Congregations could find a congregation in a different part of the conference that you don't know very well to share joys, challenges, and prayer over the course of the year. A pastor could meet with another pastor to share in similar ways, or create an "affinity" group of pastors (pastors who are over 60, pastors who are bi-vocational, pastors who serve large churches, pastors who serve small churches, pastors who are mothers of young children, etc.), or design a sermon series and work together with another local pastor or pastors.
- Have fun together. Identify a congregation and plan a fellowship event together, such as a variety show, watch a movie and discuss it, or other ways focused on getting to know each other. Pastors could start a small group of pastors' families, or attend an event like a baseball game together, or meet together for prayer, fellowship, service, and worship.
- Look outward into the community together. Engage in mission with another congregation to put on a musical for community children, volunteer at a local nonprofit, adopt a local school, do a peace march, host a Vacation Bible School, have a joint offering project, plan a summer or spring break service trip with SWAP together, etc.
- Celebrate God together. Come together for worship. Perhaps have Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday services together, or gather for an old fashioned hymn sing and soup supper. Pastors may wish to pull together a group of pastors and hire someone to facilitate monthly Group Spiritual Direction, or do a pulpit exchange with another church.