

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)  
Renewing a Vision  
Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference  
May 2017

*The following questions were raised by delegates, the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), and staff as part of processing and responding to the March 2017 delegate sessions:*

**1. How is MLT intending to lead in the future within the new vision?**

Our conference is a "community of congregations" who intentionally choose to share life together through shared practices, common beliefs, mutual accountability, supporting staff, facilitating networking between congregations, encouraging celebrations and story-telling, providing resources to pastors and congregations..

Decisions will be discerned by collaboration of the covenanting members of our conference.

**2. What is the expected timing for delegate discernment of Renewing a Vision?**

MLT is bringing the Renewing a Vision document for delegate discernment at the June 15-17, 2017 Annual Sessions.

**3. When do we anticipate the first opportunity to be for congregations to covenant?**

Upon potential approval of the Vision, the invitation to covenant will be open immediately through June 2018. MLT will welcome conversation with each congregation as they discern this commitment.

**4. How frequently will congregations renew the covenant?**

MLT is proposing a 3 year cycle of recommitment.

**5. Are the 'covenant practices' a list to choose from or all required?**

MLT encourages each person to read the full document on what it means for this community of congregations to covenant together. ([Full Covenant Document](#))

Please refer to our community graphic on the Renewing a Vision brochure ([link](#)). Some congregations have many connections while others have just one. A congregation's ability to connect in covenant will be dependent on their context. Covenanting together is hoped to be an ongoing intentional process that encourages giving and receiving of support from the community of congregations beyond ourselves.

**6. Why do we need to sign a covenant?**

It is our hope that congregations will embrace this intentional way of being in relationship. 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.

## **7. What if a congregation doesn't covenant?**

Our covenanting process is invitational. We are inviting all congregations who resonate with our Vision to covenant together. Some congregations may discern not to accept this invitation and would no longer be part of this community of congregations, but we hope for dialogue between the congregation and conference during this discernment process.

## **8. Is there a financial component to the covenant?**

Congregations who covenant are strongly encouraged to contribute financially to IMMC as the Spirit leads and they are able. Giving, in the forms of finances, volunteers, prayer, and time spent in relationship building, are all ways to enhance our life together, and allows us as a community to offer all member congregations tools and resources for congregational development and health, pastoral support, and community engagement.

## **9. Do congregations and their pastors covenant together, or are they separate from each other?**

A designated congregational representative will sign the covenant on the congregation's behalf. We trust the signature represents a decision consistent with their congregational process. Pastors and others who desire their credentials to be held by IN-MI Mennonite Conference will also sign the covenant.

## **10. How is it determined when a congregation enters into a discernment process? Who can bring that forward or request that a process take place?**

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.

We also believe a congregation could benefit from a discernment process when faced with a significant decision about its future and vision, such as whether to build or start a new church, or . . .

The request can come from the congregation itself, a sister congregation who desires to enter the process alongside the first congregation, or from conference leaders. The hope would be that a covenanting congregation would initiate the process in most instances.

## **11. Who makes the 'final decision' at the end of a discernment process?**

If after the full commitment of a congregation to the covenant 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 may 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)

OR 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.

### **12. How do congregations get connected to build relationships within the covenant?**

We hope that making connections will be creative and life giving. This may be challenging for congregations at a distance. One possibility would be conversation in the pastors’ area clusters, another would be to utilize conference communications such as the Gospel Evangel or the monthly prayer letter. Items or prayer requests could be named aloud in worship, lifted up by leaders, etc.

### **13. Why only LGBT concerns the only one to be directly addressed within the Vision?**

This issue has been part of denominational careful discernment for many years. Indiana Michigan Mennonite Conference began an intentional process of discernment in 2011. This culminated in the work of the Unity and Variance Task Group and MLT’s mandate for arriving at a conference decision on membership, marriage, and credentialing of LGBT persons. (See [Appendix B – May 2016](#)) This careful process of discernment of a difficult issue is now a pattern which we can apply to other issues in the future.