

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about *Pieces of a Vision*
Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference
May 24, 2016**

The following questions were raised by delegates, the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), and staff as part of processing and responding to the March draft of "Pieces of a Vision." This sheet is an attempt to provide clarification.

1. *How is MLT intending to lead in the future within the new vision? What specifically are we changing about how we have functioned in the past?*

MLT hopes we can all view our conference as a "community of congregations" who intentionally choose to share life together through shared practices and common beliefs, and mutual accountability. "Conference" isn't an abstract "them," nor does the MLT or staff constitute "conference," rather "we" (those who covenant) are conference.

Decisions will be determined by collaboration of the covenanting members of our conference. MLT will guide the work and mission of IN-MI Conference by: supporting staff, facilitating networking between congregations, encouraging celebrations and story-telling, providing resources to pastors and congregations.

2. *Are the 'covenant requirements' a list to choose from or all required?*

We expect congregations and credentialed leaders will demonstrate their commitment to conference and to each other by participating primarily in the practices and discernment process. More covenant suggestions are listed in the Vision Appendix. The list offers ways credentialed leaders and churches can be involved and can work at building relationships as well as shared spiritual practices. We expect congregations and leaders will choose the options that make sense for their geography / context, while perhaps also challenging themselves to new areas or practices.

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

MLT understands that delegates will adopt the new vision/plan that outlines how we will be guided by covenanting around shared spiritual practices and beliefs. At this point, we anticipate the adoption of the Vision and the first covenant signing celebration to take place at Annual Sessions in 2017.

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

MLT is proposing a 3 year cycle of recommitment.

5. *What if a congregation doesn't covenant?*

Our covenanting process is invitational. We are inviting all congregations in our geographical area 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. We do hope for dialogue between the congregation and conference during this discernment process.

6. *Is there a financial component to the covenant?*

All 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.

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

Please refer to the covenant section of the vision which outlines this carefully for congregations and all credentialed leaders.

8. What is a "qualified teacher?" Who determines who is a qualified teacher?

MLT believes there are many gifted teachers within our conference community. The teachers will be selected by MLT in conversation and consultation with the congregation seeking guidance.

9. 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.

10. How is it determined when an action (or inaction?) warrants a congregation entering into a discernment process? Who can bring that forward or request that a process take place?

The request can come from the congregation, a sister congregation, or from conference leaders. The hope would be that a covenanting congregation would initiate the process as outlined in the conference Vision:

When a congregation is considering beliefs or practices that differ from the beliefs and practices outlined in our conference by-laws, Mennonite World Conference: Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists, Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995), Missio Dei: What is an Anabaptist Christian?, Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love, or A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership (the polity manual), the congregation will initiate the process.

As in the past, the Ministry Credentialing Team (MCT) will be responsible for investigating and processing reports of ethical violations, actions that call into question a pastor's credentials, and congregational covenant membership within conference (entering and departing).