

“IN-MI Mennonite Conference: Renewing a Vision”

RENEWING A VISION

May 26, 2016

This document describes a renewed vision for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC), informed by the following documents: *The Bible; Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995); *Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists* (Mennonite World Conference); and *Missio Dei – What is an Anabaptist Christian?* (by Palmer Becker).

Mission Statement

(STILL IN PROCESS. WE WELCOME FEEDBACK.)

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

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 more complete understanding of what it means to follow Jesus here and now.

Our Hope

Jesus sent his disciples out in his name and they returned to report all that 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's name, and a time to support and equip one another in how the Spirit is leading our congregations. 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).

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

- Relationships between congregations will be strengthened to enable greater affection, understanding, and mutual sharing.
- Conference activities will focus on equipping 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 would grow in capacity for God-centered worship, Christ-like love, and reaching out to their neighbors in Spirit-led witness and service.

LIVING OUT OUR VISION

Shared Spiritual Practices

Currently, our conference and denominational by-laws refer to beliefs we hold in common. Commonly held beliefs are essential for maintaining communal identity. The Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference by-laws do not address how and to what extent the beliefs we “hold” are binding or how we handle situations when we disagree on these things.

Yet, experience has shown that it is difficult on a practical level to hold one another accountable for a difference in beliefs. On a relational level, divisions occur when we expect everyone to agree on everything we say we believe. Recent examples of congregations differing on the Confession of Faith, in addition to our current beliefs on human sexuality, would be divorce and remarriage, women in leadership, peace theology, evangelism, and church planting.

There is a close relationship between belief and spiritual practice. That is, our beliefs tell us what we value and they orient us toward how we practice our faith. As we live out our faith by following Jesus’ commandments, those experiences shape our beliefs. In all of this, the Holy Spirit is the counselor who reminds us of everything Jesus taught us and who enables us to obey (John 14:15-26). We can trust that as we together live out our shared spiritual practices, the Holy Spirit will shape our beliefs and the degree to which we belong to one another.

Since belief and spiritual practice are so closely related, this document proposes that we agree to be accountable to one another not only for holding common beliefs, but also for implementing a set of common spiritual practices, and sound practices that are currently embedded within our Confession of Faith (*See Appendix A.1*).

Process of Discernment

Our vision includes a commitment to submit to clear and reliable pathways for communal biblical discernment when considering beliefs and practices that differ from the broader church. When a congregation is considering beliefs or practices that differ from the beliefs and practices outlined in our 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), the congregation will engage in a process of discernment that includes engaging with another congregation (*See Appendix A.2*).

Covenant for Congregations and Credentialed Leaders

Our vision includes strengthening relationships in order to more deeply engage in the work of the reign of God. When our congregations are better connected we can serve our communities and the world more effectively. We will invite congregations and credentialed leaders who want to be part of this conference to sign a covenant every three years (*See Appendix A.3*). A congregational representative will sign the covenant on their behalf. Pastors and others who desire their credentials to be held by IN-MI Mennonite Conference will also sign the covenant.

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Corinthians 13:13)*