



## 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

### The 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 God<sup>1</sup> 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 teachers<sup>2</sup> for the purpose of increasing our

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

<sup>2</sup> 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

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.<sup>3</sup> (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,<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> (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)

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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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

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

<sup>6</sup> 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).

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.