

2018 FEB/MAR DELEGATE MEETINGS

REVIEWING RELATIONSHIPS: Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference & Amigo Centre and Bethany Christian Schools

Two meaningful parts of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference (IMMC) for many people have been the conference connections with Amigo Centre (AC) and Bethany Christian Schools (BCS). Both institutions, currently owned by IMMC, began around 60 years ago and have served many people from IMMC congregations nurturing faith across the lifespan. Today, IMMC constituency alone cannot sustain these organizations; they have continued to look for ministry opportunities that connect with their surrounding communities and present an Anabaptist witness.

Since the inception of the Missional Leadership Team (MLT), they have appointed representatives to the AC and BCS boards who have functioned as critical links. Current MLT members Randy Detweiler and Bob Yoder serve as the representatives on the AC and BCS boards, respectively.

In conversation with the executives of both organizations, the MLT announced during Annual Sessions in June 2017 that during the next fiscal year there would be an “evaluative review” to:

- 1) consider the ways our relationships to one another can be strengthened so that our respective missions can be enhanced, and
- 2) consider if our current organizational structure plan is best served as we look to the future. In particular, we wish to explore if IMMC’s legal ownership of both AC and BCS is still appropriate.

Though conversations among members of the three boards have increased in the past two years, they began as part of the IMMC restructuring process in 2006-2009. An Amigo/Bethany Task Group formed and their work culminated with *Recommendations to the Missional Leadership* in 2009 that addressed three concerns:

- 1) The board member appointment process.
- 2) Lack of interaction between MLT and Amigo and Bethany Boards.
- 3) Ownership of Amigo and Bethany in Conference Constituency.

Some efforts were made by all three institutions, but more clarity is needed. This “evaluative review” seeks to increase clarity. IMMC’s assessment included a survey to delegates. The MLT invited AC and BCS to perform their reviews in ways appropriate to their respective organizations, and to supply a 1- to 2-page summary of their process and findings to the MLT.

This document includes the following:

- 1) a draft proposal for IMMC delegates to vote on during 2018 June Annual Sessions, and
- 2) findings from the respective evaluation processes.

MLT PROPOSAL TO IMMC DELEGATES REGARDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH AC & BCS

(1st draft – 2018 Feb/Mar Delegate meetings)

(Final vote – 2018 June Annual Sessions)

IMMC has appreciated the longstanding relationships we have had with both Amigo Centre (AC) and Bethany Christian Schools (BCS). It is clear that many have benefited from their respective ministries. As we look to the future, we desire to be in continued relationship with both organizations and seek ways to strengthen our connections with them for mutual edification.

Through their respective evaluation processes we affirm that both desire to remain having an Anabaptist/Mennonite identity, and appreciate that each have valued their relationship with IMMC and wish to strengthen their bond with us.

At the same time, in light of our evaluative process concerning the matter of “legal ownership,” we propose a change in each of their statuses from a “Conference-Owned Organization” to an “Associated Organization” (see below). This means that IMMC will no longer “legally own” either AC or BCS, and going forward...

- 1) AC and BCS will oversee the selection of their executive,
- 2) AC and BCS will develop their own processes for selecting board members,
- 3) AC and BCS will be responsible for their own bylaws, including amendments, and
- 4) in the event of closure and dissolution, AC and BCS will distribute assets in accordance with their respective state requirements for a non-profit.

Article 12 (IMMC Bylaws): Description of "Associated Organizations"

"Mennonite-related organizations may be associated with Conference for mutual support and encouragement. These organizations provide their own boards and administrators. They may or may not receive financial support through Conference and/or congregations. They are encouraged to provide an annual report of their accomplishments and financial status to the Conference delegate body. The Conference does not have legal or financial responsibility for associated organizations."

Other IMMC Associated Organizations: Anabaptist Disabilities Network, Everence, Great Lakes Area Choice Books, The Hermitage, MCD Goldenrod, Menno-Hof, MCC Great Lakes, Oaklawn.

If this proposal passes in June then details regarding legal status, including changes to our bylaws, and any additional specific steps we/they wish to make as a way to strengthen our relationships with one another will be worked out in the following months and/or year.

EVALUATION PROCESSES: IMMC, AC, BCS

A. Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference

IMMC delegates were invited to participate in a survey in January 2018. The first two sections below were in the survey cover letter, followed by the key findings.

What does “legal ownership” mean?

Amigo Centre and Bethany Christian Schools have their own 501(c)(3) status, executive leadership boards, head of organization, etc. and really are in control of their own operations. Generally, IMMC “legal ownership” means that 1) conference is involved in the selection of the executive, 2) conference selects and approves board members, 3) conference approves bylaws of the organization, and 4) assets return to IMMC if the organization closes.

Broader Context Considerations

- 1) In light of our recent adoption of *Renewing a Vision*, it would be good to explore how the current relationship helps our conference live into this new visioning statement.
- 2) IMMC congregational membership, both in number of congregations and in who comprises our congregants, has significantly changed over the past 60 years.
- 3) Other camps and schools throughout the U.S. and Canada who at one time were legally owned by a regional Mennonite conference or district, no longer are. But, it also recognizes that many camps and schools who participate in Mennonite Camping Association and Mennonite Schools Council began from an “association of people” rather than by a conference or district.

What did MLT “hear” from the survey results?

- 1) There is strong support for both AC and BCS; many positive comments for their ministries.
- 2) Both organizations provide and live out Anabaptist values.
- 3) IMMC should hold conference activities at each place, even if “ownership status” changes.
- 4) “Legal ownership” by IMMC has no significant bearing on how well their ministries are carried out; the boards, staff, and constituency of AC and BCS carry out their ministries well. If “ownership status” remains in its current form then some responses called for IMMC to increase direct support, including financial and operational.

B. Amigo Centre

The AC review process included discussions by their board at several of their meetings in 2017 and conversations by Matt Ropp, current Executive Director, with stakeholders about the pros and cons of the current ownership structure. Input was also gathered from staff regarding how the ownership relationship is currently impacting Amigo’s ministry. Matt also discussed with other Mennonite camps regarding their respective structures and governances.

In a January 26, 2018 email to MLT, Matt noted the following from the November 2017 AC Board meeting:

- “IN MI Mennonite Conference is an important part of Amigo Centre’s ministry. Regardless of what the legal relationship looks like Amigo Centre wants to build a more dynamic relationship with conference and congregations within conference.”
- “If the ownership relationship were to be changed the Exec Committee discussed defining our constituency more widely to provide people outside of IMMC an opportunity to make Amigo their camp. We did discuss continuing to have board representation from conference. This would hopefully keep communication strong and provide some form of accountability.”

This email also conveyed the following: *“The overall feeling of board members is that an independent ownership structure provides Amigo Centre with the best opportunities for the future.”*

C. Bethany Christian Schools

The BCS review process included discussions by their board on several occasions since 2014 and conversations by Tim Lehman, current Head of School, with key donors and pastors of partnership congregations. In a January 25, 2018 letter to MLT by Tim Lehman and Michelle Horning, Board chair, they noted, “It is clear from these conversations that the ‘owned by’ affiliation with Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a sticking point. Under Bethany’s Articles of Incorporation, the reserved power of IN-MI Mennonite Conference to appoint or remove Bethany board members creates problematic dynamics.”

The letter continued, “Bethany’s current board clearly desires that Bethany maintain an Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and does not desire to sever all ties with IN-MI Mennonite Conference. Bethany will continue its membership in Mennonite Schools Council and, by extension, accreditation through the Mennonite Education Agency. Additionally, Bethany seeks to be more intentional in building relationships and collaborations with multiple Mennonite conferences and institutions.”

On December 11, 2017 the BCS board voted to *“formally request release of ownership from IN-MI Mennonite Conference, and to seek new ways to relate to multiple Mennonite and like-minded organizations.”*

APPENDIX

AMIGO CENTRE AND INDIANA-MICHIGAN MENNONITE CONFERENCE (IMMC) RELATIONSHIP HISTORY

In 1956, there was a vision for a camp that provided church camp facilities for congregations, families, youth groups and children; facilities for Bible conferences, mission meetings and inspirational services; and a suitable location for family cottages for rest and recreation in a Christian Setting.

“Some who had the vision for starting a camp were young men who had worked in the forests or other natural settings during their Civilian Public Service (CPS) days during World War II and had discovered first-hand the power of wild places to draw one closer to God. There was also a growing Bible Memory program that a number of churches had become involved in. In addition, the camp facilities of Mennonite Youth Village, near Union, MI had become too small for the number of campers, and supporters were looking for other options.”¹

Initially most of the programming and church groups who utilized the camp were members of IN-MI Mennonite Conference. Camping on the island at Amigo Park has been sustained over the past 60 years. A large part of the programming was partnering with the Bible Memory organization. Many of their campers came from conference congregations as well. Over the years an outdoor environmental education program, additional youth programming of Snow Camp and Know Jesus, Adult and family programming were added. During the late 80’s and early 90’s the vision of camp was widened to include new facilities. The addition of the retreat center, gymnasium and West Shore Lodge allowed a broader retreat experience in addition to a summer camp experience. Churches and families outside of the conference began to utilize the space more.

The central goal of Amigo Centre has not changed in the past 60 years. Being in harmony with God, others and Nature is central to our programming and operations. We believe that the ministry and mission of Amigo Centre allows the Holy Spirit to touch people and change lives.

IN-MI Conference youth participate in a variety of youth programs such as summer camp, winter youth retreats and Know Jesus. We are blessed to have a number of young adults from conference churches who volunteer their summers as counselors. We rely on feedback from conference pastors and members on our programs so we can continue to provide meaningful experiences. Volunteers for facility projects, kitchen, outdoor education, summer camp and adult programs are overwhelmingly members of conference congregations.

Amigo Centre relies on congregational giving for roughly 4% of our operating budget. This translates to roughly \$26,000 in 2016. This has fallen from previous years. In 2012 for instance congregational giving was just under \$42,000. Pass-through contributions continue to make up

¹ Amigo Centre – In Harmony with God and Nature p3

the largest portion of congregational giving. We do receive congregational contributions from churches outside of INMI conference and even outside of the Mennonite Church. Amigo is also the beneficiary of congregational programs that provide summer camp opportunities to their youth. Some provide scholarships to their youth some provide additional funds for kids who don't have a congregation or who may not be able to afford otherwise.

With the changing conference landscape, Amigo has been blessed by continued support from congregations who have left conference. There is some hesitancy about what their involvement can be and how they can relate to us. From the beginning of Amigo Centre, our purpose has been to provide a place for people to step outside of their normal lives and into God's amazing natural creation. It is in this setting that transformation can happen.

Written for IMMC delegates
Matt Ropp, Executive Director
December 2017

HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN BETHANY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS AND INDIANA-MICHIGAN MENNONITE CONFERENCE

Tim Lehman - Head of School

November 01, 2017

Note: For historical analysis, I drew heavily on *Hearing Our Teacher's Voice: The Pursuit of Faithfulness at Bethany Christian Schools, 1954-2004*.

Bethany Christian Schools is a dynamic learning community that integrates faith development with academic excellence. Grounded in Mennonite values, Bethany equips students for Christian discipleship in the church and around the world.

Although the words of the mission statement have been updated and revised from time to time, Bethany is essentially carrying out the same mission since the school was founded in 1954 by the Indiana-Michigan Conference of the Mennonite Church.

In the early 1940's the Mennonite church was struggling with how to confront the powerful influence of mainstream culture. In many congregations there existed deep mistrust of the secular world. Perhaps to insulate or protect youth from secular influence, many Mennonite youth did not attend high school.

As a result, individuals within the conference saw a need to create a Mennonite high school. The original intent was to provide a "safe" educational curriculum that would weave together the sacred and secular worlds. After several years of discernment through prayer and community meetings, perhaps some cajoling and compromise, the school was founded in 1954.

Realizing that the IN-MI Mennonite Conference constituted a broad spectrum of beliefs and practice, the founding intent was clearly not to use the school as a means of maintaining conformity or enforcing doctrine. As one early founder noted, the intent was to help students "measure the way of the world by the rule of Christ"² In today's world of Christian education, we would say the founding model was missional rather than doctrinal, and Bethany remains so today.

Over the decades Bethany has experienced many changes. In the early years nearly all students came from conference congregations. In fact, in those early years, yearbook photos included the name of the students' home congregations. The 1965 yearbook indicates that students came from nearly all of the local Mennonite congregations, as well as far flung ones like Howard-Miami, Kouts, Leo, Milan Center (Ohio), second Mennonite (Chicago), and Cedar Grove (Manistique MI).

More recently, nearly all of our students come from within a 25 minute drive of Bethany. In addition, the percentage of students who identify as "Mennonite" or historically Anabaptist is

² Devon Schrock from *Hearing Our Teacher's Voice* p 16.

less than two thirds. Less than 50% of our students attend IN-MI conference churches. We have evolved from a school for the Mennonite community to a Mennonite school for the community.

Another evolution has been in the way that Bethany is funded. In the early years, tuition was kept very low, with the expectation that congregations would contribute significantly to the school.³ In fact, the early heads of school essentially worked a fundraising circuit within the conference churches. In 1965, direct contributions from congregations to the annual fund covered 70% of the school's operating costs.

Partly as a result of the dependence on congregational support, Bethany drifted from one budgetary crisis to the next. The school considered closing several times; as recently as 1995 the operating debt was \$709,000.⁴ That year Allan Dueck became head of school and among other strategies, worked to reduce debt by raising tuition and relying less on the vagaries of congregational giving.

Today less than 1% of operating income is direct support from congregations. The school however does partner with several area congregations (not all in IN-MI conference) to subsidize tuition for students from their congregation. Partnership plan support now amounts to about 20% of our income and is on a clear downward trend.

As our circumstance demonstrates, organizations evolve. Over time, successful organizations inevitably outgrow their founding stage, function autonomously from the founding organization, and no longer require assistance, or frequent guidance. Maintaining the hegemonic relationship hinders both organizations. Therefore it is time for BCS and IN-MI to redefine their relationship in a way that is mutually beneficial. Doing so can make both organizations stronger by supporting one another's missions on equal footing.

BCS and IN-MI Conference as partnering organizations

The stated purpose of IN-MI Conference is to maintain a federation or "community of congregations"⁵ with a shared Anabaptist vision. Conference resources are geared toward equipping and supporting that community. On the other hand BCS is primarily an educational institution that uses Anabaptist faith tradition as a scaffold for its educational program. Yet IN-MI Conference and BCS have some similar goals, and as peers or sister institutions, can be mutually supportive of one another's mission. For example, both institutions promote faith formation and spiritual practices, practice community living by emphasizing mutual accountability.

³ Independent School Management (ISM) refers to this model as a "price" school. Beginning in the 1990's Bethany gradually evolved into a "Process" school. See ISM's brief explanation [here](#).

⁴ *Hearing our Teacher's Voice* p 188.

⁵IN-MI Conference mission statement: 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.

How can IN-MI Conference support the mission of Bethany Christian Schools? Broadly speaking, the vibrancy of IN-MI conference and the influence it has on congregations can significantly impact Bethany. Approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of our students come from historically Anabaptist/Mennonite households. As IN-MI Conference constituency increases more potential families that might connect with Bethany's vision. The conference could promote and support Mennonite education kindergarten through post-secondary.

How can BCS support the mission of IN-MI Conference? Youth are the future of our church. Bethany is one of the few places that collects a broad spectrum of Mennonite youth. BCS has students from 30 Mennonite or Anabaptist congregations, 14 IN-MI Conference churches.⁶ Bethany is a place where students are exposed to and can discuss Mennonite Faith perspectives. A church body or conference is genuinely interested in a youth perspective, has a ready and accessible delegate body on the Bethany campus.

⁶ all within a 25 mile radius of Goshen. More broadly, BCS currently has students from 63 congregations representing 24 different faith groups.