

**LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK FOR
CONGREGATIONS, DISTRICTS, AND CREDENTIALLED LEADERS
IN VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE**

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I. POLITY FOR CONGREGATIONS

A. The Nature and Mission of the Church

The church is the assembly of those who have accepted God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The church is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church's glorious hope. The church is the new society established and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The church, the body of Christ, is called to become ever more like Jesus Christ, its head, in its worship, ministry, witness, mutual love and care, and the ordering of its common life.

(Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 9)

The church is a variety of assemblies which meet regularly, including local congregations and larger conferences. This diversity in unity evokes gratitude to God and appreciation for one another. According to the example of the apostolic church, the local congregation seeks the counsel of the wider church in important matters relating to faith and life, as they work together in their common mission.

(Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 16)

Decisions made at larger assemblies and conferences are confirmed by constituent groups, and local ministries are encouraged and supported by the wider gatherings. Authority and responsibility are delegated by common and voluntary agreement, so that the churches hold each other accountable to Christ and to one another on all levels of church life.

(Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 16)

Our denominational bylaws identify the local congregation as "the basic organizational unit ... of Mennonite Church USA." A congregation is not the whole picture. Yet in the congregation we experience all aspects of being the family of God, with responsibilities to God, to each other in the faith community and to the society around us. It is in the congregation that we work out on a regular basis all those realities pictured in the first paragraph above.

Additionally, we recognize the important role of the Virginia Mennonite Conference (hereinafter VMC) and its component districts in the common life and mission of affiliated congregations. Since the New Testament does not provide a pattern for conference/district/congregation relationships and since we live and witness in a constantly changing society, church structures and lines of responsibility need to be kept under constant observation. Changes in mutual responsibility must always be with prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit and discernment within the faith community.

We affirm the interdependence of the church at all levels of administration, striving to actualize the concept of mutual responsibility for the life and welfare of the total church in congregational, district, conference, and denominational settings. In this quest, we affirm the essential role of district councils as "regional administrative

units” of the conference, linking congregations with the broader conference structures. And we commend the particular responsibilities of oversight leaders and other district representatives in implementing those relationships which are mutually supportive.

B. Member Gifts and Congregational Mission

Every member of the body of Christ is a gift to the church and has gifts to utilize in the church’s ministry. Gifts are provided to the church by our Lord, enabling it to equip God’s people for ministry. Congregations should discover and discern the gifts of members by charging a group of competent persons with this responsibility.

Congregational leadership is established to equip and enable members as they use their gifts for the benefit of the congregation and for ministry in the world. In the process, the congregation evaluates age, training, experience, and maturity of individuals in discerning particular ministry assignments. Not only adults, but younger believers need opportunities to develop latent gifts within the congregation’s worship, nurture and service activities.

Similarly, congregations need to evaluate their situation and resources. Geographic, demographic and economic parameters will affect the nature of the life and ministry of each congregation. The needs and resources of the surrounding community are important factors. Finances and skills available within the congregation, larger church bodies, and other sources need to be assessed. Impelled by the mandate of the gospel, all these factors help a congregation in discerning its overall mission and specific goals.

C. Reception and Inclusion of Believers as Members of Congregations

1. Membership Qualifications

Congregational members shall be baptized believers who have made a voluntary commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who demonstrate their decision to walk in Christian discipleship within the fellowship of the Mennonite Church. Individual members are recognized as members of conference by virtue of their membership in one of the congregations affiliated with VMC. (Virginia Mennonite Conference Constitution, Article V, *Membership*)

2. Membership Integrity

At the time of reception, it is expected that all prospective members will give evidence of a salvation experience and a present living commitment to Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the written Word. Pastoral leaders will want to use this opportunity to teach or review the beliefs and practices of the Mennonite Church and of the local congregation. Those receiving baptism are simultaneously received as members of the congregation.

For those transferring from another Mennonite congregation, a letter of transfer from the previous church testifies to their ongoing walk with God. Those from another denomination may be received by confession of faith or letter of transfer. It is always a courtesy for leaders and/or new members to notify the former con-

gregation of their new allegiance. Those baptized as infants demonstrate their personal commitment to Christ through believer's baptism when they are received. Former members being reinstated to active membership are to be received with the recognition of their repentance of sin or negligence.

3. Membership Covenants.

Membership covenants for members of a given congregation may be formulated in harmony with the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (hereinafter *Confession of Faith*) and with statements such as those on divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and membership for military personnel, which have been adopted by the Virginia Mennonite Conference and are included in the online "Policy Statements" section of this *Leadership Handbook*. (See www.virginiainconference.org/resources)

4. Associate Membership

Associate membership is a category for persons who, for a short period of time, are absent from their home base but who relate regularly to a group or congregation of their choice. This arrangement offers opportunities to participate in local activities without severing membership ties with the "home congregation." The extent of participation is determined by the receiving congregation. Associate members may be publicly welcomed and received, based upon a policy adopted by the congregation such as the following example:

Associate membership assumes the entering of a temporary relationship with our congregation. Persons holding membership in good standing in another congregation may be received into our fellowship and activities as an associate member of this congregation, upon their expression of agreement with the doctrinal position, covenant, and practices of our church.

D. Pastoral Care of Members

Congregational leaders, including pastors, deacons, elders and teachers, should encourage and provide for the periodic visitation of every member of the congregation under their care. Such visits should include encouragement and spiritual counsel, and should promote enthusiastic participation in the various church functions.

1. Discipline

Congregational discipline needs always to be a part of church life, with members admonishing and challenging one another to purity of life and the deeper spiritual experience. When church members fall into known and open transgression, showing no repentance after appropriate admonition, designated congregational leadership will need to shape further action. When sin and rebellion persist, exclusion from the fellowship of believers may become necessary, preferably via discernment of the larger congregation. Motivation for such action will be most constructive when the goal is redemption rather than punishment.

2. Inactive Members

Members who lose interest in the church and willfully absent themselves from the worship and service activities of the congregation may expect personal contact to seek their reenlistment. Should such inactivity continue, their names may be placed on an inactive list. Members moving to another area or attending

another church will be encouraged to move their membership to their new location. If the transfer is not made within a reasonable time, they too may be placed on the inactive list. Members who cannot participate actively because of old age, infirmity, student status, and the like, retain their eligibility for the active membership roll.

3. Records and Statistics

Those who are placed on an inactive list are to be notified of their status if possible. Inactive members are not to be forgotten. Rather, continuing effort is warranted to restore them to active involvement in the life of a congregation. For statistical purposes, only the members on the active roll are to be counted in the annual membership reports for conference records.

E. Reception and Inclusion of Congregations as Members of Conference

VMC is composed of affiliated congregations who maintain relationship via mutual fellowship, counsel, and support as provided within the structures of conference. Congregational membership in VMC is evidenced through its prior affiliation and participation with one of the conference districts. Requirements for inclusion and procedures for reception into conference membership are outlined in Article I of the VMC Bylaws.

F. Shared Congregational Leadership and Three-fold Ministry

The Bible records, in both Old and New Testaments, that God called persons from the ranks of their faith community to serve as leaders under God's direction. At times, particularly in the first-century church, God called leaders through discernment within the community of faith.

From the beginning, church leadership was regularly shared among multiple persons: at first the *apostles*, then those appointed or elected to serve the various emerging churches. Originally in the New Testament, the terms *elders* ("presbuteroi" from the synagogue tradition), *pastors* (figuratively, "shepherds" of the flock) and *overseers/bishops* ("episcopoi" reflecting Greek concepts of functional leadership) were used interchangeably as titles for the first office. Additionally, the ministry of *deacons* is visible as a second office in the New Testament.

Starting from these two offices, threefold concepts of leadership appeared very early in the development of the church. In addition to presbyters and deacons, some presbyters, such as Peter and Paul and the other apostles, came to be recognized as exercising a third office in their broader based responsibilities for oversight and regional coordination.

To the middle of the twentieth century, Mennonite leadership patterns typically embraced a threefold model in the particular offices of *bishop*, *minister/preacher*, and *deacon*. In most cases, persons were called to one of the three offices by lot and ordained to minister in the congregation(s) from which they were selected as long as life and capacity endured. Assignments of deacons or ministers could be expanded by subsequent ordination to another office.

Since World War II, however, major changes have occurred in understandings of ministry in Mennonite Church conferences across North America. Most notable was a move away from the self-supported bishop-minister-deacon hierarchy toward solo-pastors, who increasingly were equipped with seminary training, vested with authority previously reserved for bishops, provided with income for their labors, and installed for time-limited terms of service.

Outside of Virginia, Lancaster, and Franklin conferences, the earlier role of “bishop” has been largely abandoned, and even in Virginia the language of “overseer” in most cases superseded the earlier understandings. The exception has been in African-American churches where the term “overseer” carries a negative image from the history of slavery. Simultaneously, the role and function of deacon became ambiguous with a diminishing demand for assistance to indigent persons and assisting the bishop/minister with church discipline. The terminology of “deacon” generally gave way to “elder,” while length of service changed from “ordained for life” to multiple-year elected terms. (cf. *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*, 1996, pp. 41-46)

The time-honored vision of shared three-fold ministry, however, has continued and re-emerged in significant forms. Most prominent have been the ordained offices processed and monitored by conference credentialing policies. Pastors of congregations have become the prototype for ordained ministry, some of whom may be subsequently installed and charged for service as overseers, conference ministers or regional ministers.

Because other congregational officers are not examined for ordination, the “third” office of the current three-fold leadership model is rarely guided by conference polity or discernment. It is appropriate that congregations have freedom to empower lay leadership as the Spirit leads. It is also important that the conference affirms these offices as a vital component of shared leadership in the church, along with those who are affirmed by ordination.

In harmony with most Mennonite Church patterns in North America, then, VMC affirms three generic offices for leadership ministry in the church, each of which is vital for healthy congregational life. (See also *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*, 1996, pages 74-79, and *A Shared Understanding of Leadership*, 2014, pages 14-15, 32-35).

1. Oversight Ministries

Oversight ministries reflect the broader church perspective and support-systems of ordained oversight leaders, including district ministers, overseers, bishops, and conference minister.

2. Pastoral Ministries

Pastoral ministries reflect the general equipping perspective of ordained/credentialed pastors, evangelists, missionaries, chaplains, teachers, administrators, etc.

3. Deacon/Elder Ministries

Deacon/Elder ministries reflect the local ministry perspective of deacons, elders, council members, cell leaders, and such, for whom credentialing is not required, and who primarily perform discerning, implementing, and care giving leadership within a particular congregation.

II. POLITY FOR DISTRICTS

A. The Congregation: The Basic Organizational Unit

The congregation is the basic organizational unit in church life. Its mission is enhanced by inter-congregational relationships. In VMC such relationships are maximized through allied congregational clusters and organized districts which recognize geographical proximity and/or other common factors.

The New Testament models shared leadership as the pattern for ministry and church governance. It does not endorse a pattern where authority resides in a lone leader. Rather, in all the new assemblies around the Mediterranean, it affirms a practice where leadership gifts and responsibilities are distributed among multiple servants of the church.

Since the church did not begin until Pentecost, Christ, Himself, did not prescribe a specific pattern of organization. The early church met organizational needs and chose persons to serve in various roles as new situations arose. There were apostles, elders, overseers, pastors, deacons, teachers, evangelists, prophets, administrators, etc. Their specific roles are not clearly defined. The responsibility of some was largely congregational, while others provided a ministry of general witness or oversight so as to insure broader Christian identity and unity.

B. The District: An Intermediate Organizational Unit

1. District/Cluster Function

VMC has established districts as administrative units of conference. Districts provide inter-congregational structures which enhance communication and interaction between leaders, congregations, districts, and conference. In particular, districts function to “encourage, coordinate, and provide counsel and financial assistance to church extension programs and projects beyond the resources of individual congregations” (VMC Bylaws, Article V, *Districts*).

Clusters, of which there may be one or more in a district, are to enhance mutual interaction and “nurture of pastors and leadership persons within congregations forming the cluster” (VMC Bylaws, Article VI, *Clusters*).

2. District Composition

- a. The District shall typically be composed of one or more cluster(s) of congregations, which for geographical or other reasons of affinity find it advantageous to share in a district relationship.
- b. Districts are administrative units of conference and are responsible to establish a council which shall function as a deliberative and administrative body.
- c. Districts shall formulate an instrument of operational guidelines which set forth a plan of operation.
- d. District councils shall be composed of persons carrying leadership responsibilities in district congregations and those serving as congregational delegates to Conference Assembly. Persons in the special ministries category of conference may be invited to become members. Persons whose ordination

credentials have been accepted by the district but have no leadership assignment may become members of the council upon invitation.

- e. The formation of a new district requires the mutual consent of any districts affected and the approval of Conference Council.

3. District Leadership

- a. Districts are encouraged to establish an executive committee composed of a chair, a vice-chair, a secretary, and additional members as determined by the district council.
- b. Oversight leaders, who may be known as district ministers, or overseers, or bishops, typically serve as ex-officio members of the executive committee and council. It is preferable that they not be district officers.
- c. The secretary shall keep accurate records of the proceedings of all meetings, compile the annual district reports, and perform such other duties as may be assigned.
- d. The district council shall make provision for a treasurer who shall receive and disburse any monies forwarded from any source, in accordance with district guidelines.
- e. The council officers shall plan district council meetings, preparing an agenda which may be circulated among council members in advance of each meeting.

4. District Council Responsibilities

- a. Serve as an administrative unit of conference, expediting recommendations and resolutions of Conference Assembly under the direction of Conference Council.
- b. Give guidance to district congregations in matters of nurture, discipline and unity of practice.
- c. Be sensitive to the spiritual needs within district congregations, endeavoring to meet those needs through special emphases in congregational, cluster, or district meetings, or by other applicable methods.
- d. Provide opportunities for the development and recruitment of leadership persons.
- e. Develop appropriate mechanisms to promote outreach and to establish new congregations and service programs.
- f. Appoint a district representative to serve on the Conference Council and another to serve on the board of Virginia Mennonite Missions. These appointments are to be reported to the conference office by May 1 of each year.
- g. Assist district congregations, especially those smaller or emerging, in matters of finance, encouraging fiscal responsibility for meeting congregational needs and the needs of the other church agencies.
- h. Provide a context of arbitration in case of tension or division within a congregation.

III. GUIDELINES FOR FAITH AND LIFE COMMISSION

A. Responsibilities and Accountability

The Faith and Life Commission (FLC) is one of three program commissions established by Article IX of the VMC Constitution. The commission is responsible to “(1) provide leadership for Conference in spiritual, doctrinal, and faith and life issues, (2) establish guidelines for ministerial leadership within the Conference, and (3) exercise responsibility for granting, maintaining, and discontinuing ministry credentials.” (VMC Bylaws, Article IX, Section 3.3)

1. At one time the following responsibilities were identified for initial processing by a spiritual discernment sub-committee. They continue as responsibilities of the full commission:
 - a. Monitor theological trends in the church
 - b. Process faith statements for consideration by the Conference Assembly
 - c. Provide approaches to critical issues for congregations
 - d. Clarify guidelines that are needed to correct false teachings
 - e. Deal with current issues that influence our Mennonite life and witness
2. Article X of the VMC Constitution, on *Leadership Ministries*, prescribes that “Conference shall provide guidelines for congregational leadership, pastoral care and nurture of believers in affiliated congregations by recommending leadership patterns consistent with a biblical model. Conference may appoint persons for special ministries and it shall establish patterns of oversight for congregations through the Faith and Life Commission.”
3. Since “all commissions are accountable to Conference Assembly through Conference Council,” the functions and duties of the FLC are to be “outlined by Conference Council and approved by Conference Assembly” (VMC Bylaws, Article IX, Section 1, *Functions and Duties*).

B. Membership and Officers

1. The Faith and Life Commission is composed of:
 - a. All active oversight leaders serving in the conference, including oversight leaders for special ministries, with terms as outlined in VMC Bylaws or specified by individual district guidelines.
 - b. Special ministries oversight leaders, with only one or two persons in their cluster, shall not be members of the FLC, but shall report in writing to the Conference Minister.
 - c. Three members-at-large, one member being elected each year by Conference Assembly, for a three-year term.
 - d. An additional member may be co-opted from outside the commission to serve as chair, for a three-year term.

The qualifications of members and the organization of the FLC are outlined in VMC Bylaws, Article IX, *Commissions*.

2. Officers of the FLC are as follows:
 - a. The Chair may be a co-opted member, in addition to those prescribed above. Thus, it is expected that the chair will not be an overseer nor serve on any one subcommittee, but will be available for general direction and assistance to all committees as needed.
 - b. The Vice-Chair and the Secretary shall be chosen from members of the commission. The three officers will serve three-year rotating terms of office.
 - c. Per the VMC Constitution, the Chair and Secretary will represent FLC on the Conference Council. Exceptions to such representation are provided for in the VMC Bylaws, Article IV, Section 1.3.
 - d. The VMC Executive Conference Minister will provide staff leadership and participate in all commission and executive committee meetings, without vote.
 - e. FLC officers may meet as an executive committee between commission meetings for the following duties:
 - 1) Give guidance to the staff on issues beyond the routine
 - 2) Act on behalf of the commission between meetings
 - 3) Prepare the agenda for the regular commission meetings
 - 4) Assign the appropriate agenda items to the internal committees
 - 5) Function as the implementation group for the Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy.

C. Working Procedures

1. Member Interaction

It is important that FLC members have opportunities for open group interaction in sharing personal pilgrimages. Commission members are encouraged to practice and model personal ministry with each other in appropriate ways when there is need.

2. Gift Discernment Committee

- a. Three members are selected by the full commission to serve on FLC's Gift Discernment Committee, each for a rotating three-year term. The members of the committee will name their own chair from their own number.
- b. The Gifts Discernment Committee shall provide recommendations for the following positions to be confirmed by the full commission:
 - 1) The FLC Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary.
 - 2) Members of the Leadership Enrichment Committee, the Credentials Committee, and other sub-committees, as provided in Section D below.
 - 3) Chairs for the Leadership Enrichment Committee, the Credentials Committee, and other sub-committees as provided in Section D below.

- c. Other duties of the Gifts Discernment Committee
 - 1) Recommend FLC members to complete vacant terms in any of the established positions, for confirmation by the FLC.
 - 2) Monitor sub-committee membership and provide opportunity for changes in committee membership at the conclusion of individual terms, taking into account the interests of FLC members
 - 3) Bring recommendations to the spring meeting so those selected can begin responsibility September 1 of the year elected
3. Special Ministries Coordinators
- Oversight leaders caring for credentialed ministers in non-congregational roles will coordinate special ministries clusters. Respective clusters will be organized for such ministries as leadership/administration, teaching, chaplaincy, and evangelistic/prophetic. Special ministries oversight leaders shall serve the FLC as follows:
- a. Attend FLC meetings and report regularly to the Commission
 - b. Process applications for participation in the special ministry category
 - c. Make appropriate recommendation to the Credentials Committee regarding applications
 - d. Along with conference staff, monitor the response of cluster members for reports and payment of fees
 - e. At request of the Commission, contribute toward the evaluation of concerns arising in any of the Special Ministries clusters

D. Standing Committees

Some items of commission business may be assigned to working committees, in accordance with the areas of responsibilities given to FLC. Each committee will give its agenda items adequate consideration in order to bring reports and/or recommendations to the full commission for response and/or action. The Executive Conference Minister shall provide staff services as needed. Two such committees are as follows:

1. Leadership Enrichment Committee

The committee shall be composed of five members of the FLC, selected for rotating three-year terms, through FLC's gift discernment process.. One of these members shall be named as committee chair via the gifts discernment process for a two year term. The Executive Conference Minister will provide staff services for the committee.

The Leadership Enrichment Committee will direct various approaches to provide training and enrichment for church leaders. In particular, the committee will:

- a. Recommend persons for appointment by FLC to plan the Ministry Retreat
- b. Assign a member of the committee to serve on the Ministerial Training Trust Fund Committee
- c. Recommend programs to FLC for oversight leader seminars or workshops

- d. Plan for congregational leadership training opportunities
- e. Promote area programs to enhance and strengthen church leadership

2. Credentials Committee

The Credentials Committee will facilitate the call and credentialing of persons for ministerial leadership in VMC settings, on behalf of the FLC, within the scope of VMC beliefs and practices as defined by FLC.

The committee shall be composed of six members of the FLC, named by the commission's gift discernment process, with two selected each year for rotating three-year terms. One of these members shall be named as committee chair for a two year term via the gifts discernment process. The Executive Conference Minister will provide staff services for the committee, including maintenance of credential records.

The Credentials Committee will typically meet nine times each year, and will inform FLC members of their meeting schedule well in advance so that oversight leaders may readily coordinate the processing of ministerial candidates with congregations or institutions seeking credentialed leaders.

In particular, the Credentials Committee will:

- a. Process requests for ministerial credentials submitted by oversight leaders.
- b. Review the appointment and/or reappointment of oversight leaders, for confirmation by the FLC.
- c. Authorize the renewal and/or change of ministerial credentials for ministers certified by VMC. This includes license renewal, adjustment of ministerial status, and transfer of credentials between conferences.
- d. Develop and administer guidelines for an individual to complete a ministerial call process that could lead to receiving ministerial credentials for serving in a VMC congregation and/or ministry.
- e. Develop and administer an assessment instrument for use by Credentials Committee members as they interview individuals, focusing on a ministerial candidate's call to ministry, spiritual maturity, competency in ministerial practices, and readiness for ministry.
- f. Authenticate documentation submitted by each ministerial candidate for processing by Mennonite Church USA and VMC. These may include but are not necessarily limited to: Ministerial Leadership Information form (MLI), criminal background check, financial viability review, psychological profile, references provided, and sexual misconduct policy statement.
- g. Certify a candidate for ministerial credentials by acting to approve the individual's application and assigning the appropriate MC USA designation code for the approved credential. In event the Credentials Committee cannot achieve consensus, the committee may report the matter to the FLC for further review and counsel.
- h. Authorize an appropriate process for investigation and discernment in response to charges of ministerial misconduct involving a person holding VMC credentials, for final action by FLC.

3. Other Standing Committees may be established by the FLC as needs arise, with functions and structures as determined by FLC.

IV. POLITY FOR OVERSIGHT MINISTRIES

A. Role of Oversight Ministry

In keeping with Anabaptist tradition and New Testament example, the role of oversight ministry is to provide mentoring, encouragement, resourcing, and accountability for credentialed persons in pastoral and diaconate ministries. An oversight leader in VMC is to be a pastor to the pastors and elders within a specific cluster of congregations, within a district, or within a special ministries cluster. It is preferable that oversight leaders who are also serving in a pastoral role do not carry oversight for the congregation of which they are pastor.

In general, oversight leaders are to facilitate communication and foster positive relationships between pastor and congregation, assist congregations in developing vision and goals with periodic reviews, and assist in resolving conflicts. The oversight leader guides a congregation through various processes such as leadership reviews, transitions, and terminations, arranging for special resources from beyond the cluster/district, when appropriate.

By virtue of office, the oversight leader will be a member of the FLC of VMC, and accountable to that body. A district may designate its oversight leader with the term District Minister, or Overseer, or Bishop.

(See also *BYLAWS OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE*, Article VII. *Leadership Ministry*, Section 1. *Oversight Leader*)

B. Personal Qualifications for Oversight Leaders

An oversight leader's walk with Christ Jesus is to be characterized by spiritual maturity as described in I Timothy 3:1-7. The leader shall have a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, a meaningful prayer life, wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit, the ability to listen actively and discern carefully, skills in counseling and in conflict management, and the ability to communicate effectively.

The oversight leader (district minister, overseer, or bishop) shall have been previously ordained, with sufficient experience in ministry to enable ongoing counsel for congregational leadership. The oversight leader's personal schedule shall allow regular visits and consultations with the pastors and congregations for whom they carry oversight.

C. Relational Job Description for District Oversight Leaders

1. Relationship to Credentialed Leaders in the District
 - a. Serve as a resource and spiritual mentor to congregational leaders
 - b. Provide counsel and support in times of personal stress or crisis
 - c. Schedule regular visits with each credentialed person, including the spouse on occasion

- d. Encourage personal and vocational development through conferences, retreats, seminars and formal educational opportunities
 - e. Arrange, with the conference office, for an orientation of new pastors to conference policies and avenues of accountability
 - f. Provide counsel and support to the pastor when a change in ministerial assignment is indicated
2. Relationship to District Congregations
- a. Serve as the primary channel for spiritual accountability of the congregation to district council and conference
 - b. Communicate with congregations regarding spiritual resources available through the conference
 - c. Encourage congregations to develop a schedule and process for regular pastoral review
 - d. Encourage congregations to establish a Pastoral-Congregational Relations Committee (PCRC) to monitor and enhance pastoral-congregational relationships
 - e. Participate in significant events in the life of congregations
 - f. Serve as a member of all pastoral search committees
 - g. Serve as a member of all pastoral evaluation committees
 - h. Officiate at all licensings, ordinations and installations of pastors
 - i. Be available to preach on invitation
 - j. Attend meetings of the congregation, elders, or church council upon invitation
 - k. Remain aware of congregational life by receiving minutes of congregational and church council meetings
 - l. Provide counsel in the early stages of congregational conflict and suggest appropriate resources when conflict becomes adversarial or polarized
 - m. Maintain personal objectivity in circumstances of congregational tension or conflict
3. Relationship to District Clusters
- a. Arrange for regular meetings of the pastoral leadership of cluster congregations
 - b. Facilitate sharing and fellowship of cluster participants
 - c. Serve as the primary channel of communication between the cluster, district council, and the FLC about spiritual issues and concerns
 - d. Arrange resourcing events as appropriate
 - e. Promote the exchange of vision and goals of congregations within the cluster
 - f. Promote interchange between clusters within the district
4. Relationship to District Council
- a. Assist the district council chair in preparing district agenda
 - b. Serve as an ex-officio member of the district executive committee and district council
 - c. Arrange for issues of faith and discipleship to be considered by district council
 - d. Report congregational requests for ministerial credentials and pastoral appointments, inviting advice from the district council
 - e. Promote conference and denominational agenda and programs

5. Relationship to FLC (FLC)
 - a. Attend all meetings, as a member of the FLC
 - b. Promote environment of mutual trust, respect and support among colleagues
 - c. Bring regular reports regarding concerns, activities and developments within one's district
 - d. Monitor developments in the religious arena and secular sphere, bringing issues with moral and ethical dimensions to the FLC for discussion and discernment
 - e. Participate with integrity in discerning the mind of Christ on issues brought to the FLC, facilitating decision-making
 - f. Request approval from FLC's Credentials Committee for conferring ministerial credentials and making any changes in credential status (e.g., changes to different categories of credentials, transfers within VMC, and inter-conference transfers)
6. Relationship to Conference
 - a. Participate as a delegate in conference assemblies
 - b. Provide reports as required by conference agencies, boards and commissions
 - c. Promote and support conference and denominational agenda and programs

D. Relational Job Description for Special Ministries Oversight Leaders

1. Relationship to Cluster Members
 - a. Serve as a resource and spiritual mentor to cluster members
 - b. Schedule regular meetings with individual members of the cluster, including the spouse on occasion
 - c. Call regular meetings of the cluster for fellowship and discussion of relevant topics as desired and appropriate
 - d. Keep cluster members advised of relevant FLC agenda and developments
2. Relationship to the FLC
 - a. Attend all meetings, as a member of the FLC
 - b. Promote environment of mutual trust, respect and support among colleagues
 - c. Bring regular reports regarding the concerns, activities and developments of the cluster
 - d. Monitor developments in the religious arena and secular sphere, bringing issues with moral and ethical dimensions to the FLC for discussion and discernment
 - e. Participate with integrity in discerning the mind of Christ on issues brought to the FLC, facilitating decision-making
 - f. Request approval from FLC for conferring ministerial credentials and making any changes in credential status (e.g., changes to different categories of credentials, transfers within VMC, and inter-conference transfers)
3. Relationship to VMC
 - a. Participate as a delegate in conference assemblies
 - b. Provide reports as required by conference agencies, boards and commissions
 - c. Promote and support conference and denominational agenda, as appropriate

E. Selection and Appointment of Oversight Leaders

1. Selection and Appointment

The selection of an oversight leader shall be facilitated by the district chairperson and approved by the FLC in accordance with guidelines established by the FLC. District councils shall be responsible for the expenses of the oversight leader. (VMC Bylaws, Article VII, Section 1.4)

- a. The selection process for a new district minister, overseer, or bishop may be initiated by either the district chair or a cluster/district overseer who together will recommend action by the district council.
- b. Upon affirmation by the district council, the district chair will inform the FLC of the plan to select an oversight leader for a cluster/district, eliciting counsel.
- c. The cluster/district will appoint an oversight leader selection committee composed of one member from each cluster/district congregation. Additional members may be co-opted. One of the committee members shall be selected as chair
- d. Normally neither the retiring oversight leader nor that district's chair will serve as a member of the selection committee. However, committees are strongly encouraged to solicit their counsel.
- e. The chair of the Oversight Leader Selection Committee will contact the Executive Conference Minister to arrange for appointment of a member of the FLC to relate to the selection committee and to serve as the channel of communication with the FLC.
- f. The chair of the Oversight Leader Selection Committee will consult regularly with the Executive Conference Minister, using resources from that office to facilitate the search process.
- g. The committee chair will inform congregational leadership that the search is in process, inviting each congregation to submit names of potential candidates.
- h. Ordained persons with experience in leadership ministry, including currently active pastors, are eligible for appointment.
- i. The selection committee will consider all potential candidates, consulting district council members and cluster pastors as appropriate, before proposing one candidate to the Credentials Committee of FLC for counsel and further processing.
- j. The Credentials Committee will bring their recommendation of a candidate to the full FLC for review and action.
- k. Upon approval of the candidate by the FLC, the Executive Conference Minister will inform the chair of the Oversight Leader Selection Committee of the commission's action.
- l. The selection committee chair will inform District Council and congregational leadership of the commission's action for congregational response and affirmation.

- m. Upon affirmation by district congregations and the District Council, the FLC shall appoint the oversight leader for the specified term of service and with the agreed designation, i.e. overseer, bishop, or district minister. The newly appointed oversight leader will be recognized in the annual commissioning by Conference Assembly.
 - n. The District Council in consultation with the Executive Conference Minister will arrange for a service of installation of the newly appointed oversight leader.
2. Reappointment
- a. Clusters/districts are advised to review the ministry of their oversight leader prior to completion of the agreed term of service.
 - b. Such review shall be initiated by the district chair, who will assist the District Council or cluster in organizing the review process.
 - c. Upon completion of the review, the district chair will present a recommendation to the Credentials Committee of the FLC.
 - d. Upon reappointment by the FLC, the Executive Conference Minister will inform respective cluster/district leadership and relevant conference entities of the reappointment.
 - e. Affirmation of reappointment is asked from clusters, congregations, and congregational leadership in accordance with district policy.
3. Remuneration
- District councils will determine the type and level of remuneration for their oversight leader, covering all expenses associated with the exercise of those responsibilities.
4. Concluding Service
- An oversight leader desiring to discontinue service shall notify the district council chair six to nine months before the end of the term of service, thus initiating a new search process as outlined in these guidelines.
5. Retirement
- a. Active oversight leaders will generally anticipate retirement between the ages of 68 and 70.
 - b. Continuing service beyond age 70 is to be determined on an annual basis.

V. POLITY FOR PASTORAL MINISTRIES

[Check out additional resources online at www.mennoniteusa.org and www.vmconf.org.]

A. Patterns and Functions of Pastoral Leadership

Pastoral leadership in the congregation may be provided in a variety of ways based on size, program, location and resources of the congregation. *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership, 1996*, addresses these issues in an extensive way, now updated by *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership, 2014*.

Pastor-leaders are servants. Following Christ's example and New Testament teaching, pastors take a servant stance as they fulfill pastoral functions. Pastors are not to do the work of the congregation but are servant models as they shepherd and equip members to carry out Christ's missionary mandate and facilitate and coordinate ministry in their context. The ministry of a congregation is the responsibility of the whole congregation, utilizing the gifts of the Spirit resident in that faith community.

What are the functions of pastoral leadership in the life and mission of our congregation? There appear to be four possible pastor-leader functions for which one or more persons in a congregation may be responsible. These include:

1. **Shepherding:** This includes counseling, pastoral visiting, crises ministry, and life-cycle ministries, such as baptisms, weddings, parent-child dedications, funerals, etc.
2. **Equipping:** This implies the preacher-teacher role to nurture persons in the faith and prepare them for the work of ministry.
3. **Facilitating:** This is an administrative process of helping people to fulfill their ministry as the Church is both gathered and scattered.
4. **Coordinating:** This includes bringing the total ministry of the Church together so the parts fit into the whole. It requires being in touch with the various groups that are planning and working in the Church's program.

Some congregations will call one person to provide pastoral leadership. A team of several persons may better provide the gifts and time needed for congregational leadership. Congregations may arrange a combination of part-time and full-time persons with the pastoral leadership functions being assigned according to individual gifts. Each congregation will decide on the pattern which best fits their situation and interests.

B. Preparation for Pastoral Ministry

1. **Educational Preparation.**

VMC has not established minimal educational requirements for pastoral ministry. It strongly encourages persons who sense a call to pastoral ministry to pursue appropriate college and seminary training. From whatever source, candidates should demonstrate a good understanding of the biblical material, theological and doctrinal issues, Anabaptist/Mennonite history, and the Mennonite Church USA and its

ministry. Pastors are encouraged to develop life-long learning patterns for keeping current in the world, including regular.

2. Readiness for Ministry.

In evaluating a possible call to ministry and how to prepare for it, it will be important to explore these areas:

- a. **Spiritual Commitment.** Can I testify to a personal relationship with Jesus and a readiness to follow where he leads?
- b. **Biblical Theological Foundation.** Do I have a living knowledge of old and new testaments and an understanding of how their witness impacts the world today?
- c. **Personal Character and Integrity.** How has my character been shaped by values communicated within my family system, and reinforced by educational pursuits and religious experience? How do these factors enable me in responding to an inner call to pastoral ministry?
- d. **Denominational Membership.** Am I committed to the Mennonite Church and am I ready to hold active ministerial credentials in VMC and membership in a VMC congregation?
- e. **Pastoral Gifts and Skills.** Have I sensed an inner call to pastoral ministry? How has the Holy Spirit gifted me, and how has my congregation discerned those gifts? What additional training have I pursued or am I planning in order to cultivate those gifts and gain skills for pastoral ministry?

3. Seven Core Competencies.

Another approach has been developed in the past decade by Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. This focuses on “six core competencies” (plus a seventh added by VMC) which are vital for every pastor. Candidates and search committees are encouraged to ask these key questions in evaluating the candidate’s readiness and progress:

- a. **Biblical Story.** Is the candidate firmly grounded in the Bible?
- b. **Anabaptist/Mennonite Story, Theology, Convictions.** How well does the candidate understand and embody core Anabaptist principles?
- c. **Christian Spirituality/Discipleship.** Does the candidate evidence a spirituality that is continually being shaped by the love of God the Father, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?
- d. **Self-Awareness and Emotional Health.** Is the candidate on a journey toward greater self-awareness and self-understanding, enhancing the capacity to enter and maintain healthy relationships with others in the church and beyond?
- e. **Missional Engagement.** What is the candidate’s capacity to provide missional direction and to collaborate with congregational leaders in equipping the congregation for active missional engagement in and beyond its local context?
- f. **Leadership.** What is the candidate’s understanding of and capacity for congregational leadership?

- g. Pastoral Ethics. How does the candidate demonstrate personal integrity and commitment to wholesome and above-board relationships

C. Beginning a Pastoral Search

Leadership for calling a pastor to serve a congregation is the cooperative work of the oversight leader and the congregational committee assigned the task. The initiative for conversation between the congregation's oversight leader and the congregational committee may be taken by either party.

If a congregation does not already have a committee, such as the Pastoral-Congregation Relations Committee, charged with the responsibilities for calling, evaluating and working with pastoral assignments, its first step after dialogue with the oversight leader will be to appoint or designate a pastoral search committee. They may wish to designate an existing committee, such as, the church council, board of elders or a pastoral council. It is important that this committee include a cross-section of persons (age, gender, viewpoints, interests) of the congregation.

Procedures for the pastoral search process will vary by districts and congregations. The committee and the oversight leader, need to agree early in the search process who will carry what roles and assignments. The process will be facilitated by using "Ministry Transition" materials available from Mennonite Church USA (www.mennoniteusa.org) and the Conference office (www.vmconf.org).

In some situations, congregational leadership in consultation with its oversight leader, may choose to commission a minister for a particular leadership role, rather than requesting licensing by the conference. Where such commissioning is for primary pastoral leadership, the guidelines in this section of the handbook may be applicable.

In VMC, authorization for licensing or ordination is given by the FLC upon request by a congregation, cluster or district bishop/overseer. The oversight leader is responsible to guide the candidate in responding to the "Ministerial Leadership Information" online and other forms required by the Conference (www.vmconf.org), as outlined in section VII.D.3., "Suggested Regular Procedures for Receiving Credentials."

When consideration is being given to calling a person who currently has a leadership assignment in another VMC congregation or a church agency, the committee and oversight leader are encouraged to report their interest to the respective oversight leader or agency administrator where the individual is serving.

Persons holding ministerial credentials in an Anabaptist/Mennonite affiliated conference or denomination who have been affirmed for accepting a ministerial assignment in VMC will be requested to submit a completed Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) form online.

D. Steps in the Search Process

1. The Pastoral Search Committee begins with the basic questions for evaluating potential pastors as described in Section B, above.
2. The committee will consider all names of persons suggested. Suggestions may come from the congregation, the oversight leader, the FLC, or the MC USA Office of Congregational and Ministerial Leadership. The review and evaluation of the names of persons will include conversations with persons who have worked with or are working with the individual in a current or past assignment. At the appropriate time, references provided by the candidate will be contacted for their response.
3. After careful and prayerful consideration, the appropriate person from the committee or congregation is empowered to contact the prospective candidate identified by the preceding step. The congregation will keep focus by relating to only one potential candidate at a time.
4. Various means may be used to get acquainted. This may happen both by gathering information from the candidate's current setting and by bringing the person into the congregation issuing the call. Candor and openness will enhance these conversations. A third party, such as the district minister, overseer, or bishop, can be helpful in discussions between the candidate and the committee.
5. The prospective pastor and the congregational representative(s) will want to outline their mutual expectations in a free and open exchange. This will include a discussion of the program of the congregation, the role of pastoral leadership, and conversation with the spouse of the candidate where applicable.
6. Exposure to the congregation will be carefully planned by the committee. The process will include ample exposure of the candidate and the congregation to each other. A variety of contexts may be used, such as meeting with the committee, the church council, and the entire congregation in worship and in an informal setting.
7. In the process of evaluation, the congregation will want to explore the candidate's sense of call to ministry, areas of perceived strength and weakness, pastoral vision and goals in comparison to those held by the congregation under consideration.

E. Accountability of the Pastor

Accountability is important in the life of the faith community. One of the important traits of a Christian is to be a person with a sense of accountability, responsible not only to God, but to the Body of Christ and congregational and conference leadership.

Congregational leadership should develop a sense of accountability for themselves as leaders. If pastors are out of focus, not sure of their duties, their goals undetermined, then indecision prevails, resulting in inefficiency, complacency or disunity. To be effective, pastors and elders will work as a team, giving account of their work both to the congregation and the appropriate bishop or overseer.

Pastors will usually have three levels of relationship for accountability:

1. The pastor's oversight leader, as a pastor to pastors, represents the primary level for accountability. There may be occasions when the conference minister may function in this role.
2. The functioning of a Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee is encouraged for maintaining constructive understandings between pastor and congregation.
3. A peer relationship with fellow ministers in related congregations offers another important resource for encouragement and self-evaluation, preferably through the district structure.

F. When Tensions Arise Among Congregational Leaders

From time to time, congregational leaders will be called on to settle disputes. Pastors are encouraged to initiate and pursue the "rule of Christ" (Matthew 18:15-18) which outlines processes for personal reconciliation which are to be contained within the smallest numbers of people possible.

When broader perspective is needed, the pastor will normally work first with the eldership or congregational supervisory committee. Where a standing Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee is in place, it will have a key role in working toward resolution. The congregation's oversight leader is also to be kept informed.

When efforts of the appropriate congregational entities along with the oversight leader fail to bring resolution, the oversight leader will consult with the Executive Conference Minister for further counsel and sources of help. The process should be under-girded by the principles in the "Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love" document (Appendix B). If these processes fail to bring unity, several further guidelines are proposed:

1. Consistent with their efforts to work objectively, the oversight leader and consultants will consider calling another person to function as overseer for one of the factions. The overseer(s) will consult with the district chair and the executive conference minister to assist in the ongoing process.
2. If the conflict involves the precipitous resignation or termination of a pastor, neither faction is to call that person to serve as their pastor until a suitable time has passed after the termination, perhaps 6-12 months. This policy will help prevent impulsive actions, which could foreclose other possibilities for resolution.
3. An arbitration group, including representatives of the various factions, should be appointed to assist in clarification and resolution of issues relating to a pending or ensuing separation.
4. Participating oversight leaders, with other responsible leaders, are encouraged to arrange a public service of reconciliation, at an appropriate time(s).

G. Perspective on Evaluating Leadership Ministry

1. Why Evaluate Ministry?

a. The Case for Evaluation

Evaluation happens constantly. Not the least, church members engage in evaluation on the telephone and in the parking lot, make choices about what activities to attend and how faithfully to attend, and give feedback to church leaders in various ways. Informal feedback may include direct compliments and criticisms to those being “evaluated,” complaining to those in authority or whoever will listen, dropping out, and agitation or advocacy in congregational meetings.

Formal leadership evaluations are usually more insightful than these processes in providing reflective appraisal of the functioning of leaders and programs. Constructive evaluations help assess congregational mission and set new direction for ministry. When done well, evaluations enhance pastoral ministry in congregation and community as leaders receive objective and thoughtful feedback on their work.

While the employed pastor has been the most frequent subject for evaluation by churches, constructive evaluation can be beneficial at various levels of leadership. This is especially true as a three-fold pattern of congregational leadership is emerging once again: (a) oversight ministries, (b) the pastor and other equipping leaders in the congregations, and (c) the local ministry leaders: elders, deacons, council members, and the like.

b. Pitfalls in Evaluation

Pastoral evaluation has too often been delivered with injury to the recipient and congregation. Persons in ministry have felt themselves the objects of blunt instruments wielded by people not competent to evaluate, or inflicted as an anonymous means of venting anger. Sometimes appropriate feedback has been inappropriately processed, turning otherwise constructive criticism into destructive ammunition.

Pastors are especially vulnerable to such abuse when evaluations are tied to a vote on whether the pastor shall be called to a further term of service. A pastor is far more likely to hear and benefit from objective feedback when career and livelihood are not on the line.

2. Who is Competent to Evaluate?

a. Those to Whom One is Accountable

Servant leaders seek to serve all congregational participants, each of whom has valid input regarding some of their work. But pastors who take direction from everyone are likely to please no one and will have their sanity sorely tried in the process.

Leadership evaluations take place in the context of a covenanted community of Christian disciples, committed to giving and receiving counsel in love and integrity. This assumes caring processes and appropriate structures for accountability. The following suggest areas of evaluative competency for various groups in the church:

- 1) Overall Relationships: Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee.
(See MC USA resources listed at beginning of Section V)
 - 2) Spiritual/Theological perspective: Oversight leader, Elders, Ministry Peers.
 - 3) Job “contract” understandings: Congregational chair and/or Church Council.
 - 4) Preaching and Worship Leadership: Those who listen/respond.
 - 5) Visitation: Those who have been visited
 - 6) Administration: Those who relate through organizational processes.
Within VMC, the oversight leader serves as a pastor and mentor to pastors. In cooperation with the congregation’s other primary leaders, oversight leaders promote the welfare of both pastor and congregation. Thus the oversight leader has a key role in formal evaluation processes, whether involving primary leaders only or the whole congregation.
- b. An Authorized Evaluation Committee
All structured evaluations should be guided by an authorized group. In many churches, a standing Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee exercises a valuable ombudsman role between leaders and members. Where such exists, it is likely the most appropriate group to implement the evaluation of leaders.

Where there is not such a standing committee, an ex officio group including oversight leader, council chair, and elders chair may be charged with annual reviews. Or additional at-large persons may be appointed for each review. While elders are sometimes charged with the evaluation process, their leadership role tends to make them candidates for evaluation themselves, rather than objective observers.

3. What Should Be Evaluated?

a. Things that are Important to the Mission of the Church

It is desired that each congregation will want to reflect periodically on how it is fulfilling its mission and how individual leaders are enabling that fulfillment. Some evaluation happens routinely through annual reports (especially financial reports), gift discernment process, and through program planners who ask instinctively, “What shall we do again and what shall we change?”

Oversight leaders, elders, and church councils have a particular obligation to reflect on all ministries of the church. At times, evaluation will focus on congregational performance, which is best measured by a previously established mission statement and/or goals. At other times, it will focus on ministries led

by particular leaders, especially those who carry extensive responsibility, but need not be limited to those who are remunerated for their ministry. Evaluation of leaders is best measured against objectives and expectations agreed upon in advance, often in the form of a job description.

b. Things that are Important to the One Being Evaluated

Pastoral evaluation is most helpful when desired and requested by the pastor as a means of self-awareness and personal growth. Congregational chairs and elders find it much easier to give feedback when it is requested. And congregational questionnaires are most helpful when they are gathering feedback on areas in which the pastor wants to grow. While the pastor may not always initiate the feedback process, the most helpful result will follow when the pastor is involved in constructing and shaping the questions which are asked. This rule is applicable, as well, to any other leader or committee whose work may be under review.

4. When Should Evaluation be Done?

a. When It Enhances Long-Term Partnership

The goal of evaluation is the nourishing of structures and communication that keep people together. As in husband/wife relationships, ministry evaluations also work best when it is presupposed that the participants are committed to each other for better and for worse!

b. When Not Generated by Crisis

Conflicts are not resolved by leadership evaluations. At best, they can give insight on areas of disagreement, if crafted for that purpose. More often evaluations under stress produce winners and losers, with the mobile pastor most likely to be offered as sacrificial lamb. Conflict situations must be addressed, but by mediation and reconciliation processes rather than evaluation processes.

c. Regularly

Leadership reviews are most useful when they come regularly out of sincere desire to know and respond to what members are experiencing. Annual evaluations (or alternating years as a minimum) by smaller leadership groups can identify areas of concern or tension before escalating into broader controversy. Annual reflection should provide feedback, at least in the areas of preaching, pastoral care, administration, and community participation. Pastoral reviews involving the whole congregation are recommended at least every four or five years.

In addition to reflecting on the pastor alone, rotating mini-evaluations of various departments may be useful, e.g. Education and Elders, last year; Worship and Fellowship, this year; Outreach and Stewardship, next year. The pastor's relation to each of those departments could be highlighted in the appropriate year. While business reviews are frequently tied to future compensation, the most helpful pastoral evaluations will likely emerge when they are disconnected from considerations of salary and extension of service.

Thus pastors serving four year terms will likely benefit most from a wide-ranging review in their third year, and even more from annual check-ups.

5. How to Evaluate?

a. With Clear Objectives

It is never sufficient and often dangerous to borrow someone else's questionnaire. It is vital to ask first: "Why are we doing this?" "What do we need to learn?" "What will enable us to get the right information?" "Who has competency to answer these questions?" "What will we do with the data?" "Who will see the results?" and similar questions. Only then do evaluators have a measuring rod for shaping questions and selecting formats for the task at hand.

b. Within Competency Areas

It is unfair to both the evaluator and evaluatee to inquire in areas for which the evaluator has no experience or sense of responsibility. Thus review of performance against job description is best handled by key congregational officials who are able to see the big picture. There are other areas of public ministry which can be more broadly polled, e.g. those who have listened to sermons are competent to say how they heard and responded to the sermons and what they hope will continue and what may change. But rather than a tenure review, sermon response forms distributed to selected respondents at various times throughout the year may be most helpful in learning specifics for improvement of preaching. In a similar way, those who have had occasions for pastoral care could be interviewed regarding their experiences in this area.

c. As Personally as Possible

Informal evaluation by pastors themselves can sometimes be best. Pastors need to develop ears to hear, learning constructive ways of inviting people to "say a little more about what you were observing." Occasional questions like, "How are you experiencing the church these days?" may also generate good information. Such feedback can enhance self-evaluation by the person being reviewed, which should be considered essential in a well conducted review process.

Most evaluations utilize paper questionnaires which can be very useful, although such forms are only one tool for gathering information. Questionnaires typically feature objective type questions, with single word answers or rating scales or a range of affirming or disagreeing options. Such questions are most easily tabulated and quantified. Open-ended questions are harder to summarize, but have greater capacity for reflecting feelings and perspectives. A combination of objective and open-ended questions is often wise.

When questionnaires are used, it is vital to require a signature for the sake of responsible critique, so long as respondents are assured that their answers will be handled confidentially by the evaluation committee.

Other tools, usually to be preferred because they foster two-way communication, are personal interviews; with all members/participants in small congregations, with randomly selected members, with those having interest and/or expertise in the area under review, or with members expressing a desire to meet a member of the review committee. Group discussions utilizing focused questions may also be useful when pursued with discretion and sensitivity.

d. Engaging An Outside Consultant

Some churches are fortunate to have members skilled in personnel work serving on evaluation committees. Even so, congregations need the wider-church perspective represented in their oversight leader. Sometimes it may be agreed between overseer and committee to enlist another skilled consultant for additional objectivity and wisdom.

A key role of the committee (and consultant), including the oversight leader, is the interpretation of collected data, processing it for pastor and congregation in ways that are clarifying, rather than distorting. More detailed material may be discussed with those being evaluated and those who work closely with them. Information distributed to a broader audience should usually be in the form of a general summary.

Raw data should never be distributed beyond the committee and consultants, in order to avoid proliferation and misuse of the material. Human nature being what it is, people (not least the one being evaluated) often gravitate to the most damaging, and usually inaccurate, perspective.

6. When is it Right to Use a Ballot?

a. Some Say Never

There are some who advocate an open-ended “contract” between pastor and congregation which remains in place until both parties sense that it is time to make a change. Reasons for changing may include retirement, an inner or outer call to another place of ministry, a mutual sense that the current relationship is no longer facilitating the congregation’s mission, etc. Annual evaluations by the committee with more significant review at designated intervals provide the context for mutual discernment of whether to continue in office or work toward suitable closure.

b. To Confirm Another Term of Ministry

It is often valuable and expected that the congregation has opportunity to confirm a continuing term of service for their pastor. Such public vote of confidence can be energizing to both pastor and members. A confirmation ballot is best separated from an evaluation process, at least by a month or more.

When a vote is appropriate, the most useful ballot will contain a clear recommendation from the Pastor/Congregation Relations Committee and/or Church Council and/or other designated group, specifying the basic terms and any related understandings for continuing leadership. Experience indi-

cates that a minimum 75% affirmative vote is beneficial for an effective pastoral ministry.

Rather than framing the ballot question as a choice between “yes” or “no,” it may be preferable to offer a choice open-ended choices, for example: “I affirm the recommendation” or “I cannot affirm this recommendation at this time because...”

If the responsible group is unable to make a clear recommendation or believes it likely that the recommendation will not be confirmed, a formal vote is best avoided. In such case, it will be best for the committee and pastor to agree on a mutually constructive process of closure.

When the balloting is positive, the results may be published with whatever celebration fits the personality of the congregation and enhances the ongoing partnership.

H. Concluding a Pastoral Assignment

1. Reasons for Conclusion

While long-term pastoral service is to be preferred, all pastoral assignments must eventually come to an end. The conclusion may be for reasons such as retirement, resignation by the pastor, mutual agreement by pastor and congregation to conclude a call, non-renewal by the congregation for a subsequent term of ministry, dismissal for malfeasance, or death.

2. Loss and Pain of Conclusion

Whatever the cause, pastoral transitions are likely to be occasions when there is a keen sense of loss and grief. At the same time they can be occasions for celebrating significant leadership accomplishments. The pain and separation will be experienced in different ways by the pastor, pastor’s spouse, pastor’s children, co-leaders in the congregation, other members of the congregation, and the wider community.

3. Timing of Conclusion

When possible, pastoral changes should not be made hurriedly. Decisions about resignation, or ending a pastoral assignment, should be processed through consultation with the pastor, the oversight leader, the elders/deacons and/or other key leaders of the congregation, the PCRC, or personnel committee prior to any public announcement. When agreement has been reached on a change, there should be a mutually agreed date for the termination of the assignment (usually three to six months). This should allow sufficient time for the pastor and family to arrange for alternate employment and for the congregation to begin its process of finding another pastor.

4. Processes for Conclusion

Once the date for concluding the pastoral assignment has been agreed upon, it is important to arrange suitable processes for closure. These should provide opportunities for both the pastoral family and the congregation to reflect on and affirm the journey they have shared together; to let go of the pain associated with

saying “goodbye,” freeing all for wholehearted entry into the next chapter of their separate journeys; and to experience God’s grace in the spiritual dimensions of endings and new beginnings (similar to death and resurrection).

a. Closure for Pastor and Congregation

Satisfying closure for the congregation and the departing pastor may include:

- 1) Making personal contact with each other as a way of acknowledging the significance of the time shared together.
- 2) Clarifying the reasons for leaving. Openness is a prelude to healthy closure; if left unclear, people tend to imagine worst case scenarios.
- 3) Letting go of old grudges. Facing unresolved conflicts through open and loving dialogue to facilitate healing of relationships.
- 4) Sharing expressions of sadness and uncertainty. Facing the pain of the impending departure openly and sharing such feelings with each other.
- 5) Getting affairs in order. Turning over administrative and pastoral responsibilities to others.
- 6) Expressing appreciation to each other for mutual contributions received during the time together.
- 7) Symbolizing the formal ending of the pastoral relationship through corporate ritual and celebration, acknowledging God’s leading and grace to this point through the years together.

b. Closure for Pastor and Fellow Leaders

Understandings related to the transition should be agreed upon at the congregational leadership level. The outgoing pastor should not take the initiative to determine future staff workload details. The oversight leader, along with the church council, the Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee (PCRC), and/or other congregational leaders need to work at these issues. The Executive Conference Minister may also be consulted.

Conducting an exit interview with the outgoing pastor can be a healthy exercise. Initiative for this should be taken by the oversight leader along with the PCRC or other appropriate committee. On occasion, the Executive Conference Minister may be involved. The outgoing pastor (and spouse, if appropriate) may use this opportunity to bring things to meaningful closure by taking a “final” look at how things have gone during their time in the congregation. The occasion can enable free expression about both difficult and good times, without needing to lay blame. It can identify insights gained and learnings made. It should also be a time when appreciation is freely shared.

Guidelines for Pastoral Exit Interview, produced by the Ministerial Leadership Offices of Mennonite Church USA, can be a helpful tool in conducting exit interviews. Information may be found on line at www.mennoniteusa.org or www.vmconf.org.

I. Retirement

Typically, pastors are encouraged to anticipate retirement between the ages of 65 and 70. Extensions beyond age 70 are for one year terms, with each extension accompanied with an evaluation by the appropriate congregational leaders. Oversight leaders can assure retiring pastors of continuing opportunities for ministry through interim assignments and/or invitations to preach in other churches, if they so desire.

Effective retirement will incorporate many of the components suggested in the preceding Section H on “Concluding a Pastoral Assignment.” While not needing to abandon personal friends, retiring pastors and spouses will do well to cultivate new friendships with persons outside the congregation just served, in order to minimize occasions or perceptions of second-guessing their successors.

Whether or not retiring pastors remain where they have been serving, an exit interview involving the oversight leader, retiring pastor, elders, and new pastor (if known) allows all to express hopes, fears, disappointments, reservations, and concerns for the future. If the retiring pastor remains in the area, there should be a period of time away from the congregation, according to the guidelines in section J.2, which follow. Then an accountability group, including the oversight leader and new pastor (if retired pastor continues membership with same congregation), can be established to afford accountability for the “pastor emeritus” stage of ministry.

J. Providing for Pastoral Transition

1. Interim Arrangements

When changes in pastoral leadership occur in a congregation, there is potential for stress. Thus a planned time of transition is often vital for promoting healthy congregational relationships and allowing new leadership to get off to a good start. In addition to “good closure” as described in Section H, it is often advantageous to arrange for an interim pastoral team of leaders from within the congregation or to obtain the services of an interim pastor. This is especially urgent when the previous pastor has served the congregation for an extended period. Interim leaders can bring an impartiality and freedom from program building that enables the congregation to identify and address issues in need of resolution. The interim period offers a time for the congregation to review its purpose and refocus its objectives, thus enhancing the selection of longer-term leadership with appropriate ministry style and gifts for its newly focused mission.

In calling an interim pastor, the congregation will state the job expectations clearly in writing, including a mutual understanding that the interim pastor is ineligible to be a candidate for the existing pastoral vacancy. A defined period of time, at least six to twelve months, is recommended. Counsel from the oversight leader, or other conference resource people will be beneficial in discerning the proper provisions during the transition period.

2. When Previous Pastors Remain

Generally, former pastors will discontinue attending the congregation which they recently served. This guideline recognizes a change from earlier generations when many pastors served “for life” in the congregation where they were “born and raised.” With the advent of shorter terms and a more mobile pastorate, however, it is often confusing for members and current leaders when a previous pastor remains on the scene after leadership responsibilities have ended.

When it is decided that a former pastor will remain in the congregation and/or community recently served, the following guidelines are in order:

- a. It is both courteous and mutually helpful for the former pastor to be away from the congregation for six months to a year immediately following retirement, to facilitate the transfer of leadership to the successor.
- b. Previous pastors will not hold a major office in the congregation such as elder or council member, for at least a year after concluding their pastorate, and then only in consultation with the current pastoral leadership of that congregation.
- c. Since the active pastors in the congregation normally conduct weddings, funerals, and parent/child dedications, requests for the participation of a previous pastor should be brought to the current leaders for discernment of appropriate involvement. Often the best pastoral care by a former pastor is to attend such events rather than exercise public leadership.
- d. One of the best gifts a resigning or retiring minister can give a congregation is confidence that they can worship, serve, and grow without dependence on former leaders.
- e. The former pastor should refrain from analyzing or discussing the current program or its leaders either with members of the congregation or persons outside the congregation.
- f. If the former pastor wishes to continue visiting the sick at home or in the hospital, this should be done in consultation with current leadership in order to avoid misunderstanding or duplication of effort.

K. Guidelines for Special Ministries

1. Special Ministries for which VMC grants credentials:
 - a. Chaplaincy as requested by an appointing congregation, district, or agency and approved by the FLC.
 - b. Designated pastoral ministries within church agencies (e. g., pastor of students) as requested by the agency and approved by the Faith & Life Commission.
 - c. Evangelistic, prophetic, teaching, and leadership ministries that would be significantly enhanced by ministerial credentials, when requested by a congregation, district, or agency and approved by the Faith & Life Commission.
2. Support for Persons in Special Ministries

VMC provides support for persons in special ministries in the following ways:

- a. Authentication of call and credibility through the credentialing processes of the FLC.
 - b. Visibility and affirmation for ongoing ministry through the maintenance of an annually published roster of ministry persons in the Conference report book and through the Mennonite Directory.
 - c. Support, encouragement and nurture through a relationship with an oversight leader.
 - d. Collaboration in establishing a support/accountability plan.
3. Provision for collegial relationships with others in similar ministries.
 4. Accountability of Persons in Special Ministries

Accountability is the dynamic whereby a minister submits and subjects his/her ministry, faith, and life to the church. The offices of ministry are great treasures of the church, each person placed in a ministerial office is a steward of this treasure, humbly and openly providing an account of the ways he/she manages this trust. (*A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership*, 1996, page 82)

VMC expects those credentialed for a special ministry to:

- a. Be an active member of a VMC congregation
 - b. Have the affirmation of the leadership of the congregation of which he/she is a member
 - c. Have the support of the sponsoring congregation, district or agency for the credentialing
 - d. Arrange for the payment of any dues established for the credentialing and supervisory services of the Conference
5. FLC responsibility for Special Ministries procedures:
 - a. Designating oversight leaders for credentialed persons
 - b. Establishing and collecting the dues for the credentialing and supervisory services provided
 - c. Interpreting the policy in exceptional cases
 6. Application Process

The person applying for special ministries credentialing will submit the following to the FLC:

 - a. A completed application form. (Addendum B, "Special Ministry Application")
 - b. A letter of affirmation and support from the leadership of his/her congregation.
 - c. A letter of request from the congregation, district or agency by whom the individual is sponsored or employed.
 - d. A written support/accountability plan that includes:
 - 1) A statement of vision and goals for ministry, articulating the vision for the particular ministry and describing that vision's connection to the purposes of VMC and/or the Mennonite Church USA
 - 2) Expectations and commitments in relationship with the congregation where the credentialed person is a member
 - 3) Regular consultation with a designated oversight leader provided by VMC, typically with contacts at least four times a year, and more during times of transition

- 4) Participation in a mutual support or ministry accountability group.
Group members could be peers in ministry, persons selected from the congregation, or persons from the place of employment as deemed appropriate to provide care and support
- e. Anticipated biennial contribution. (See Section K.9, "Contribution," below.)
- 7. Biennial Review
 - a. A review of the ministry of persons credentialed for special ministries is expected every two years, with a report submitted to the designated oversight leader by June 15 of the year in which the review occurs. The official Special Ministries Biennial Review Form asks for a brief report on ministry activity and on the implementation of the support/accountability plan.
 - b. Licenses for special ministry will be renewed annually (similar to licenses for pastoral ministry). The biennial review with recommendations for extension of the ministry term will be reported to the July meeting of the FLC's Credentials Committee.
 - c. Recommendations of ordained persons to be continued in their special ministry status will be processed for affirmation by FLC's Credentials Committee in its July meeting.
 - d. Reviews will be alternated so that half will be done each year.
- 8. Conference Delegate Status
 - a. Persons credentialed by VMC and active in special ministries who are not members of a special ministries cluster may be delegates to VMC assembly if so designated by their respective district councils.
 - b. Special ministries clusters may name one delegate to VMC assembly for every ten cluster members or fraction thereof.
- 9. Transfer and Duration of Credentials
 - a. Transfer of credentials from other conferences will be accommodated upon the request of a congregation or agency and the establishment of the support/accountability plan.
 - b. Ordained persons credentialed for special ministry (OSM) who do not have a continuing assignment or choose not to renew the special ministry status will be placed in the "inactive" (OIN) category.
 - c. Licensed persons credentialed for special ministry (LSM) without a continuing assignment will have their licenses withdrawn.
 - d. Persons ordained in VMC prior to January 1993 and those transferred into special ministries from another Conference prior to January 1993 will be placed in the *active without charge (OAW)* category or *retired (ORE)* if age 55 or older.
- 10. Contribution

Financial contributions from congregations provide for oversight leader remuneration in the districts. In special ministries, however, contributions from persons in such ministries or from their employing agencies will provide for some remuneration for special ministries oversight leaders.

 - a. The suggested contribution of \$100 may be made upon application and/or renewal, and will cover the two-year period (\$50 per year).

- b. The contribution is voluntary for those who were part of the special ministries program at the time of the adoption of this policy (July 19, 2000). It is required of those who have become part of the special ministries program since then.

VI. NON-CREDENTIALLED CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

A. Perspective

Ministry gifts are broadly distributed by the Holy Spirit, with expectation that all God's people will have a ministry within the servant functioning of the church (Eph. 4:11-16). In that sense, all members are ministers and are called to be faithful as daily witnesses, prayer warriors, administrators, worship leaders, teachers and education leaders, in ministries of love, and many other kinds of service relating to their local congregation. All of these ministries should be supported and encouraged by the larger congregation which works as a unity led by its central groups. VMC By-laws, Articles VII.3 & .4, mention, in particular, the role of deacons, deaconesses, elders, pastoral assistants, etc.

In general, every congregation has two broadly based leadership tasks: first, spiritual discernment and oversight (Section B below), then facilitation and coordination of congregational administration (Section C below).

In smaller congregations, both functions are often directed by one leadership group such as an ordained leadership team, or elders, or a church council. Larger congregations usually find it more functional to sub-divide responsibilities between (1) a deacon or elders group to focus on spiritual leadership, whose members may or may not be credentialed, and (2) a council or cabinet which focuses on program coordination, whose members are less likely to be credentialed.

Because it is so easy in either model to get caught up in details of program administration, it is vital to evaluate regularly whether the spiritual leadership function is holding its first priority.

B. Guidelines for the Spiritual Leadership Group

1. Composition
 - a. Minimum of three men and/or women, typically commissioned for overlapping terms for continuity
 - b. Pastor(s)
 - c. Overseer as an ex-officio member
 - d. Elders, deacons, and/or other such persons as designated by the congregation.
2. Qualifications
 - a. Responsive to the Holy Spirit
 - b. Spiritual maturity though not necessarily "older"
 - c. Servant outlook
 - d. Respected by fellow members
 - e. Loyal to the congregation and larger church
 - f. Concerned for spiritual faithfulness of individual members and the congregation

3. Responsibilities
 - a. General spiritual oversight and encouragement
 - b. Discerning spiritual needs of the congregation
 - c. Assisting and advising pastor/ordained leaders
 - d. Overseeing pastoral care and mutual care of members
 - e. Dealing with discipline of members
 - f. Processing membership applicants and transfers

C. Guidelines for the Congregational Administration Group

1. Composition
 - a. Minimum of five men and/or women
 - b. One or more pastoral leaders
 - c. Members selected for particular areas of program responsibility, such as spiritual leadership, education, worship, outreach, fellowship, facilities, stewardship, and mutual care
 - d. Selected members commissioned for one to three-year rotating terms in their responsibility areas
2. Qualifications
 - a. Responsive to the Holy Spirit
 - b. Administrative ability
 - c. Servant outlook
 - d. Respected by fellow members
 - e. Loyal to the congregation and larger church
 - f. Concerned for united witness and growth of the congregation
3. Responsibilities
 - a. Facilitating congregational decision making
 - b. Coordination of overall congregational program
 - c. Reviewing/developing congregational policies and budget
 - d. Congregational administration and human resource components including hiring, evaluating, and dismissing staff
 - e. Appointing other officers and committees

VII. POLITY FOR MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS

A. Introduction

Mennonite Church USA provides a biblical-theological framework for the calling and empowering of persons to serve as credential ministers in the church. Current guidance is offered particularly in *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership: Polity Manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA (Working Document)*, 2014. Each conference is expected to develop policies and procedures to meet the standards established by the denomination for various forms of ministerial service.

As one of 21 conferences within Mennonite Church USA, VMC seeks to live within the framework of denominational polity as it relates to the call, qualifications, and credentialing of persons for ministry in its various forms, along with the ethical frameworks for leadership ministry. The Credentials Committee of the FLC is VMC's designated entity to assist the Executive Conference Minister in administering the policies and protocols associated with ministerial credentials.

The following definitions and outline of practice are offered as guidelines for the process of granting ministerial credentials within VMC. They are not retroactive for any who received credentials under an earlier system.

B. Definition of Credentials

Typically, ministerial credentials are considered and granted for pastoral assignments that are initiated and processed by a congregation. Credentials are also granted for special ministries beyond the congregation. Both inner call and personal giftedness are important considerations. Ordination credentials are normally reserved for persons who have a confirmed sense of ministry direction and the required giftedness. Licensing is recommended when a person's giftedness, aptitude, and calling to pastoral ministry are being discerned.

VMC recognizes that, whether ordained or licensed, persons with ministerial credentials have equal prerogatives. The basic differences are that licensing is renewed annually by the FLC Credentials Committee as requested by respective oversight leaders, and that licensure terminates with the assignment.

C. Categories of Credentials

VMC has basically endorsed the denominational categories for ministerial credentials as outlined in *A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership, 2014*, with several modifications. VMC's categories are the following:

1. Licensing
 - a. *Licensing Toward Ordination, (LTO)*. A temporary credential granted for purpose of discerning ministerial gifts, abilities and aptitude, usually for a minimum of two years and with the anticipation that the candidate may eventually be ordained for pastoral ministry.
 - b. *Licensing for Special Ministry, (LSM)*. A temporary credential granted for the purpose of discerning gifts in a VMC approved special ministry outside of/ beyond the congregational setting.

2. Ordination

- a. *Active (OAC)*. The continuing ministry credential held by those serving in a leadership ministry assignment.
- b. *Active in Special Ministry (OSM)*. The credential granted for a person serving in Special Ministries, a ministerial category established and recognized by VMC for those having ministerial assignments in a conference, institutional, community, or denominational context.
- c. *Active without Charge, (OAW)*. The credential held by those not presently holding a charge for ministry (for a period of up to three consecutive years after which the credential status becomes *Inactive*).
- d. *Inactive (OIN)*. The credential held by those who have been without a ministerial assignment for more than three consecutive years or who have left VMC or the denomination. This credential is not valid for performing ministerial functions. Neither the conference nor district which holds the credential is responsible for the actions of a person so recognized. If subsequently, an invitation to a ministerial assignment is received, the FLC Credentials Committee will be informed and an interview conducted to decide whether to reactivate the ordination credential.
- e. *Retired (ORE)*. The credential held by those who have retired from active ministry, after age fifty-five. This credential is valid for performing ministerial functions and is to be exercised in consultation with the oversight leader. A previously retired minister called to a new ministry assignment will have the pastoral status changed to *Active*.
- f. *Probation (OPR)*. The credential held by those having a ministry assignment who are placed under close supervision for a specified period of time in order to determine whether the credential will be continued. At the conclusion of the probationary period, it is determined whether the credential becomes *Active*, *Suspended*, or *Withdrawn*.
- g. *Suspended (OSU)*. The ministry credential is laid aside for a specified period of time for disciplinary reasons. At the end of the suspension period, it is determined whether the credential moves to *Probation*, *Active* or *Withdrawn*. Suspended credentials are not valid for performing ministerial functions.
- h. *Withdrawn (OWI)*. The status given when a ministry credential is ended for nondisciplinary reasons. This status is also given to ministers no longer affiliated with the denomination, who will no longer have a Mennonite Church ordination credential.
- i. *Terminated (OTE)*. The status given when the conference has actively removed the credential because of a disciplinary action. The individual no longer has an ordination credential.
- j. *Deceased (ODE)*.

D. Procedures for Granting Credentials

1. Congregational Ministries

a. *Ordination*

Ordination is the normal procedure to recognize and authenticate persons being given pastoral assignments in a local congregation. These credentials are given with the understanding that the person's ministry will continue even should there be a change in the location of one's pastoral assignment. When a period of time passes during which a person does not have a ministry assignment after which that person becomes a candidate for a pastoral assignment, a review shall be engaged to reaffirm that person's credentials. However, when a ministry change occurs that does not require ministerial credentials, those credentials shall be withdrawn as outlined in this document.

Licensure

Licensure is recommended for persons being assigned ministerial responsibilities for a given term, a specific role, or geographical location. It may be used where a person's giftedness, aptitude, and calling to pastoral ministry are being discerned. It may be preliminary to ordination. The same process is to be followed for ordination and licensing if the person has not been credentialed before.

There may be situations where a cluster or district, rather than the local congregation, is in a better position to take responsibility for requesting credentials. In such situations the oversight leader will make contact with the chair of the district for the appropriate steps. A discerning process will determine the person's call and gifts for ministry and a decision on whether to grant ordination or a license.

When a person who has been licensed three years or more is being considered for ordination, the FLC's Credentials Committee will decide if a new oral interview is necessary, based on a review of the candidate's Ministerial Leadership Information (MLI) and consultation with the person's oversight leader.

b. *Commissioning*

Commissioning may be chosen in some situations where licensure is deemed inapplicable or premature. Commissioning is understood to be an act of the congregation rather than of the conference and may apply to all manner of leadership tasks. However, the conference does not issue a credential. When one is commissioned for primary pastoral leadership, with participation by the oversight leader, said leader may thereby be recognized as a commissioned minister in conference directories, a delegate to the VMC Assembly, and a member of the affiliated district council.

Typically, this is a time-limited designation. If there is anticipation of ongoing pastoral leadership, the commissioned minister, facilitated by the oversight leader, is expected to pursue credentialing within three years.

2. Special Ministries

The process for granting special Ministries Credentials is similar to that for congregational ministry. As with congregational ministries, either ordination or licensure credentials may be granted. Careful discernment is required in determining the type of credential. Most often it will be either *Licensing for Special Ministry (LSM)* or *Ordination for Special Ministry (OSM)*.

It is expected that the candidate will be an active member of a VMC congregation. The oversight leader of the appropriate district or Special Ministries Cluster will be actively involved in the discernment process and will carry responsibility for presenting the request to the FLC. The request for credentials will come from the congregation or the organization to be served. Credentials accountability flows through the oversight leader.

The procedure for granting credentials, the type and status of credentials granted, and terms of service for persons in special ministries follows the same guidelines and categories outlined in this document for other ministries.

3. Suggested Regular Procedures for Granting Credentials

(application forms are available at www.vmconf.org/faith-life)

- a. In early conversation, the oversight leader engages with the candidate regarding achievement of the core competencies outlined in Section V.B.2 above, in this VMC polity handbook. If candidate has not yet earned a Master of Divinity degree, options for additional learning are considered.
- b. The oversight leader informs the candidate on how to access the online “Ministerial Leadership Information” (MLI) questionnaire (www.mennoniteusa.org), for submission by the candidate to Mennonite Church USA.
After processing, the denominational office provides a copy of the completed MLI form with collected references to the oversight leader for review and further conversation with the candidate.
- c. If considered important for evaluation of the candidate, the oversight leader arranges for the candidate to take a personality profile review similar to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Personal Profile System (DISC).
- d. The oversight leader completes the “Information Sheet for Credentials Committee,” attaches it to the MLI form, and sends the materials to the office of the executive conference minister.
- e. The candidate completes the “Authorization for Disclosure” form which allows the conference office to conduct a National Criminal File search. Conference staff reports any results of the search to the oversight leader and the Credentials Committee.

- f. The candidate receives a copy of *Manual: Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure*. Candidate signs and returns the accompanying Code of Sexual Ethics form, including witness signatures, to the Conference Office.
 - g. FLC's Credentials Committee verifies and reviews the MLI and other submitted materials, and interviews the candidate.
 - h. The committee takes official action on the request for validation of credentials, reporting their action to the oversight leader and to FLC.
 - i. The inviting congregation votes for the final approval of the candidate.
 - j. The oversight leader contacts the conference office for the signed certificate and wallet card, for presentation at the credentialing and/or installation service, giving appropriate date and location.
 - k. The oversight leader plans an appropriate service with the congregation where the person to be credentialed or installed will serve.
 - l. The oversight leader reports the date and location of the credentialing service along with other district reporting on the quarterly report forms submitted to the FLC secretary.
4. **Transfer of Credentials**
For candidates accepting a call into a VMC setting from another Anabaptist/Mennonite conference or denomination, the procedure for transferring ordination credentials from the previous affiliation will follow the process outlined in the preceding Section 3.
5. **Reactivation or Revalidation of Credentials**
Ordained persons classified for three years or more as *Active Without Charge (OAW)* or *Inactive (OIN)*, may have their credentials reactivated/revalidated by following the usual steps outlined in Section 3 above. The procedure begins with the appropriate oversight leader completing the *Information Sheet for the Credentials Committee* and submitting it to the office of the executive conference minister. The Credentials Committee will determine whether the candidate needs to produce new MLI form for the reactivation process.

E. Description of Ministry Roles

1. **Congregational Ministry**
Credentialed persons are authorized to perform the duties pertaining to their congregational assignment as outlined by the congregation's constitution or job description.
2. **Special Ministries**
Persons with credentials for special Ministries are authorized to perform the duties pertaining to their assignment as prescribed by the institution where they serve. They are not to assume functions designated for congregational ministries. However, the pastors and elders where they worship may invite these persons to participate in ministerial services in the congregation as deemed appropriate. Upon invitation, they may also use their ministry gifts in other congregations.

3. Inter-relationships

Persons already licensed and/or ordained prior to assuming a new ministry assignment shall be commissioned/installed in accordance with the functions and stipulations of their new ministerial role.

F. Accountability for Credentials

1. Congregational Ministries

Ultimately, the responsibility for granting, maintaining, and discontinuing ministerial credentials resides with the FLC (VMC Bylaws, Article IX, Sec. 3.3.3) and particularly with the FLC's Credentials Committee. However, for normal functioning, credentialed persons in typical pastoral ministries are accountable to the congregation through its leadership and to their oversight leader in one-to-one counsel. They shall be members of their associated cluster/district council and shall have active delegate status in the VMC Assembly.

2. Special Ministries

Ultimately, the responsibility for granting, maintaining, and discontinuing ministerial credentials of all types resides with the Faith and Life Commission (VMC Bylaws, Article IX, Sec. 3.3.3) and particularly with the FLC's Credentials Committee. However, for normal functioning, credentialed persons in special ministries are accountable to the congregation or organization they serve and to their oversight leader in one-to-one counsel. Unless certified by their district or cluster, credentialed leaders in special ministry do not have membership status in their associated district council nor delegate status in the VMC Assembly.

3. Active Without Charge/Inactive

Persons holding VMC ordination credentials but having no current ministry assignment, and persons transferring ordination credentials from another conference but having no current ministry assignment, will have their credentials held in the *Active Without Charge (OAW)* or *Inactive (OIN)* category in the district where they hold congregational membership. They are not expected to be members of the district council and do not have active status as delegates to Conference Assembly. The oversight leader will keep in regular contact with these persons in recognition of their ministry gifts and to ascertain the validity of continuing their credentials.

G. Concluding of Credentials

1. Review

Oversight leaders shall review annually the status of credentials for persons holding membership in congregations in their cluster/district who have credentials in the *Active Without Charge (OAW)* or *Inactive (OIN)* category. After three years, if they are no longer involved in a recognized ministry and have no plans to return to active ministry, their credentials shall be withdrawn (*OWI*) by appropriate process of the FLC. It is important for the oversight leader to maintain communication with the person involved during this process. This policy relates

only to those who were credentialed since January 1993, for both congregational and special ministries.

2. Retirement

Persons who are retired after a significant period of service in ministry assignments may keep their credentials valid in order to be available for interim pastoral assignments or other ministry opportunities within the life of the church. Depending on personal interest and ability, some retired persons may prefer to have their credentials in an inactive category or withdrawn.

3. Termination

Ministerial credentials may be terminated as a disciplinary action by the FLC. In such event, an appropriate notation will be made on the minister's personal file in the VMC office.

4. Exit Interview

When feasible, it is advisable to conduct an exit interview with the person who is retiring or whose credentials are concluding for whatever reason. Such an interview could assist in bringing closure and setting the stage for constructive understandings and good feelings regarding the change being made. The interview should be conducted by the appropriate oversight leader and/or the Executive Conference Minister.

H. Recording and Updating Ministerial Credentials

1. Official records concerning ministerial credentials will be held in the VMC Conference Center computer. All changes will be filed periodically by conference staff and held for referral or printouts when needed. The process for keeping adequate records will be as follows:
 - a. Oversight leaders will report appropriate information on the quarterly report forms to the secretary of FLC.
 - b. Conference staff will enter the information into the computer
 - c. The staff of the FLC will report all completed ministerial credential changes in an attachment to quarterly commission minutes.
 - d. Quarterly printouts will be given to oversight leaders in order to share information and promote accuracy.
 - e. The FLC secretary will write a letter of condolence to the family of a credentialed leader who has passed away.
2. Certificate and Wallet Card
 - a. The oversight leader will request these documents from conference staff, giving appropriate date and location.
 - b. The conference staff will expedite the request and work with each oversight leader in delivering the certificate and wallet card.
3. Media Announcements

Information concerning the completion of the credentialing process should be reported to the conference office which is responsible that the information is appropriately shared with church media.

VIII. GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL EMPLOYMENT

A. Pastoral Growth and Renewal

Pastors find themselves giving out on a regular basis as preacher, teacher, pastor, administrator. This pace is not only taxing emotionally, but often leaves pastors drained in terms of fresh ideas and resources for spiritual stimulation. The following suggestions are offered to promote growth and renewal.

1. Weekly Sabbath

While all members are expected to participate in worship activities on Sunday, the pastor's Sunday role tends to be more akin to ongoing work. Accordingly, it is encouraged that another day be freed regularly for Sabbath refreshment. Typically, a full-time pastor will have at least one and a half days off from pastoral responsibilities each seven-day week.

2. Quarterly Weekend

Pastoral families are increasingly caught in the crunch of Monday through Friday work or school obligations for spouse and children, while the pastor is obligated on weekends. Additionally, the pastor's call frequently places his family in a location distant from the pastor's and/or spouse's parental family. In the interest of cultivating family relationships, congregations are encouraged to provide a weekend free for spouse and family activities at least once per quarter.

3. Annual Vacations and Holidays

Pastors are to be free from regular pastoral responsibilities on holidays normally observed by their members. Additionally, to enable time for rest and reflection, congregations are encouraged to provide at least two weeks of paid vacation (in proportion to percentage of employment) each year, with a third week after four years of pastoral experience.

4. Continued Training

Demands of leadership ministry dictate that pastors pursue continued training for stimulation, retraining or specialization, renewal, emotional refreshment, evaluation of vocational role, and/or completion of an academic degree. Benefits for enhanced ministry usually outweigh any sacrifices perceived for pastor or congregation. In recent years, VMC has encouraged conference based theological education. In particular, the following kinds of continuing preparation are encouraged:

a. In-Service Training

In cases where a congregation calls pastors without formal training to leadership ministry, the congregation is strongly encouraged to provide opportunities and financial assistance for in-service study and training.

b. Continuing Education

For persons with previous formal training, it is suggested that continued training experiences be provided through released time from congregational duties, along with a congregational budget for course work and seminars.

c. Sabbatical leave

- 1) In order to encourage significant growth in ministry and to increase the likelihood of longer tenure, congregations are encouraged to provide up to a month of sabbatical leave for each year of completed service in that ministry location.
- 2) In contrast to vacation, sabbatical goals typically involve formal or informal study, focused reflection, or participation in Christian service projects.
- 3) Generally, a sabbatical leave will not be used until the fourth year of ministry in that location, with subsequent leaves during the eighth and twelfth years of ministry.
- 4) During sabbatical leave, the pastor receives full salary and benefits in accordance with current employment understandings. Personal sabbatical expenses, in excess of regular in-service budgets, are the pastor's responsibility.
- 5) Sabbatical plans submitted by the pastor are to be approved by the governing council of the congregation, with the understanding that the pastor will provide a minimum of one year service to the congregation after completing the leave.

B. Financial Support and Benefits

Pastors need prayer, personal and financial support from their congregations.

Prayer for pastoral leaders is important. Congregations are strongly encouraged to be in active prayer for their pastoral leadership.

Prayer support is closely related to personal support. The members of the congregation are urged to express their ongoing personal commitment and support for pastors by thanking them, encouraging them, and sharing with them for their development, and not only during times of particular challenge or stress.

Decisions concerning the financial support and fringe benefits for pastors are the responsibility of designated congregational lay leaders. This is best done by a committee accountable to the church council which, as a larger group, is responsible for a broad range of administrative decision making in the congregation.

1. Level of Financial Support

Congregations should set a goal of providing sufficient income to pastors to free them to fulfill the assignments expected of them in the congregation. All congregations are encouraged to plan for a minimum of half-time pastoral services and subsequent financial support, for one or more persons.

2. Calculating Amount of Time

Congregations who have pastors serving on a marginal or part-time basis are encouraged to evaluate and analyze their expectations and the time their pastoral leaders provide. It is difficult to use the normal business “hours-per-day” and “days-per-week” approach to analyzing a pastor’s time and work load. A more workable approach is to analyze the time on the basis of blocks of time; such as morning, afternoon and evening for each day of the week using the following chart. Identify the blocks of time which each of your pastoral staff invests in congregational work.

	Sun-day	Mon-day	Tues-day	Wednes-day	Thurs-day	Friday	Satur-day
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

There are a total of 21 work-time units in the above chart. The morning and afternoon blocks contain more hours than the evening blocks. However, the evening is more prime time for pastors and their families, so the evening units are counted of equal value to the morning or afternoon units. Full time service is generally considered as 12 units of time.

3. Pastoral Salaries and Benefits

Mennonite Church USA’s Ministerial Leadership Office annually distributes “Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries/Benefits in Mennonite Church USA” for use by congregations in determining pastoral salaries. The guidelines are available in paper form or on the internet from the VMC office or MC USA Ministerial Leadership Office.

Congregational leadership is reminded that these are guidelines which should be adapted to a congregation’s unique circumstances. Congregations are encouraged to provide salary and benefits at a level that generously meets the needs of the pastor and his or her family and is commensurate with agreed responsibilities.

It is expected that benefit packages will include a family medical health plan, pension plan/retirement fund, life and disability insurance, continuing education allowances, expense allowances, such as auto expenses, conference expenses, and professional expenses as outlined in the “Guidelines for Pastors’ Salaries/Benefits in Mennonite Church USA” available on the Mennonite Church USA website. (www.mennoniteusa.org/resource/pastor-salary-guidelines/)

4. Written Employment Understandings

Congregations and pastors are urged to record and attest their mutual expectations and job responsibilities in a written covenant document. Sample documents are available from the Conference office or online from the MC USA website.

This Handbook revised and adopted by the VMC Faith and Life Commission, August 26, 2015, with final wording in Section III by FLC Credentials Committee, September 16, 2015.

Virginia Mennonite Conference
Constitution

PREAMBLE

Christ Jesus has commissioned the community of faith to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all people, to nurture Christian believers and to show love to all persons. To fulfill this mandate in accordance with biblical principles, we set forth this constitution to describe the relationships and responsibilities which will guide us in our common task.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this church body is Virginia Mennonite Conference, hereinafter designated as Conference. The principal office is located at 901 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

ARTICLE II: IDENTITY

The Virginia Mennonite Conference was organized in 1835 by congregations of the Mennonite faith scattered throughout the Shenandoah Valley. These congregations desired a common organization and fellowship for promoting the work of the church from the perspective of the sixteenth century Anabaptists. Currently, it consists of congregations in Virginia and neighboring states who subscribe to the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) and make voluntary commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior a priority.

ARTICLE III: RELATIONSHIPS

The conference is a charter member of Mennonite Church USA, effective February 1, 2002, sending delegates to the Delegate Assembly and the Constituency Leaders Council as governed by the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA and of Virginia Mennonite Conference. Congregations and individual members of the conference relate to other entities and agencies of Mennonite Church USA as provided in the bylaws of that body and through the extended ministries of the denomination.

ARTICLE IV: PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be to:

1. Provide vision and leadership in the mission of the church by promoting and coordinating outreach ministries;
2. Bring persons into saving relationship with God by regeneration through the blood of Christ;
3. Foster a mature understanding of Christ-centered lifestyles;
4. Teach biblical doctrines faithfully;
5. Promote unity within the faith community;
6. Encourage fellowship among believers and congregations;
7. Develop guidelines which enable persons to live in community, promote peace and justice and practice stewardship of resources.

ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP

The Conference shall be composed of affiliated congregations who maintain relationship via mutual fellowship, counsel, and support as provided within the structures of Conference. Procedures for reception and termination of Conference affiliation are set forth in the bylaws of the Conference. Individuals are recognized as members of Conference by virtue of their membership in one of the affiliated congregations. Congregational members shall be baptized believers who have made a voluntary commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who demonstrate their decision to walk in Christian discipleship within the fellowship of the Mennonite Church. Privileges and responsibilities of individual members shall be those accorded by their respective congregations.

ARTICLE VI: DISTRICT COUNCILS

All member congregations shall participate in a district council which serves as a regional administrative unit of Conference. District councils shall include all ordained and licensed leaders exercising active assignments recognized by Conference, congregational delegates to Conference Assembly, and additional persons as determined by each district council. Each district shall be represented on Conference Council by a member of the district council executive committee as determined by the respective district council.

ARTICLE VII: CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY

There shall be a Conference Assembly to serve as the governing body of Conference. It shall hold final powers of identification, organization and dissolution of Conference. Conference Assembly shall include those persons stated in the bylaws. The composition of Conference Assembly as outlined in Article III of the bylaws may be modified only by action of Conference Assembly.

ARTICLE VIII: CONFERENCE COUNCIL

There shall be a Conference Council to serve as the executive body of Conference, to coordinate the work of Conference commissions and committees, and to facilitate the activities of Conference between Assembly sessions. Conference Council shall include those persons stated in the bylaws. Staff are not eligible to serve on Conference Council.

ARTICLE IX: CONFERENCE COMMISSIONS

Conference ministries and activities shall be implemented through program commissions established by Conference Assembly, including the following:

- A. The Faith and Life Commission shall provide leadership for spiritual, doctrinal, and faith and life issues, and exercise oversight for ministerial leadership credentials.
- B. Virginia Mennonite Missions shall lead in the development and administration of Conference programs of mission outreach, service, and church planting, both overseas and in the broader geographical area in which member congregations are located.
- C. The Congregational Life Commission shall be a resource to congregations in areas of Christian education, stewardship, peace and justice advocacy, and family concerns

including special areas of ministry such as: older adults, men, women, persons with disabilities. It shall also serve as a liaison with church agencies and institutions.

ARTICLE X: LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES

Conference shall provide guidelines for congregational leadership, pastoral care and nurture of believers in affiliated congregations by recommending leadership patterns consistent with a biblical model. Conference may appoint persons for special ministries and Conference shall establish patterns of oversight for congregations through the Faith and Life Commission. These leaders shall be affirmed for their ministries by Conference Assembly.

ARTICLE XI: CONFERENCE ORGANIZATIONS

Conference shall authorize, as needed, additional entities within the Conference context. Such entities shall operate within the guidelines of their own constitutions and/or bylaws. Conference organizations shall specify in their constitutions, bylaws or operating manuals their methods of appointing their boards and officers along with the responsibilities of the same.

ARTICLE XII: NONPROFIT TAX EXEMPT STATUS

Virginia Mennonite Conference is organized, and shall be operated, exclusively for charitable, religious, educational and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, making distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law (the "Code").

The Conference shall have all of the general rights, privileges, and powers conferred upon corporations created by the Act (Title 13.1, Chapter 10 of the Virginia Code), but shall be limited to the exercise of only such powers as are in furtherance of the purposes expressly provided for in these articles and as are in furtherance of activities permitted to be carried on by a corporation exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code and a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Code.

No part of the net earnings of the Conference shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, trustees, officers, or other private persons, except that the Conference shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in the purpose clause hereof.

No substantial part of the activities of the Conference shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Conference shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of this document, the Conference shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by an organization exempt from federal income

tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by an organization, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Upon the dissolution of the Conference, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by the Court of Common Pleas of the county in which the principal office of the Corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

ARTICLE XIII: AMENDMENTS

The Conference Assembly may adopt amendments to this constitution, upon recommendation by the Conference Council, by a 75% majority vote of the delegates present and voting at any duly called meeting of the Assembly, providing that delegates have received written notice of the substance of proposed changes at least thirty (30) days prior to the meeting when the amendment is to be considered.

ARTICLE XIV: BYLAWS

Bylaws will be hereinafter adopted. The conditions and regulations of Conference membership and function shall be determined by the bylaws. The bylaws may be amended in whole or in part, in the manner provided therein. The bylaws are to be deemed an integral part of this constitution.

Ratified by at least 75% of the delegates present this 26th day of March, 1994

As witnessed by:

Laban Peachey, Moderator

David D. Yoder, General Secretary

Attested to by:

Wayne North, Conference Secretary

Amended February 8, 1997, ACTION VMC 97:02

Amended July 15, 1999, ACTION VMC 99:05

Amended July 19, 2002, ACTION VMC 02:14

Amended June 14, 2003, ACTION VMC 03:10

Amended July 25, 2008 ACTION VMC 08:05

Amended February 5, 2011 ACTION VMC 11:03

BYLAWS
VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE

GENERAL

All matters hereinafter contained in these bylaws shall be subject to such provisions in regard hereto, if any, as are set forth in the constitution. All references in these bylaws to the constitution shall be construed to mean the constitution as from time to time amended. The name, place of business and purposes of Conference shall be as set forth in the constitution.

ARTICLE I: MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Eligibility

Applications for membership in Conference may be received from congregations or groups who are:

- 1.1 A covenanted group of believers, typically composed of at least ten households, gathering regularly for worship, fellowship and Christian ministry.
- 1.2 Ready to function within the Constitution and bylaws of the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.
- 1.3 Directed by clearly designated leadership, recognized by both the congregation and Conference.

Section 2. Privileges of Conference Membership

- 2.1 Recognition as a covenanted group of believers functioning within the fellowship and bylaws of Virginia Mennonite Conference.
- 2.2 Credentialing and mutual support for ordained leadership.
- 2.3 Access to fellowship and resources provided through conference assembly, conference council, districts, commissions, and agencies.
- 2.4 Representation in the conference assembly by the congregation's ordained/licensed leaders and other commissioned delegates as provided in Bylaw III, Section 2.
- 2.5 Access to denominational fellowship and resources provided through assemblies and agencies of Mennonite Church USA.
- 2.6 Representation in the Mennonite Church USA delegate assembly by the conference's and congregation's commissioned delegates as provided in the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.

Section 3. Responsibilities of Conference Membership

- 3.1 Gathering regularly for worship, fellowship, and Christian ministry as a covenanted group of believers.
- 3.2 Promoting mutual nurture and discipline in harmony with the stated purposes of the Conference.
- 3.3 Giving and receiving counsel through congregational, district, conference, and denominational structures.
- 3.4 Designating and supporting ongoing congregational leadership, recognized by both the congregation and conference.

- 3.5 Functioning within the constitution and bylaws of the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.
- 3.6 Providing generous prayer, emotional, and financial support for conference and denominational ministries, including prayer and financial backing for congregational representatives to delegate assemblies.

Section 4. Application Process

- 4.1 The leadership of a group or congregation desiring affiliation with Conference will engage in discussion with the oversight leader (formerly recognized as bishop/overseer) of the district/cluster with which they wish to identify.
- 4.2 The oversight leader will meet with the group to further explore their commitment to their district and to Virginia Mennonite Conference and their response to the constitution and bylaws of Virginia Mennonite Conference, the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.
- 4.3 When the group is organized, it will present a written request to the oversight leader for affiliation with Conference. The application will include a statement of faith, a statement of acceptance of the principles contained in the documents listed in item 2, and a statement of organization.
- 4.4 The oversight leader will arrange with the respective district's chairperson to have the request considered by the district for action.
- 4.5 The response of the district will be reported to Conference Council which will bring a recommendation for action by Conference Assembly.
- 4.6 Upon approval by Conference Assembly, the fellowship will be recognized as a congregation affiliated with Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Section 5. Termination

Congregations wishing to terminate their affiliation with Conference shall present a written request for withdrawal to their oversight leader. The oversight leader will notify the district chairperson who will place it on the district's agenda for consideration. The action of the district will be reported to Conference Council through the Executive Conference Minister for further processing. Conference Council will make a recommendation to Conference Assembly for final action.

In instances where a congregation's theological stance or loyalty to Conference is questioned, the issue shall be processed by the respective district council. A report of the process, findings and recommendations shall be brought to the Faith and Life Commission for counsel and action. The response of the commission shall be reported to Conference Council. Conference Council will take responsibility for any further action.

ARTICLE II: OFFICERS

Section 1. Elected Officers

Conference officers shall be:

- 1.1 Moderator;
- 1.2 Assistant moderator;
- 1.3 Secretary;
- 1.4 Treasurer.

These officers shall be elected by Conference Assembly from a ballot presented by the Gifts Discernment Committee of Conference. The moderator shall be elected in the first year of the cycle, the assistant moderator and treasurer in the second year and the secretary in the third year.

Section 2. Terms of Office

Terms of office shall be three years. Officers may serve a maximum of two consecutive full terms. Terms of office shall coincide with the Conference year.

Section 3. Duties

3.1 The moderator shall:

- 3.1.1 Act for the purposes of Conference as “president” to perform generally accepted functions of the office of president on behalf of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.
- 3.1.2 Assist the Conference in determining and articulating vision and mission;
- 3.1.3 Serve as a spokesperson for Conference;
- 3.1.4 Preside over all sessions of Conference Council and Conference Assembly.

3.2 The assistant moderator shall:

- 3.2.1 Act for the purposes of Conference as “vice president” to perform generally accepted functions of the office of vice president on behalf of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.
- 3.2.2 Provide counsel to the moderator;
- 3.2.3 Substitute for the moderator in the moderator’s absence;
- 3.2.4 Chair meetings at the request of the moderator;
- 3.2.5 Serve as ex-officio member of the Constitution Committee.

3.3 The secretary shall:

- 3.3.1 Keep and distribute accurate minutes of all proceedings of Conference Council, Conference Assembly and other conference-related meetings;
- 3.3.2 Correspond on behalf of Conference as requested by Conference Council.

3.4 The treasurer shall:

- 3.4.1 Chair the Conference Finance Committee;
- 3.4.2 Regularly review investment decisions for conference assets.
- 3.4.3 Provide financial advice and reports to Conference Council and Assembly as requested.

Section 4. Staff Officers

4.1 Executive Conference Minister

The Conference Council shall appoint an Executive Conference Minister reporting to the conference moderator, with term, responsibilities and compensation as established by Conference Council. The Executive Conference Minister shall exercise general supervision over the administration, financial matters and fundraising, while also serving as a resource to conference overseers and pastors and shall provide staff services for the Faith and Life Commission, and other conference standing committees.

4.2 Virginia Mennonite Missions (VMM) President

VMM shall appoint a president reporting to the Chair of the board, with term, responsibilities and compensation as established by the VMM board. The VMM president shall serve as the Chief Executive Officer of VMM. The VMM president shall provide staff services to VMM, the mission commission of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

ARTICLE III: ASSEMBLY

Section 1. Composition of Delegate Body

- 1.1 Congregationally-appointed delegates; Congregationally appointed delegates shall be selected on the basis of one delegate for each 100 members or fraction thereof. Substitutes are allowed, provided they are appointed by an appropriate congregational representative and not the involved congregational delegate.
- 1.2 Ordained and licensed ministers and deacons actively serving in the pastoral ministry of Conference congregations or “Congregations in Formation” (alternates for credentialed leaders are not permitted);
- 1.3 Persons commissioned for pastoral ministry in their congregation with endorsement by the oversight leader;
- 1.4 Up to four members from each district council executive committee who are not otherwise delegates;
- 1.5 Active oversight leaders serving Virginia Conference;
- 1.6 Persons licensed or ordained by Conference and active in special ministries who are not members of a special ministries cluster; if designated as delegates by their respective district councils;
- 1.7 One delegate for every ten members or fraction thereof from each special ministries cluster;
- 1.8 One delegate from each Conference Ministry and Conference Endorsed Ministry;
- 1.9 Members of Conference Council;
- 1.10 Non-credentialed members of the Faith and Life Commission;
- 1.11 Conference Staff Officers as non-voting participants.

Section 2. Delegate Terms

Congregational delegates will typically serve three-year terms coinciding with the Conference year or as specified by the sending congregation. Delegates are eligible for reappointment.

Section 3. Qualifications of Delegates

Delegates to Conference Assembly shall be members of affiliated congregations who are willing to give the time required by the assignment.

Section 4. Duties of Delegates

- 4.1 Attend all meetings of the Conference Assembly and their respective district councils;
- 4.2 Share perspectives in accordance with biblical principles;
- 4.3 Represent the convictions of their constituents faithfully;
- 4.4 Provide reports and promote decisions to their respective congregations, districts, agencies and boards;

4.5 Perform other duties as assigned by the Conference Council.

Section 5. Meetings

Conference Assembly shall convene a minimum of twice annually at times and places determined by Conference Council. Special sessions may be called by Conference Council. Delegates shall have a minimum of thirty days' written notice for all Assembly meetings.

Section 6. Motions

Delegates may submit motion(s) for consideration by assembled delegates, via Conference Council, in advance of Assembly or the Winter Delegate Session. All motions must be signed by at least 3 delegates and be received by the moderator no later than the day before Conference Council meets. Motions made from the floor may be received for consideration but may only be acted upon at the next delegate assembly.

Section 7. Decision Making

7.1 Each delegate shall be eligible to cast one vote. There is no provision for proxy voting.

7.2 A majority of votes cast shall determine any matter, except when the Assembly agrees otherwise or when otherwise provided in the Constitution or By-Laws.

7.3 Forty percent (40%) of delegates shall constitute a quorum. Approval of actions shall require a simple majority of those present.

ARTICLE IV: CONFERENCE COUNCIL

Section 1. Composition

Conference Council shall consist of:

- 1.1 The elected Conference officers;
- 1.2 One representative from each district council executive committee;
- 1.3 The chair and secretary from each commission. Exceptions to having these officers serve in this capacity require specific action of the commission;
- 1.4 Virginia Conference representatives to the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA;
- 1.5 A substitute when a member is unable to attend;
- 1.6 Staff officers serving as non-voting participants;
- 1.7 Heads of Conference Ministries invited as non-voting participants.

Section 2. Personal Qualifications

Conference Council members shall be:

- 2.1 Fully committed to Jesus Christ, the church and congregational life;
- 2.2 Persons of vision, spiritual discernment, maturity and leadership;
- 2.3 Knowledgeable of their district, its congregations and programs;
- 2.4 Positive in attitude toward the Mennonite Church, Virginia Mennonite Conference, and their districts;
- 2.5 Willing to devote the time required by the assignment including attendance at meetings;

- 2.6 Able to work effectively with bishops, overseers, district chairpersons, congregational leadership and their colleagues;
- 2.7 Able to contribute creatively and productively to the work of Conference Council;
- 2.8 Skillful in communication;
- 2.9 Able to work in contexts of diversity.

Section 3. Corporate Duties

Conference Council as a corporate unit shall:

- 3.1 Serve as the executive body of Conference;
- 3.2 Act as the “operational body” for VMC personnel and VMC property/real estate acquisition and disposition;
- 3.3 Project vision, define direction and promote unity in coordinating the work of Conference;
- 3.4 Decide what issues shall be brought to Conference Assembly;
- 3.5 Define the functions, responsibilities and lines of accountability of conference officers, commissions and conference committees;
- 3.6 Provide for staffing of Conference;
- 3.7 Facilitate the work of Conference Assembly between sessions;
- 3.8 Arrange for an inspirational component of Conference Assembly;
- 3.9 Prepare the agenda for business meetings of Conference Assembly;
- 3.10 Receive reports from commissions and agencies;
- 3.11 Evaluate the work of Conference commissions and agencies annually;
- 3.12 Develop plans to meet the financial needs of Conference, including adoption and supervision of the annual budget;
- 3.13 Prepare minutes for Conference Assembly delegates to review and approve;
- 3.14 Commission three representatives to the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA as provided in the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.
- 3.15 Appoint Conference based delegates and alternates to the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA as provided in the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.

Section 4. Meetings

Conference Council shall meet quarterly. Additional meetings may be called by the moderator and the secretary. All meetings, except for executive sessions, are open for observation. For participation, prior arrangement shall be made with the conference coordinator.

Section 5. Quorum

Two-thirds of the voting members of Conference Council shall be present to constitute a quorum. Actions shall require a seventy-five (75%) affirmative vote of members present for implementation.

Section 6. Appeals

Conference Council shall serve all conference committees, ministries and subsidiary organizations as a final level of appeal. Congregations desiring counsel, assistance or resolution shall first contact their respective district councils. When resolution is not achieved at this level, the congregation may appeal to Conference Council through the

officers of Conference Council. Such appeals must be supported by at least five members or ten percent (10%) of the congregation, whichever is greater. The officers of Conference Council will determine further processing of appeals including consultation with appropriate commissions and district councils.

ARTICLE V: DISTRICTS

Section 1. Composition

Districts shall typically be composed of a minimum of one cluster of at least four congregations. Consideration shall be given to geographical location, affinity of theological faith understandings, historical developments, and congregational preference in determining district composition. Modification of district composition shall have the approval of the districts and clusters affected and of Conference Council, in accordance with guidelines established by Conference Council.

Section 2. Purpose

Districts shall encourage, coordinate, and provide counsel and financial assistance to church extension programs and projects beyond the resources of individual congregations and clusters. Such endeavors shall be established and operated in consultation with appropriate commissions and agencies.

Section 3. Organization

Districts shall form a district council composed of all active district pastors, congregational delegates to Conference Assembly, oversight leaders and additional leadership persons as determined by the respective district council.

Districts shall appoint an executive committee composed of its officers, oversight leaders, and the district delegate to Conference Council. Councils typically shall organize annually in September. They shall be chaired by a member of their executive committee, who is preferably its representative to Conference Council.

Section 4. Terms of Service

Officers and congregational delegates to district councils shall serve three-year terms with a maximum of two consecutive terms or as specified by the district.

Section 5. Duties of District Councils

- 5.1 Serve as an administrative unit of Conference;
- 5.2 Communicate and interpret policies and actions of the Conference and Mennonite Church to their constituencies;
- 5.3 Recommend or appoint members to Conference agencies and boards as requested;
- 5.4 Implement actions of Conference Assembly;
- 5.5 Assist congregations or clusters in establishing and operating programs.

Section 6. Appeals

Appeals by individuals for counsel, assistance arbitration or resolution shall be made to their district councils which will determine further processing.

ARTICLE VI: CLUSTERS OF CONGREGATIONS

Section 1. Organization

Districts with more than five congregations may form clusters within the district, including clusters for persons serving in special ministries. Each cluster shall have an oversight leader. The responsibilities of the oversight leader on behalf of the district shall be designated by the district council. Clusters should normally not exceed five congregations.

Section 2. Purpose

Clusters shall provide for fellowship and nurture of pastors and leadership persons within the congregations forming the cluster. Except for the selection of the oversight leader, they will not perform administrative functions.

ARTICLE VII: LEADERSHIP MINISTRY

Section 1. Oversight Leader

1.1 Oversight leader designation

A district may designate the oversight leader with the term bishop, overseer, or district minister.

1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Oversight leaders shall be named for districts or clusters of congregations to provide counsel, oversight and pastoral resources to local congregations and their leaders. They shall facilitate communication and foster the building of positive relationships between pastor and congregation, assist congregations in developing vision and goals with periodic reviews, and assist in resolving conflicts in consultation with the Faith and Life Commission. Generally oversight leaders who also serve as pastors shall not carry oversight for the congregations of which they are pastor. Where there are exceptions, the Executive Conference Minister shall provide support and counsel, in consultation with the district chair. General responsibilities and relationships of bishops/overseers shall be in accordance with guidelines established by the Faith and Life Commission.

1.3 Qualifications

Oversight leaders shall be ordained persons with ministry experience and with personal schedules that allow regular visits and consultations with the pastors and congregations for whom they have oversight. Qualifications shall be in accordance with guidelines established by the Faith and Life Commission.

1.4 Selection and Appointment

The selection of an oversight leader shall be facilitated by the district chairperson and approved by the Faith and Life Commission in accordance with guidelines established by the Faith and Life Commission. District councils shall be responsible for the expenses of the oversight leader

1.5 Terms of Service

Oversight leaders shall serve for an initial three-year term. They shall be commissioned by Conference Assembly upon the initial appointment. They are eligible for reappointment with terms specified by the district or cluster in which they serve. Terms of service shall coincide with the Conference year. Reappointments shall fol-

low procedures in accordance with guidelines established by the Faith and Life Commission.

Section 2. Credentialed Ministerial Categories

Ministerial categories shall be consistent with categories as established by the Faith and Life Commission for ministerial credentialing.

2.1 Role and Responsibilities

Ministers licensed or ordained for pastoral/congregational ministry shall serve in such functions as preaching of the Word, outreach, nurture, pastoral care and administration. They shall be responsible to their oversight leader, to their district council and to the councils of congregations which have called them.

2.2 Qualifications

Ministers must be persons with a mature faith and an exemplary life. They shall have ability to teach and preach the Word, provide pastoral care and administrative leadership, and must possess a sense of the call of the Spirit.

2.3 Selection

Selection and assignment to congregational leadership shall follow guidelines established for ministerial credentialing by the Faith and Life Commission.

2.4 Special Ministries

Ministers licensed or ordained for special ministry shall serve in such functions as church planting, evangelism, pastoral care, chaplaincy, administrative leadership, and Christian education.. The role and responsibility of persons licensed or ordained for special ministries shall be determined by the nature of their assignment in accordance with guidelines on ministerial credentials established by the Faith and Life Commission.

Section 3. Deacons and Deaconesses

3.1 Role and Responsibilities

Deacons and deaconesses may be ordained or appointed for a designated term. Decision to ordain or appoint rests in the councils of the congregation subject to the pattern followed in the congregation's district. Deacons and deaconesses may assist in the teaching of the Word, the administration of the ordinances and other functions in the congregation, in discipline and in the mutual care of the congregation.

3.2 Qualifications

Those called to the deacon and deaconess office shall exhibit the qualities in I Timothy 3:8-13.

3.3 Selection

Congregations may appoint deacons or deaconesses as they have need in consultation with their cluster and district councils. Where credentials are desired, the oversight leader shall forward the request to the Faith and Life Commission according to the guidelines for ministerial credentialing established by the Faith and Life Commission.

Section 4. Other Leadership Ministries

Congregations, in counsel with their oversight leader, may designate other leadership roles within the congregation, such as elders and pastoral assistants in accordance with guidelines established by the Faith and Life Commission.

ARTICLE VIII: COMMITTEES

Section 1. Standing Committees

1.1 Conference Council Executive Committee

1.1.1 Composition/Appointment

The Conference Council Executive Committee shall consist of the four elected officers of Conference. The Moderator shall chair the committee and the secretary record minutes of its meetings. The Executive Conference Minister shall serve as staff member for the committee.

1.1.2 Duties

1. Develop agendas for Conference Council in advance of their quarterly meetings.
2. Develop draft agendas for delegate meetings for approval by Conference Council.
3. Make decisions, or complete assignments, delegated by Conference Council.
4. Act on urgent or emergency requests which may arise between Conference Council meetings.
2. Initiate a triennial performance review for the Executive Conference Minister, to be led by the Chair of the Faith and Life Commission.

1.1.3 Tenure

Members shall serve in keeping with their elected or appointed terms.

1.2 Gifts Discernment Committee

1.2.1 Composition/Appointment

The Gifts Discernment Committee shall consist of five members appointed by Conference Council. The chairperson shall be designated annually by Conference Council.

1.2.2 Duties

1. Through an appropriate process, discern persons within Conference with gifts, time and calling to serve as members of Conference commissions and committees as required by the Constitution and Bylaws along with other appointments for which Conference Council may request assistance.
2. Present a list of such nominees to the Conference Council for review and approval.
3. Recommend to the Conference Assembly, upon approval of Conference Council, persons to serve as officers of Conference.
4. Contribute to the appointment process for officers and members-at-large of VMM through having the chair of the Gift Discernment Committee to serve on the Gift Discernment Committee of VMM.

5. Monitor appointments for breadth of representation and to avoid conflicts of interest that might be created by having individuals serving in more than one capacity.
6. Maintain a master list of Conference appointments to Conference offices, commissions and committees, recording the length of term and termination date.

1.2.3 Tenure

Members shall serve five-year terms with one member being appointed annually. Consecutive terms may not be served.

1.3.1 Composition/Appointment

The Finance Committee shall consist of the conference treasurer, who chairs the committee, and at least two other persons appointed by Conference Council. The Executive Conference Minister shall attend all meetings of the committee as non-voting staff.

1.3.2 Duties

1. Prepare the Conference budget for Conference Council approval.
2. Regularly review investment decisions for Conference assets.
3. Interpret, coordinate, and promote Conference and church-wide giving within the constituency.
4. Assist in fundraising for Conference programs.
5. Collect, study, and publicize stewardship information.
6. Monitor trends in giving and expenditures within congregations and Conference and provide counsel concerning them.
7. Assist congregations in budget planning, including the support of pastors, oversight leaders, evangelists and other church leaders.
8. Develop and implement procedures to manage endowments in accordance with the agreements between donors and VMC.
9. Provide Conference Council with advice on financial practices and recommend financial policies to Conference Council.

1.3.3 Tenure

Members shall serve three-year terms with at least one member being elected or appointed annually. Members may serve a maximum of two full consecutive terms.

1.4 Constitution and Bylaws Committee

1.4.1 Composition/Appointment

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee shall consist of three persons appointed by Conference Council plus the assistant moderator serving as an ex officio member. The chairperson shall be designated annually by Conference Council.

1.4.2 Duties

1. Monitor the current effectiveness of the constitution and bylaws as a living document.
2. Suggest appropriate amendments for consideration by Conference Council.

1.4.3 Tenure

Members shall serve three year terms for a maximum of two full consecutive terms.

1.5 Historical Committee

1.5.1 Composition/Appointment

The Historical Committee shall consist of three persons appointed by Conference Council. One member shall be appointed each year. The archivist, appointed by Conference Council, shall be an ex-officio, nonvoting member of this committee. The chairperson shall be designated annually by Conference Council.

1.5.2 Duties

1. Provide oversight and guidance in establishing policies for Conference archives.
2. Provide personal counsel and assistance to the Conference archivist in the performance of those duties.
3. Encourage and promote the gathering and preservation of documents and artifacts of historical significance and value.
4. Promote programs and studies of historical interest within congregations and Conference in order to foster appreciation for their heritage.
5. Encourage the publication of articles and books of historical significance or interest.

1.5.3 Tenure

Members shall serve three-year terms with one member appointed annually. Members may be reappointed.

1.6 Peace Committee

1.6.1 Composition/Appointment

The Peace Committee is accountable to the Congregational Life Commission. It shall consist of a Chair or Co-Chairs appointed by Conference Council, plus a representative appointed by each district, a representative from the Faith and Life Commission, and a representative from Virginia Mennonite Missions. A liaison from EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding and from MCC's East Coast Board shall be invited as non-voting participants.

1.6.2 Duties

1. Coordinate activities, provide resources, and encourage the work of Congregational Peace Advocates.
2. Provide regular interaction with conference youth regarding peace issues.
3. Identify and promote peace-related Christian training and witnessing.
4. Communicate regularly throughout the Conference to cultivate an awareness of the biblical teachings about peace and embodied expressions of peacemaking.

1.6.3 Tenure

The Chair or Co-Chairs shall serve three year terms and may be reappointed once. District representatives and congregational advocates serve at the pleasure of their sending entity.

1.7 Retired Church Worker Aid and Enrichment Distribution Committee

1.7.1 Composition/Appointment

The Retired Church Worker Aid and Enrichment Distribution Committee shall consist of a person appointed by the Faith and Life Commission and a person appointed by the Congregational Life Commission.

1.7.2 Duties

1. Process applications for assistance from the Fund.
2. Distribute funds as available and in line with established criteria for distribution.

1.7.3 Tenure

Appointed members shall serve three-year staggered terms, and may be reappointed once.

Section 2. Ad hoc Committees

Conference Council, Commissions, and Conference Assembly may appoint ad hoc committees or task forces for specific assignments. Such committees shall report to the appointing body to whom they are accountable.

ARTICLE IX: COMMISSIONS

Section 1. Functions and Duties

The programs and activities of Conference shall be the responsibility of commissions as determined by the Conference Assembly. The functions and duties shall be outlined by Conference Council and approved by Conference Assembly. All commissions are accountable to Conference Assembly through Conference Council.

Section 2. Qualifications

Persons serving on commissions shall give evidence of Christian character and spiritual discernment. They shall have both interest and competence in the area of the commission's responsibility. Persons may not serve on more than one commission concurrently. Conference staff persons are not eligible to serve on commissions.

Section 3. Faith and Life Commission

3.1 Composition/Appointment

The commission shall be composed of all active oversight leaders of districts or clusters plus three members at large elected by Conference Assembly.

3.2 Organization

The commission shall provide for its own organization. It shall elect a chairperson, assistant chairperson and secretary. These officers will constitute its executive committee. The chairperson may be co-opted from outside the commission. The commission may establish subcommittees from among its members to fulfill its mandate.

3.3 Duties

1. Provide leadership for Conference in spiritual, doctrinal and faith and life issues.
2. Establish guidelines for ministerial leadership within the Conference.
3. Exercise responsibility for granting, maintaining, and discontinuing ministry credentials.

3.4 Terms of Office

Officers and members at large shall serve three-year terms for a maximum of two full consecutive terms. One officer and one member at large shall be elected each year on a rotating basis.

3.5 Meetings

The commission shall meet quarterly with the privilege of the chairperson to call additional meetings.

Section 4. Virginia Mennonite Missions

4.1 Composition/Appointment

This commission shall be composed of representation from Conference districts and up to six members at large selected and appointed by the board upon affirmation by Conference delegates.

4.2 Organization

The chairperson shall be elected or appointed by the board and may be a non-board member. Other officers and committees shall be elected or appointed as outlined in the bylaws of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions, Inc.

4.3 Duties

This commission shall provide missions leadership for the Conference.

4.4 Meetings

The commission shall meet quarterly with the privilege of calling additional meetings as determined by the officers of the commission.

Section 5. Congregational Life Commission

5.1 Composition/Appointment

The commission shall be composed of the chairperson and up to eight persons elected by the Conference Assembly through the Conference gifts discernment process. Consideration shall be given to the constituent groups served by the commission.

5.2 Organization

The chairperson shall be appointed by Conference Council from a slate developed through the Conference gifts discernment process, specifying the term of service. Chairpersons may serve a maximum of six consecutive years in this role, not including previous service as a regular commission member. The commission shall elect a secretary from its members. It shall have the privilege of appointing committees as required to fulfill its responsibilities.

5.3 Duties

1. Listen to and understand congregations and their needs, issues and solutions.
2. Connect congregations to Conference and appropriate organizations to congregations.
3. Resource congregations on issues related to worship, peace advocacy, phases of life and other topics as they are identified.

5.4 Terms of Office

Members of this commission shall serve three-year terms for a maximum of two full consecutive terms.

5.5 Meetings

The commission shall meet quarterly with the privilege of calling additional meetings as determined by the officers of the commission.

ARTICLE X: CONFERENCE MINISTRIES

Conference Assembly may establish, appoint, or officially recognize particular Conference Ministries, and charge them with the responsibility to fulfill specific ministries of Conference. Sharing a similar constituency with the Conference, such ministries shall be governed by their separate articles of incorporation, constitution and/or bylaws. All such governing provisions shall be subject to review and response by the Conference Council before they are enacted or amended by the particular Conference Ministry.

At least seventy-five (75) percent of the board of each Conference Ministry shall be members of Virginia Mennonite Conference, including those appointed by the Conference Council or one of the conference districts. The officers of respective Conference Ministries shall report to district chairpersons the names of persons from their districts who have been appointed to the ministry's boards. They may request Conference Council to assist in selecting additional board members.

Each Conference Ministry shall present a report annually to Conference Assembly, including a financial accounting. One staff or board leader shall represent the ministry as a voting delegate in the Conference Assembly. Ministry representatives are invited to meet with Conference Council in regular session as non-voting participants. In a spirit of giving and receiving counsel, boards of each Conference Ministry shall meet with Conference Council every three years for an In-Depth Review of the ministry's programs and relationships.

ARTICLE XI: CONFERENCE ENDORSED MINISTRIES

Conference Council may recognize specific programs or agencies, including organizations associated with Mennonite Church USA, as Conference Endorsed Ministries, thereby affirming the respective ministries as compatible with and supportive of the mission and purposes of Virginia Mennonite Conference. At least 60% of board members of Conference Endorsed Ministries shall be members of Anabaptist churches, as determined by Conference Council at the time of their recognition.

Ministries desiring such endorsement shall make application to the Conference Council through the conference coordinator. As part of the application process, such ministries will present a full statement of their objectives, organization and viability, with attention to how their ministry supports Conference purposes and mission. Upon satisfactory presentation, Conference Council may approve the application for a three-year period, after which the ministry may apply for subsequent three-year endorsements. The conference office shall publish annually a list of Conference Endorsed Ministries.

Interaction between Virginia Mennonite Conference and Conference Endorsed Ministries shall be in a spirit of mutual counsel. These ministries shall present a written re-

port annually to Conference Assembly, symbolizing their intention to continue in their endorsed relationship, and shall make annual financial contributions to the conference, as specified by the Conference Council. One staff or board leader shall represent the ministry as a voting delegate in the Conference Assembly.

ARTICLE XII: CONFERENCE YEAR

The Conference fiscal year and organizational year shall be September 1 through August 31.

ARTICLE XIII: ACTIVITIES IN QUESTION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Conference shall adopt written policies for maintaining tax exempt status and compliance with conflict of interest requirements necessary for a not for profit corporation.

ARTICLE XIV: AMENDMENTS

The Conference Assembly may adopt amendments to these bylaws, upon recommendation by the Conference Council, by a simple majority vote of the delegates present and voting at any duly called meeting of the Assembly, provided that delegates have received written notice of the substance of proposed changes at least thirty (30) days prior to the meeting when the amendments is to be considered.

Adopted March 26, 1994

Amended February 8, 1997, ACTION VMC 97:03 and ACTION VMC 97:04

Amended July 1998, ACTION VMC 98:09

Amended July 15, 1999, ACTION VMC 99:06

Amended July 19, 2002, ACTION VMC 02:15, ACTION VMC:02:16 and ACTION VMC:02:17

Amended June 14, 2003, ACTION VMC 03:10 and ACTION VMC 03:11

Amended July 9, 2004, ACTION VMC 04:05

Amended February 4, 2006 ACTION VMC 06:05

Amended July 25, 2008 ACTION VMC 08:05

Amended April 10, 2010 ACTION VMC 10:04

Amended February 5, 2011 ACTION VMC 11:02 and ACTION VMC 11:03

Amended July 30, 2011 ACTION VMC 11:09 and ACTION VMC 11:10

Amended July 27, 2012 ACTION VMC 12:03

Amended July 26, 2014 ACTION VMC 14:07

APPENDIX 3

Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love

Commitments for Mennonites in Times of Disagreement

"Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" ([Eph. 4:3](#)), as both individual members and the body of Christ, we pledge that we shall:

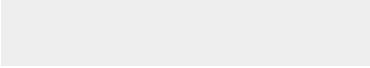
In Thought

Accept conflict	1. Acknowledge together that conflict is a normal part of our life in the church. Romans 14:1-8 , 10-12 , 17-19 15:1-7
Affirm hope	2. Affirm that as God walks with us in conflict we can work through to growth. Ephesians 4:15-16
Commit to prayer	3. Admit our needs and commit ourselves to pray for a mutually satisfactory solution (no prayers for my success or for the other to change but to find a joint way). James 5:16

In Action

Go to the other.	4. Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoid behind-the-back criticism.* Matthew 5:23-24 ; 18:15-20 .
In the spirit of humility...	5. Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Place the problem between us at neither doorstep and own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out the others'. Galatians 6:1-5
Be quick to listen	6. Listen carefully, summarize and check out what is heard before responding. Seek as much to understand as to be understood. James 1:19 ; Proverbs 18:13
Be slow to judge	7. Suspend judgments, avoid labeling, end name calling, discard threats, and act in a nondefensive, nonreactive way. Romans 2:1-4 ; Galatians 5:22-26

Be willing to negotiate	<p>8. Work through the disagreements constructively. Acts 15; Philippians 2:1-11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify issues, interests, and needs of both (rather than take positions). • Generate a variety of options for meeting both parties' needs (rather than defending one's own way). • Evaluate options by how they meet the needs and satisfy the interests of all sides (not one side's values). • Collaborate in working out a joint solution (so both sides gain, both grow and win). • Cooperate with the emerging agreement (accept the possible, not demand your ideal). • Reward each other for each step forward, toward agreement (celebrate mutuality)
In Love	
Be steadfast in love	<p>9. Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution; be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ; be steadfast in love. Colossians 3:12-15</p>
Be open to mediation	<p>10. Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use those with gifts and training in mediation in the larger church. Philippians 4:1-3</p>
Trust the community	<p>11. We will trust the community and if we cannot reach agreement or experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation or from the broader church. Acts 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one-to-one or small group disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate. • In congregational, conference district or denominational disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate or implementing constitutional decision-making processes, insuring that they are done in the spirit of these guidelines, and abiding by whatever decision is made.
Be the Body of Christ	<p>12. Believe in and rely on the solidarity of the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than re-</p>



sort to the courts of law. [I Corinthians 6:1-6](#)

*Go directly if you are European-North American; in other cultures disagreements are often addressed through a trusted go-between.

Adopted by the General Conference Mennonite Church Triennial Session and Mennonite Church General Assembly, Wichita, KS, July 1995.

Virginia Mennonite Conference
Ministerial Training Trust Fund (MTTF)
Grant Application

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Name of VMC Congregation Currently a Member of: _____

Pastor: _____ School/Agency: _____

MTTF Grant Requested (check box below):

- George R. & Margaret Brunk II
- Harry & Naomi Brunk
- Grant & Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus
- M. Lloyd & Sara Weaver
- Linden M. & Esther H. Wenger
- Calvary District
- Central District
- Eastern District (VA)
- Eastern Carolina District
- Harrisonburg District
- Northern District
- Potomac District
- Southern District
- T/C/K District
- Youth

Amount Requested: \$ _____ (Up to \$500/semester, full time, depending on availability of funds)

Enrollment: full time part time _____ credits non-credit/continuing education

fall semester spring semester fall & spring semester summer term

Ministry Inquiry

Academic Program: Seminary Undergraduate Other _____

Other financial aid previously received / applied for _____

Vocational goals _____

References (one must be a pastor):

Name: _____ Name: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Phone: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____ E-mail: _____

Signature of Applicant _____ Date: _____

Please return to (applications are reviewed at the first of each month):

Anieta McCracken, Administrative Services Manager

Virginia Mennonite Conference

901 Parkwood Dr

Harrisonburg VA 22802

Anieta.mccracken@virginiaconference.org

For office use only:

Date Received: _____ Initials: _____

Overseer's Review

I approve this application

I have questions about this applica-

tion

Overseer's Signature

_____ **Date:** _____

Action Taken by Committee: _____

Date: _____ **Signature:** _____

APPENDIX 5

Pastoral Training Form Basic Areas

(For those with less formal training)

(Overseers are to discuss this form with candidate, see that it is completed, then provide copies for the pastor and overseer.)

Candidate's Name _____ Date _____

Have you earned a high school diploma or a GED? Yes ____ No ____ Graduation Date _____

School granting your diploma or GED _____

List chronologically colleges/seminaries/universities/Bible institutes attended.

School attended	Address	Dates at- tended	Hours earned	Degree earned
		From To		
		From To		
		From To		

Listed below are basic areas of knowledge/ability for pastoring. Please indicate your felt level of competence in each area. Also, indicate the resources you have used during the past several years to further growth in each ministry area.

<u>Basic Areas</u>	<u>Feeling of Competence</u> (based on exper., reading, study)		<u>Resources used for Growth</u> (during past several years)			
	<i>Satis- factory</i>	<i>Growth Needed</i>	<i>Arti- cles</i>	<i>Boo- ks</i>	<i>Sem- inars</i>	<i>Other</i>
Biblical Studies						
O.T. and N.T. Introduction	___	___	___	___	___	___
Biblical Interpretation	___	___	___	___	___	___
Church History and Theology						
History of the Christian Church	___	___	___	___	___	___
Anabaptist History and Theology	___	___	___	___	___	___
Mennonite Faith and Polity (based on Mennonite Confession of Faith and Mennonite Polity statements)	___	___	___	___	___	___
Introduction to Theology	___	___	___	___	___	___

Skills of Ministry

Proclamation of the Word	___	___	___	___	___	___
Pastoral Care and Counseling	___	___	___	___	___	___
Evangelism (personal and congregational)	___	___	___	___	___	___
Leadership and Administration	___	___	___	___	___	___
Worship (planning and leading)	___	___	___	___	___	___

Spiritual Formation

The Pastor as Person (calling, gifts, identity, ethics, integrity)	___	___	___	___	___	___
The Pastor's Spiritual Life (spiritual disciplines, accountability, intercessory prayer)	___	___	___	___	___	___

Areas of study that would enrich your ministry. List in order of priority.

Academic Course Seminar Other (Specify)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pastoral Training Form

Basic Courses (For those with more formal training)

(Overseers are to discuss this form with candidate, see that it is completed, then provide copies for the pastor and overseer.)

Candidate's Name _____ Date _____

Have you earned a high school diploma or a GED? Yes ___ No ___ Graduation Date _____

School granting your diploma or GED _____

List chronologically colleges/seminaries/universities attended.

School attended	Address	Dates attended	Hours earned	Degree earned
		From To		
		From To		
		From To		

Listed below are basic courses for pastoral training. Please check whether you have taken these courses, the level of credit and the level of learning.

<u>Basic Courses</u>	<u>Have Taken</u>		<u>Level of Credit</u>		<u>Level of Learning</u>	
	No	Yes	College Graduate		Adequate Needed	More Needed
Biblical Studies						
O.T. and N.T. Introduction	___	___	___	___	___	___
Biblical Interpretation	___	___	___	___	___	___
Church History and Theology						
History of the Christian Church	___	___	___	___	___	___
Anabaptist History and Theology	___	___	___	___	___	___
Mennonite Faith and Polity (based on Mennonite Confession of Faith and Mennonite Polity statements)	___	___	___	___	___	___
Introduction to Theology	___	___	___	___	___	___
Skills of Ministry						
Proclamation of the Word	___	___	___	___	___	___
Pastoral Care and Counseling	___	___	___	___	___	___
Evangelism (personal and congregational)	___	___	___	___	___	___
Leadership and Administration	___	___	___	___	___	___
Worship (planning and leading)	___	___	___	___	___	___
Spiritual Formation						
The Pastor as Person (calling, gifts, identity, ethics, integrity)	___	___	___	___	___	___
The Pastor's Spiritual Life (spiritual disciplines, accountability, intercessory prayer)	___	___	___	___	___	___

Areas of study that would enrich your ministry. List in order of priority.

	Academic Course Seminar	Other (Specify)
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____

Past.TQ-FLC/7/06/00

Headship and Leadership Roles of Women

The question of how woman and men share social roles is a perennial one. Societies have always faced conflict on this matter, and perhaps always will. The pattern of role sharing in difference cultures has varied considerably, within certain obvious limits like childbearing. The biblical accounts reflect a patter in which men predominate in leadership role; however, this is not absolute. Some women were leaders. The creation story speaks of God's will for social order that respect the place of male and female. It is also clear that Jesus and the early church lifted the position of women above the level practiced by both the Jewish and pagan society of the time.

Does the Bible command a certain pattern of roles for men and women? Does the Bible teach as a universal truth the limitations of roles for men and women in certain areas? If so, what are the exact lines of distinction?

The New Testament Teaching Restricting Women

The most direct biblical statements bearing on our subject, but not necessarily the most crucial, are the passages that speak of restriction on the speaking and teaching role of women in the early church. These are I Corinthians 14:33-36 and I Timothy 2:8-15. Women are instructed not to speak, not to teach, and not to have authority over a man. A woman is to be submissive.

For several reason these commands should be understood as practical measures to deal with a local problem. Especially in the letters to Timothy there is evidence that a group of women was being misled by false teachers. Some Ephesian women appear to have been from wealthy backgrounds and were using their influence in harmful ways. Marriage and family life were despised. This would explain Paul's counsel that women are not to lead; they should attend to family duties. It is noteworthy that earlier in this same church (Ephesus) Priscilla and her husband taught Apollos the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:26). This is additional evidence that the prohibition against teaching is temporary. At Corinth also there were problems of disorderliness although the exact causes are not described. Disorderly conduct of women in the practice of pagan religion may have been carried over into the church.

Both passages are basically concerned that an atmosphere of order and respect be maintained. Only in such an atmosphere can the church be built up. The proper attitude is submissiveness. Submission, however, is not the same as silence or nonparticipation in leadership. The prophets in Corinth, for example, were also to learn submissiveness (I Corinthians 14:32). Every believer, as did even Jesus, should learn submission. For a woman to show a spirit of submission does not by definition require passive or non-public roles. In those early church to which Paul wrote, the social conditions were such that a Christian spirit for the women could best be expressed under these restrictions. Under those circumstances he made these specific commands. The general spirit of the passages is true for all time, but the particular form of the command must suit the circumstances.

Granted that women may normally speak and teach in church life, the questions can still be properly raised whether the reference to the creation account in I Timothy 2:13, 14 (and perhaps in I Corinthians 14:13) points to some fundamental and universal difference in male and female that would lead to role distinctions at some level. The teaching of I Corinthians 11:2-16 on headship is the key passage on this question. It too appeals to the creation account. Does the headship teaching support the idea that men alone should carry certain types of leadership responsibilities (such as pastoral ministry)? Is it a truth that stands over all cultural differences and that explains the predominance of men in leadership roles in biblical times?

Headship and Gender Roles

I Corinthians 11:2-16 is a complex passage and raises many issues and questions. The important aspects for the present discussion are given in summary fashions:

- The idea of headship has to do with function and not nature. Just as Christ is not of a different nature from God in the headship relationship, so woman is not different in nature from man. Superior-inferior dimensions are entirely absent.
- Headship refers broadly to the leadership function. It includes both the idea of source from which something comes and responsibility for something. This is the way the term is used in the Old Testament in relationships between persons. In the passage the thought moved from the creation event where man is the source of woman to the concept of a social relationship where responsibility and initiative rest with man. There is no reason to limit the teaching to the husband-wife relationship.
- If headship related to leadership, we can add that the concern behind the concept is order. This is the concept that unites all the passages that deal with the relationship of male and female. The term “submission” which is found in I Corinthians 14, I Timothy 2, and I Peter 3 has the literal meaning of “sub-ordered.” The biblical idea of submission is not concerned about control but about order. In Ephesians 5:22-23 the appeal to the wife for submission is grounded in the headship principle. Here is a clear indication that headship is related to the question of order in human affairs. “Order” has to do with the formal and informal patterns of responsibility and authority that are present in all stable human groupings and which guide the individual in his or her constructive role in the life of the group. That this practical concern for order is behind these passages is directly stated in I Corinthians 1:40 – “that all things should be done decently and in order.” Headship, then, is any function or role that is carried out in a community to nourish relationships between persons and help all persons to contribute their best to the life of the community.
- From the general teachings of the New Testament, we conclude that headship is carried out in a servant attitude. The emphasis is not on privilege and rights, but on responsibility and obligations to benefit the life of others. An emphasis on position or control is excluded. A “chain of command” viewpoint is inappropriate. The spirit of mutual submission must characterize all exercise of headship.
- Headship does not reserve all leadership functions for itself. That God is the head of Christ obviously does not disqualify or limit Christ who exercised public ministry in power and authority, and is now Lord of the church. So there is nothing within headship itself that would restrict a woman from carrying out leadership roles. It is

a mistake to put together the headship teaching and the “silence” passages and then to say that the Bible prohibits a woman from leadership in the church. This is in harmony with the earlier point that the silence passages are conditioned by local circumstances.

The findings to this point support women in the use of their gifts and calling in church leadership. But the question is still open whether the headship-of-man principle, as taught in I Corinthians 11, implies that roles, which involve authority and responsibility over men, are unsuited to women. This question, in turn, raises the further question of how firm and unchanging the application of the headship principle is. Here sincere difference of opinion exists.

Applying the Headship Concept

The teaching on the headship of man is not fully developed in the Bible and its implications are not worked out in detail. This makes difficult the task of weighing its meaning in our day. Paul was the only biblical writer who used this concept. It is brought into focus in response to problems of a practice nature, not to set forth the main thrust of the gospel message. While this does not make the principle of no significance, it does help in weighing its proper place.

Christians hold differing positions on the application of headship to the role of woman. The Bible itself can be understood in different ways by sincere interpreters. Two general tendencies can be identified. These approaches are used here for purposes of discussion and not to force everyone into categories.

Approach One

This approach takes with straightforward logic the implication of man as head of woman. The Bible presents an ideal picture of a society with men in leadership. There is an unchanging mandate in God’s order of creation. A woman should not exercise authority over a man. That would contradict the headship idea. For some this rules out the possibility of a woman in any church leadership role where men are being led. For most it rules out only the specific roles of principal leader such as pastor or overseer.

This approach is able to cite the New Testament practice of not including women in the circle of the twelve disciples. The list of qualifications for leaders in I Timothy 3 assumed that men are candidates (except perhaps for deaconesses in verse 11). The cultural practices of biblical times, supported by most church history, are taken as a picture of the ideal.

The appeal of this approach is its obvious logic and in its long tradition with which many feel comfortable. There are unresolved issues, however. No clear agreement exists as to where the exact line is to be drawn from exercising leadership over any man or is it concerned only that a woman in leadership always be under the “supervision” of a man? In the first case, women as elders and pastors would seem to be excluded, but in the second case a woman pastor working with a male overseer

er/bishop would be consistent with the principle. Moreover, this position tends to be inflexible out of a concern for consistency on the principle. This means that the obvious examples of women leaders in the Old Testament and the probable New Testament examples can be given little or no weight. These are seen as exceptions to the higher will of God. It also means that individual women (and men as well) may be pressed into or held back from particular roles regardless of their gifts or calling because a divinely willed social pattern is held to have priority over the individual.

Approach Two

The alternate approach acknowledges that the headship idea is essential in human experiences. The concern for order in human interaction is as relevant today as ever. This position accept the fact that gender does have relationship to role – who we are as female or male should be recognized and its implications for our life and vocation be respected. This position could hold that, as a general statement, the headship of man is the most correct universal description of life. This would have been particularly true for Paul in the culture of his day. However, there is reluctances to apply the male-female distinction in a fixed way.

Such a flexible interpretation finds its justification, first of all, in the examples of women leaders in the biblical accounts. Granted that the number is few, they are seen as significant in light of the patriarchal society pattern. These examples are not cast in a bad light by the biblical writers. This is understood to meant that, at the least, the headship principle is not a rigid, blanket command that dare never be violated. We ought to be open to women leaders even if their number is few. In addition, experience shows that the personalities of individual women and mean do not conform to fixed types. Not all men have the nature and gifts for leadership and some women do have them. The principle of headship is grounded in the nature of creation (see 1 Corinthians 11:8-9; 1 Timothy 2:13-14). Therefore, if our observation of the nature of things (for example, that some women have the gifts of leadership) is such that there are exceptions to a headship-of-man principle, then one is not violating the spirit of scripture by applying the principle with flexibility.

Finally, this position would caution against the assumption that the practice of the early church represents the highest ideal of women in leadership. The thrust of the gospel message was toward freeing of women for participating in church life (Jesus; Acts 2:17-18; Galatians 3:28). The restricting passages illustrate that the cultural patterns of the day made the full realization of the gospel vision for women impossible in that age.

Those who hold this position, or a variation of it, encourage the assignment of women to any level of church leadership on the basis of gift and calling and on condition that the orderliness of the church's life not be harmed. As with "approach one," so here certain issues exist. The careful definition of the sense and limits of the biblical statements may appear to be tampering with the authoritative word of God. There is a suspicion that the pressure for women in church leadership comes from secular ideals of women's liberation. And is it wise to go against the centuries of history

with men in leadership? If the first approach tends to subordinate the good of the individual to the structures of society, this approach could over emphasize the fulfillment of individual aspirations apart from the community good.

Conclusion

While the church of our time is divided on the subject of women in leadership, the serious difference is restricted to the question of women in certain key roles such as pastor and overseer. This study has affirmed the biblical ideal of using women extensively in public leadership roles. This creates a large area of common ground that provides opportunity for creative approaches to using women in church leadership.

The situation calls for a strategy of continuing study and constructive debate. It may be helpful if at least some parts of the church test the use of women in new levels of leadership. This kind of issue in the church is one that finds resolution only as we try new directions and then test the results in the light of the total spirit of scripture.

The following areas of counsel can give guidance to the continuing discussion and decision-making:

1. All viewpoints have the responsibility to set forth and support clearly and precisely what guidelines are being followed for the limitation or inclusion of women in leadership.
2. Attachment to present comfortable patterns or to past traditions should not discourage us from the hard work of defining a better future and making it happen.
3. Those calling for change must guard themselves from a blind egalitarian viewpoint that suppresses the significance of gender for social life. They should also cultivate the humility that acknowledges how little we know about whether and how we can overcome the traditional patriarchal (or even matriarchal) social patterns.
4. All of us should vigorously counter the abuses that have resulted from a one-sided teaching of submission for women. The low view of self in many women and the abusive dominance of some men are contrary to the spirit of the gospel.

Notes of Explanation

- 1) The best source for further study is Alan Padgett, "Wealthy Women at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in Social Context," Interpretation 41 (January 1987): 19-31. Commentaries can also be consulted. See 1 Timothy 5:13 and 2 Timothy 3:6 to illustrate the problem in this church.
- 2) It is widely recognized that Paul is dealing in 1 Corinthians 11:14 with problems of worship practice at Corinth about which he has heard. For the suggestion that pagan practices are influencing the behavior of the women see Catherine C. Kroeger, "Pandemonium and Silence at Corinth," Reformed Journal 28 (June 1978): 11-15. Our interpretation of the Pauline retraction as a temporary response to the situation is not dependent on Kroeger's particular explanation of the cause for the disorder.

- 3) The presence of the word “order” is not just an accident of English translation. The original language uses the same root word from which “submission” is formed. As noted in the text, “submission” is literally “subordination” in the Greek. One can easily see the word “order” in subordination.

Virginia Mennonite Conference Ad Hoc Committee on Headship

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*Revised and Approved by CFL
April 28, 1988*

*Reviewed and Reaffirmed by the Faith and Life Commission
January 23, 1998*

**Guidelines for District and Congregational Leaders in
Calling Women to Leadership Assignments
in Virginia Mennonite Conference**

I. Introduction

The role for women in leadership and ministry is currently an issue in the life and witness of the church. For centuries, women served the church in many ways and questions about credentials for women in leadership were not raised. Today, with a new awareness of women's gifts, there is need to clarify and articulate the role definitions, responding appropriately to the issue as a faithful church.

In setting forth these guidelines we are not making judgments about past practice. Rather, we desire to broaden our perspective on the nature of leadership in the church. The subject of roles for women in ministry is not a typical liberal/conservative issue. Differing views can be supported by appeal to Scripture. The temptation is to solidify two differing viewpoints, resulting in disunity and polarization.

This document does not intend to articulate a statement that removes the need for further study and prayer. Rather, its appeal is for a careful process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that recognizes and affirms the worth of all persons, women and men. We urge everyone to maintain a spirit of prayer and discernment in using these guidelines, seeking to provide helpful understandings and viable procedures for Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations.

II. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist districts and congregations in deciding how to best integrate women in ministry. To provide a context for decision-making on the issue, certain commitments of purpose need to be affirmed:

1. We affirm our commitment to biblical faithfulness rather than choosing our answers from historical practice or the mood of contemporary society.
2. We recognize variation in understandings of the biblical material but will strive to maintain a system of interpretation that is consistent with our Anabaptist-Mennonite hermeneutic.
3. We seek spiritual direction in decision-making rather than a democratic process that puts men and women in competition.
4. We pray for a spirit of humility and a concern for unity in processing questions on the issue.
5. We acknowledge the spiritual gifts and call of both women and men in Christ's body.

III. Perspectives

Several areas of understanding should be recognized as essential in all considerations. These basic concepts must be continually tested for their consistency with New Testament teachings. We consider their recognition essential to a proper resolution of the issues of women in ministry.

1. **Headship:** Scriptural passages that speak to the style of leadership and flow of authority between men and women must be interpreted in relation to God's original plan for the sexes and the plan of redemption. A biblical view of authority must avoid a rigid order of headship that may be shaped by cultural expectations. A hierarchical view of authority needs to be tempered by the New Testament teaching of mutual standing in Christ.
2. **Gifting:** A scriptural stance for ministry in the Body of Christ must be clarified in order to allow the gifting and call of the Holy Spirit to be operative. Many passages speak concerning every member's participation in the church, Christ's body. The Bible also calls for order in the body and expects gifts to be exercised with proper accountability.
3. **Credentialing:** An important aspect for women in ministry relates to the granting of ministerial credentials. When the gifts of women are affirmed for roles normally filled by men, decisions should not be made singly based on the fact that a woman will have authority over men. Given the New Testament concept of corporate authority and shared leadership, there should be few situations where women's leadership gifts cannot be confirmed.

IV. Provisions for Service

The church as the priesthood of all believers must mobilize all persons for effective ministry. Leadership roles should be seen in functional concepts rather than positions of power. In order to properly engage all persons with personal integrity in service the following provisions are recognized:

1. The locus of responsibility for gift discernment rests with the local congregation. Both men and women equally need the integrity of a process that affirms God's call for them through the church.
2. The faithful church is called to provide a wide range of spiritual ministries. The task of the church will best be accomplished when persons serve in complementary rather than competitive relationships. The goal of women in ministry should supersede the quest for equality with men in leadership.
3. Evangelism is the primary task of all persons and demands freedom for all to serve. When the church moves forward in mission, the urgency of the situation leaves little time to discuss sexual preference in witness and proclamation.
4. The history of the Mennonite church reveals that women have had varied expressions for their gifts in ministry. At the same time, lead roles in the church have been primarily assigned to men. The church should realize that the issue of women in ministry is not a matter of faith essentials but consistency in practice. There will be occasions where the call of God as discerned by the local congregation will require making ministerial credentials available to women.

V. Procedures for Processing

In the Virginia Mennonite Conference, the granting of ministerial credential is the responsibility of the Faith and Life Commission upon the recommendations of its Personnel Committee. These procedures are described in Section D, “Procedures for Granting Credentials,” *The Leadership Handbook for Districts and Congregations* (pages 39-41).

When processing reveals diversity of attitudes and conviction regarding granting of ministerial credentials to women, district councils may process the request in keeping with their own set of guidelines.

VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE
FAITH AND LIFE COMMISSION

*Guidelines for the use of divorced and/or
Remarried persons in church leadership*

The following guidelines apply to leadership persons experiencing divorce, divorce and re-marriage, or marriage to a divorced person.

These guidelines recognize that some divorced and remarried persons have matured into Christian leaders. The purpose of this statement is to identify (1) steps that should be taken to determine whether particular divorced and remarried persons qualify for church leadership (points 1 – 3) and (2) steps that should take place if a leadership person divorces, remarries or marries a divorced person (point 5).

1. The congregation in which the prospective leader is a member and the overseer should discern the validity of the person's call to ministry and the giftedness of the person for leadership. Do those who know the person best recognize God's call and gifting for ministry? Does the person model the faith and inspire others toward faith? If the answers to these questions are positive, the process would move to step two.
2. An appropriate group designed within the district by the overseer and/or district council should meet with the person(s) to determine whether in their judgment the person or couple qualifies for a ministry role and whether past involvements have been adequately resolved. Included with the group should be the overseer and a trained marriage counselor. Areas for discernment should include:
 - What is their call to ministry and understanding of ministry?
 - What is their understanding of the biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage?
 - What is their understanding of their past marriage failure?
 - What is their experience of forgiveness of the former spouse, of themselves, and from God?
 - Have the family and congregational hurts related to the divorce or remarriage been healed to the extent possible?
 - Do they exhibit readiness for ministry or is there need for additional experience or training?
3. If there is clear support toward ministry at step two, the regular procedures should be followed according to conference polity. These include processing by the district council, the doctrinal examination and validation by the Faith and Life Commission. Through the various steps of the entire process, the overseer(s) should be deeply involved as counselor and advocate. The overseer shall help the couple understand the purpose and activity of each step and should help the various committees understand the couple.

4. Credentialed leaders who consider or plan divorce, remarriage after divorce, or marriage to a divorced person should seek advice and counsel from appropriate persons or groups, e.g., Bishop/Overseer, Personnel Committee of FLC, Congregational Elders, or Conference Minister. This advice and counsel should be sought very early in the developments involving marital relationships.
5. If a credentialed leader anticipates divorce from his or her spouse, the leader will be given a leave of absence from leadership roles for three to six months. The purpose of such a leave of absence is to help free the congregation/agency/district to discern its future leadership and to allow the credentialed leader "space" to consider the ramifications and details of the pending divorce.
6. If a credentialed leader becomes involved in divorce, remarriage after a divorce, or marriage to a divorced person, the status of his or her ministerial credentials will be determined in consultation with the overseer and the Faith and Life Commission.

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Mandate and Process.

The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference created a task force with the mandate “to review Virginia Mennonite Conference processes in dealing with differences of theology and practice, and bring a report to Conference Council...”¹ The task force was comprised of Pearl Hoover, chairperson, Yvonne Bailey, Glendon Blosser, Monica Hochstedler, Ray Hurst, Clyde Kratz, and Owen Burkholder (staff).

The task force wrestled for a number of meetings on the specific name of our group. We chose the “Embracing Faithfulness” portion as an affirmation of our deep desire for the people of God to acknowledge and pursue faithfulness in our life together. “Discerning our differences” was selected to recognize that our life together as a people of God is a deliberate process of reflecting on what differences exist and the source of those differences. The acknowledgement of differences sets the stage for reviewing those differences in relationship to biblical and confessional materials. When we are aware of our human experiences and the breadth of our beliefs, we must then discern how we relate to each other when we understand each other well.

The task force engaged in a review of four specific cases that had the appearance of Virginia Mennonite Conference constituency engaged in social change that would affect their belief and practice. The four cases were selected because of the perception that leaders of Virginia Conference engaged in significant leadership activities that involved discernment, group processing, theological clarification and informed the practice of ministry in a new way. The following cases were selected: divorce/remarriage, women in pastoral leadership, church membership and participation in the military, and the process of the removal of Broad Street Mennonite Church.

In our work as a task force, we wrestled at length and continually over how to label the process related to the removal of Broad Street. On the one hand, we were tempted to identify “homosexual practice” as the key theme of social change. However, there was no evidence for a request to change the theological rationale associated with sexual ethics of being a follower of Jesus, nor was there any evidence of a request for a specific change in ministry practice. On the other hand, we were not prepared to investigate the breadth of the theme “church discipline” as a means of controlling social change in Virginia Conference. Therefore, even in the midst of our uneasiness of labeling the fourth issue “Broad Street,” we recognize that this congregation is the theme of the case study.

In order to learn about these four cases, members of the task force reviewed minutes of Faith and Life Council, minutes of Virginia Conference Assembly, and other documentation that provided insight into understanding the process of discernment that occurred. On some occasions, interviews were conducted with individuals that were involved in the dis-

¹ Conference Council minutes of Virginia Mennonite Conference, January 24-25, 2003.

cernment process. Finally, our task force benefited from the collective memory of Glendon Blosser and Owen Burkholder.

Task force members were assigned specific cases to research. The primary questions applied to each case study are:

- Where did the process being?
- Who was involved?
- Who were the main actors?
- What gave them the right to act?
- What was the theological question involved in this issue?
- What was the level of anxiety in Virginia Conference?
- Where were the parallel issues in the broader Mennonite Church?
- How long did the process take?

These questions gave many opportunities to engage vigorously the merits and practice of discernment in Virginia Mennonite Conference.

We want to acknowledge that for each case study we arbitrarily set the boundaries to limit the scope of our investigation. Therefore, our investigation of information for each case study varies in the scope of gathered information. For example, we began looking at divorce and remarriage with the earliest account of Mennonites in Virginia wrestling with this issue. When we came to the membership and military issue, we arbitrarily chose the Warwick District's invitational adventure to explore social change on this matter. In this case, we did not review each time Virginia Mennonite Conference sought to discern issues associated with our peace theology.

On the Broad Street case, we reviewed Virginia Conference's encounter with Broad Street in the most recent episode versus reviewing all Broad Street's attempts at social change as a member of Virginia Conference. The later research would have required consideration of Broad Street's adventure in race relationships, their urging consideration of women in ministry, the theological commitment and practice of the "priesthood of all believers" which removes the importance of ordination of a primary pastor, their theological commitments about Christology that lead to a term of probation in the Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference, and other social adventures they have engaged in over the course of their relationship with Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Case Studies.

Divorce and Remarriage.

The case study dealing with Divorce and Remarriage is the broadest historical scope. As early as 1867, Mennonites in Virginia held a conversation about divorce and remarriage. The clergy had gathered for a conference and the matter emerged from a visiting bishop. In the conversation, it became apparent that the ministers of Virginia were at ease with remarriage when the divorce was caused by marital unfaithfulness. When the position espoused by the Virginia Mennonite clergy reached other portions of the church, there was opposition to their understanding. At the next meeting of conference in April 1868, the clergy of Virginia Mennonites discussed the broader church response to their position and

decided not to vote on the matter. Granting permission for divorce and remarriage when infidelity was present remained their ministry position until the turn of the century.

The teaching position of the church on marriage has been one man and one woman for life. The primary pastoral issue was associated church membership for persons who experienced a failure of marriage and the subsequent divorce and remarriage. Persons who experienced divorce and remarriage could not be members of local congregations in the leadership discernment that occurred in 1914, 1935, 1941, 1950, and 1961.

Virginia Conference leaders dealt with the issue in 1961 by developing a statement “Approaches for dealing advisedly on the part of the church with persons involved in divorce and remarriage.” This statement was to be “a statement of guiding principles...” In the 1970’s, two conferences dealt with this issue. A shift in process is noted in the 1974 conference session. “Each case should be approached with love and patience... we feel that some liberty must be given and confidence must be placed in each district administration to deal wisely with each case which comes for consideration. In difficult situations district leaders are encouraged to seek counsel of the Conference Council on Faith and Life...”

By the 1980’s, the issue of divorce and remarriage was now emerging in relationship to dealing with church leaders who had a failed marriage and were being remarried. On this occasion, there is a reaffirmation of the teaching position of the church on marriage and a process is laid out for working with persons where “restoration of a given marriage is no longer an option.” The tone of their concern is seen in the following statement:

We recognize that not all scholars, pastors, and congregations are at the same place in their understanding of how the Bible would require the Church to deal with individuals involved in the various issues covered by this paper. We urge that all continue in prayer, study, and searching to find the mind of the Spirit in these matters; that we continue to engage one another in dialogue in the spirit of brotherly concern; and that we respect the integrity of our brothers and sisters in any congregation whose decision and action may be different than our own, within the understanding of Virginia Conference procedures.

The following observations are offered from the review of historical material.

1. Congregational leaders who were facing the situation in their congregations raised the issue of divorce and remarriage persistently. In the early stages of this discussion, the persons experiencing divorce and remarriage were coming into the church as new believers. In this period, the question hinged on whether the divorces/remarriages were before conversion. More recently, the issue is raised because of members of the congregation who are experiencing divorce and remarriage. The most recent discussions on divorce and remarriage are seeking to clarify the leadership role a person can hold having experienced marital failure and remarriage.
2. There was interaction with leaders of other conferences throughout the denomination to see how the issue was being addressed elsewhere in the church. There were significant differences between conferences at some points along the way.

3. The biblical ideal is cited in every study. Interpretations of “exception clauses” and the balancing of restriction and freedom principles in the scriptures directly affected pastoral applications.
4. Beginning in 1974, clergy and lay persons review the church position on divorce and remarriage. The questions and study processes related to divorce/remarriage were considered by the delegate body (credentialed leaders only) until 1974. In a “special session” of conference, a revised constitution was adopted that provided for congregational delegates that could include lay persons. The revised constitution also established a “Council on Faith & Life” which was composed of the bishops/overseers. This same session of conference adopted some summary statements on divorce/remarriage that included this counsel: “In difficult situations district leaders are encouraged to seek the counsel of the Conference Council on Faith and Life.”
5. Beginning in 1961, the approved documents are called, “approaches,” or, “guidelines,” with the recognition that there would be differences of application between districts. There is the call in 1983, to “respect the integrity of our brothers and sisters in any congregation whose decision and action may be different than our own, within the understanding of Virginia Conference procedures.”
6. The 1983 document (current) gives the primary responsibility for process to congregations with assistance from the overseer.

Women in Pastoral Leadership.

A woman in pastoral leadership has historical precedence in Virginia Conference. In 1861, a Virginia Mennonite Conference bishop asked “the conference to choose by voice vote women to be ordained as deaconesses to help him in the work of the church.” Deaconesses were never given “official voice” in the decision-making aspects of the conference or congregations. Women as assembly delegates were first recognized in Virginia in 1974 following the revision of the constitution that provided for congregational delegates. Virginia Mennonite Conference credentialed its first woman in 1986 with over forty-five women credentialed in VMC since then.

The primary impetus for social change on women in pastoral leadership occurs with denominational discernment. In 1971, at the first General Assembly of the Mennonite Church, conference leaders were invited “to submit issues needing attention.” The role of women was high on the resulting list. The 1973 Assembly considered a document titled, “Women in the Church.” This was circulated for further study and a 1975 report indicated two approaches were to be found throughout the church on this issue. “Leadership and Authority in the Church” was the next study with a summary document accepted in 1981. Over the next number of years conferences in Illinois ordained a woman (1973), Southwest adopted guidelines to ordain a woman (1978) and Lancaster Conference (1979) adopted a statement that provided guidance to commission “women for the sharing of their gifts in meeting the needs of the congregations and the community under the supervision of local leadership.”

Virginia Mennonite Conference’s process on women in pastoral leadership began with the Council of Faith and Life (CFL). At a leadership retreat in 1980, CFL acknowledged, “that in recent years we have been slow to recognize the gifts of our sisters and to make a place in the program of the church for these gifts to be exercised.” In 1983, CFL determined that it

should make a study of the ordination of women “before there was a specific request.” By May, there was a request from a congregation for such a study. The subsequent studies of the biblical text and a growing intensity around the issue led to a CFL statement in May 1984 that said, “The service of women in the ministry as pastors is a step which we have been considering carefully. With our present understandings, we will consider requests for the licensing or ordination of women for diaconate ministries. In light of the continuing theological discussions we feel that we cannot at this time consider requests for the licensing or ordination of women to the office of pastor.” This followed a conference on women in leadership held in the Harrisonburg area that created some controversy.

The role of women in the family and in leadership becomes the subject of conference discernment. In conference assembly in 1984 a study document was presented on the theme “Clarifying Female and Male Roles in the Christian Family.” The discussion indicated that work needed to be done on the topic of the role of women in leadership. In January 1985, the CFL made a note of reaction to a statement from Eastern Mennonite Seminary that affirmed women in ministry. As the discernment of this issue continued to emerge, congregational representatives urged CFL officers to keep the discussion open in conference. The role of CFL was beginning to be redefined as enablers rather than decision makers.

A “Dialogue Day” discussion brought representatives from around the conference to share around the question of “Women as Pastors.” Based on reports of that day, the CFL proposed “*Guidelines for District and Congregational Leaders in Processing Women for Assignment in Ministry.*” This document, approved in January 1986, offered a review of headship, gifting, and credentialing as critical components of discernment. A key sentence indicates the careful opening provided: “There may be occasions where the call of God as discerned by the local congregation would best be followed by making credentials available for women in ministry.” This is followed by a non-gender-specific review of procedures to be followed for all credentialing. The specific approving action reads, “That we agree to release the revised statement, as a CFL guideline paper for the use of our districts.” “The action was passed with one dissenting vote.”

At the same time, preparation was being made for a study on “headship” that was presented at the 1986 summer assembly. This process was continued through a study committee, which developed a document called “*Headship and the Leadership Role of Women.*” The ad hoc committee’s final report to conference acknowledged that they had not come to agreement; therefore, the paper would have two approaches. They recommended that the document “be viewed as a tool for districts and congregations.” Each district was expected to use the guidelines to establish its final resolve on the question. In October 1986, the Council on Faith and Life took action to approve the recommendation of the personnel committee for the licensing of a woman as part of a pastoral team. In January 1988 there was a clarifying question raised in the CFL. “Do the Headship Study and our other guidelines indicate our openness to the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry? Answer: Yes. This stance needs to be communicated to our churches.”

The following observations are offered from the review of historical material.

1. The issue of women in pastoral leadership had its first consideration at the denominational level before Virginia conference worked at its own resolution.
2. Both the denomination and conference recognized that the issue of headship had a polarized perspective. Both headship and mutuality were respected without labeling each other. Bishops/overseers brought the issue to CFL for counsel and discernment. No attempt has been made to identify a third point of view.
3. In the study process, it was stated that the decision-making process was one of study and discernment to seek spiritual direction rather than a democratic process that would put men and women in competition.
4. In the final resolution there was no formal action by the delegate assembly that decided which belief was to be embraced. The role of the Council on Faith and Life was to establish guidelines recognizing mutuality in credentialing for ministry. Later CFL adopted the denominational polity statement on leadership.
5. In Virginia Conference the approval process for granting credentials by Faith and Life Commission recognized a variation of convictions in districts and congregations. Overseers have been allowed to abstain in voting and a uniform voice on the issue has not been required.

Membership and Military.

Mennonites have a long tradition of being a nonresistant peace church when faced with military service. Conscientious objection to participation in military service was the expectation for male members of Virginia Mennonite Conference during World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, and the Vietnam War. Local conferences and the broader Mennonite Church worked diligently with government leaders to secure alternative forms of service such as Civil Public Service, I-W, and VS Programs. Persons who participated in military service forfeited their membership in Mennonite congregations.

The most significant rethinking of membership and military service occurs in Virginia Mennonite Conference. In 1990, the Norfolk and Warwick District Councils began work on a document “Criteria for Membership in Tidewater Area Mennonite Churches.” (See Appendix II for outline of the study document.) The document provided a rationale for the necessity of reviewing peace theology and practice based upon the experience of engaging in ministry in a militarized environment. The study document provided a historic overview of Anabaptist and Early Church perspectives on military service. There was a review of biblical perspectives that spanned the Old Testament and New Testament. The Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963) was reviewed and cited as an important point of reference. The document provided a detailed explanation of the challenges currently being faced in the 16 congregations in the Tidewater area. The conclusion of the document includes a statement providing a framework for emerging understandings.

Norfolk and Warwick District Councils sought broader counsel in their work. They invited 23 persons in various leadership roles across the Mennonite Church to contribute additional counsel. Following some revisions and the District approval of a “working document,” their work was submitted to VMC Council on Faith and Life as the “Tidewater Document” for “their information and further counsel.” CFL brought the document to the delegate assembly in July 1991. The delegates raised affirmations and concerns.

FLC continued to work on this issue in a variety of ways. In 1993 the Faith and Life Commission (FLC – successor to Council on Faith and Life) arranged for a “Study Guide on Membership Eligibility for Military People” to be sent to congregations. The results of these studies were compiled by the FLC and consensus developed “that further discussion and discernment was essential.” After further delegate discussion and congregational responses, the FLC prepared a revision of the concluding paragraphs of the “Tidewater Document.”

The animation of the subsequent delegate discussion led to a call for a special delegate session to address this issue. In preparation for that session, the FLC noted the need to broaden the conversation beyond the Tidewater experiences. It moved to affirm Article 22 “Peace, Justice and Nonresistance” from the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) “as a normative statement of our peace theology and endorse the accompanying commentary.” It went on to outline a further process of discernment around the “appropriate pastoral care and nurture of military personnel who God is drawing toward membership in our congregations...”

An FLC document, “Church Membership and Military Personnel” was proposed with a pastoral letter attached suggesting that the FLC “take initiative with congregational leaders to evaluate growth of convictions on peace...and member’s progress toward separation from military service...and report back ...in the fall of 1998.” On January 20, 1996, the delegate body adopted “Church Membership and Military Personnel in Congregations of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.” Following the 1998 review, it was reaffirmed in July 1999.

Perspectives from the broader church were received in two venues. In 1995, a consultation in the Tidewater area included representatives from Mennonite Central Committee, the Faith & Life Commission, and persons with military connections. In 1996, the General Boards of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church extended their November meeting to include a consultation on this topic.

The document includes a reaffirmation of the “historic and biblically based convictions on peace” and concludes, “that loyalty to the military oath is incompatible with loyalty to one’s covenant as a disciple of Jesus Christ.” The second paragraph notes the attitude toward difference on this matter. “We further recognize that the congregations of Virginia Mennonite Conference use a variety of ministry styles to lead new believers out of military service. While Virginia Mennonite Conference does not endorse the practice of some congregations in extending the covenant of membership to persons currently under the military oath, the Conference wishes to remain in full relationship with these congregations and to continue in mutually respectful dialogue.”

In 1999, there was a review of the direction that had been set by the 1996 documents. That progress report called for congregations to “become magnetic compassionate faith communities...” It called on pastors to “energetically and faithfully teach the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of the Biblical teaching on nonviolence, peace, and non-participation in the

military...” It also asked that in 2001 the FLC again take the initiative “to review progress on implementation of our 1996 statement, evaluating discipling processes, growth in congregational convictions on peace, and members’ progress toward separation from military service.”

Observations:

1. The congregations of Norfolk and Warwick Districts raised this issue out of the context of their mission in their communities.
2. The request for counsel went to VMC and to the broader church since there was concern that this may point toward a “historic shift” in peace teaching.
3. The VMC discernment process, while guided by the FLC, included congregations, districts, and delegate assemblies.
4. The resulting statement reiterated affirmation for a historic stance, acknowledged differences in pastoral applications, called for commitment to full relationship in spite of this difference, and established regular review procedures.
5. The reporting that followed included stories of change in the lives of persons.
6. The interchange with MCC led to the development of an “Alternatives Committee” out of Warwick District to provide teaching and options for those tempted by vocations in the military.
7. The study document was only affirmed as a study document and not as a policy statement.
8. While VMC was working on the statement of Military and Membership, simultaneously VMC was working on a position statement “Our Commitment Against Violence” which dealt with domestic expression of violence.
9. The presence of intentional leadership was demonstrated in the clarity of documents, the attention to, and participation in group process, and the engagement of conversation with others on the issue with integrity.
10. There was no outside pressure to solve this opportunity immediately.
11. Opposition concerns voiced at the delegate session were tabled without a vote.

Removal of Broad Street.

Students at Eastern Mennonite College founded Broad Street Mennonite Church as a ministry to the black community of Harrisonburg in 1935. Since its founding, Broad Street has been a source of periodic tension for Virginia Mennonite Conference. One of the more difficult issues has been Broad Street’s theological commitment to the “priesthood of all believers” concept with the application being no designated lead pastor with ministerial credentials. At the end of the 1980’s and early 1990’s a group of members left the congregation and created Immanuel Mennonite Church. Additionally, Broad Street promoted a Christological view that contributed to a period of probation in the Harrisonburg District. This background sets the context for leaders of Virginia Conference to respond to the awareness of the Broad Street meetinghouse being used for a planned covenantal ceremony of same gender persons.

In January 2002, a pastor from another District reported to the conference minister the awareness that Broad Street was in the process of renting their facility for a same gender covenantal celebration. As the District overseer began inquiring about this event, other

leaders in VMC registered concern. In February, Conference Council asked Harrisonburg District to process the situation with Broad Street and to follow the VMC by-laws. The overseer of Harrisonburg District engaged in conversation with the Harrisonburg District and Broad Street representatives. The District made two requests to Broad Street: a) not to rent their facility for this purpose; b) to state their position regarding MC USA guidelines on membership. Representatives from Broad Street gave witness to their intentions and concerns during a meeting with representatives from Harrisonburg District. The Harrisonburg District continued to express concern about Broad Street's commitment to the same gender ceremony.

In May 2002, Conference Council met for the first time since joining MC USA. In this meeting, two congregations requested transfer out of Virginia Conference. Harrisonburg District and FLC both reported on their activities and concerns associated with Broad Street. Conference Council affirmed the work of Harrisonburg District. Districts representatives also registered deep concern about the activities at Broad Street.

Harrisonburg District provided Broad Street with the opportunity to remain in VMC as long as they comply with the teaching position of MC USA on matters of sexual practice. Broad Street indicated that compliance would mean a violation of their sense of call to inclusivity. Broad Street's counter offer to suspend membership from VMC for six months was part of their proposal, which would include dialogue and discernment.

Learning of the outcome of the Harrisonburg District and Broad Street dialogue, FLC recommended to Conference Council the immediate suspension of Broad Street. Additionally, a recommendation was made to form a discernment group with a facilitator for further conversation. In July, the Conference Council suspended Broad Street and reported their action to the delegate body at Virginia Conference Assembly.

In October 2002, a discernment group was convened with a denominational minister functioning as the facilitator. The discernment group was comprised of 9 people: 3 Harrisonburg District representatives, 3 representative from Virginia Conference and 3 representatives from Broad Street. This group met once and decided no further meeting was necessary. Broad Street had indicated a desire to continue in an advocacy role of accepting practicing homosexuals into their congregation. The consensus of the group was that further dialogue would not be helpful nor change positions. Additionally, the group urged a conference wide process to review Virginia Mennonite Conference processes dealing with differences of theology and practice. In light of the commitment by Broad Street to their position, the delegate body voted to dismiss Broad Street from VMC at its February 2003 delegate session.

The practice of removing congregations from Virginia Conference as a means of discipline is a very new phenomenon. Historically, a bishop representing a district would discipline a minister for inappropriate behavior or for promoting a teaching that was inconsistent with the beliefs of the conference. Members of a congregation were disciplined for their failure to uphold the Rules and Disciplines of a Conference. In more recent times, great effort has been made to extend grace and forgiveness to persons who have failed to uphold the teach-

ing position of the church through pastoral care and counseling. This approach was seen as more desirable than public announcements of discipline and other means of social ostracism. The practice of removing congregations from a conference has emerged as Mennonite Church USA has sought to deal with sexual ethics, specifically homosexual practice. Broad Street is the congregation that challenged Virginia Mennonite Conference's resolve to follow the membership guidelines of Mennonite Church USA.

Observations.

1. The process of leadership activity occurs over one year. Broad Street confirmed the same sex ceremony on February 27 2002, 4 months later Harrisonburg District recommends to FLC that Broad Street be removed, July 2002 Conference Council suspends Broad Street's membership and February 2003 delegates to Virginia Conference Assembly vote to remove Broad Street from membership.
2. The conference was in a state of anxiety regarding the joining of MC USA and the effect of a congregation testing the guidelines at this time heightened the tension.
3. Harrisonburg District felt pressure by outside pastors/districts leaders to "do something" before the whole conference "comes apart at the seams." It seemed as if people outside the district drove the agenda.
4. Despite Broad Street's and Harrisonburg District's call for "dialogue," the energy for such dialogue never really materialized.
5. The clergy who had the initial concern about Broad Street was not brought into a conversation with representatives of Broad Street. The offended party and the offender (Broad Street) have not met.
6. The lack of credentialed leadership at Broad Street made it difficult to know whom to deal with in terms of giving and receiving counsel. This variable contributed to the inability to work with mutual trust in and through the crisis.
7. The lay leaders of Broad Street began to demonstrate greater connection to VMC through the process.
8. This process of Broad Street's removal from Virginia Conference led to a decision to review our growing understandings of faithfulness and diversity in VMC.

Analysis of Data.

Embracing faithfulness, discerning our differences

When we view our primary existence as members of the body of Christ seeking to inform the world of an opportunity to be part of God's kingdom, social change will occur among us. It is because of our intersection with the world on Christ's behalf that embracing faithfulness and discerning differences is a necessary role of the Church.

Embracing faithfulness is a commitment to be a follower of Christ that is discovering God's movement through biblical study. The Bible informs our life, witness, and mission in the world. One of the holy tasks of the gathered community is the discernment of biblical truth applied to contemporary challenges that contribute to our being faithful to God. The Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective as well as other faith statements of the church represent the discernment of the body of Christ. These documents grow out of sincere biblical study by persons committed to serving God and the Church. The affirmation by the as-

sembled body of Christ is confirmation that God has been at work in our midst. While the denomination guided the development of discernment for The Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective, regional conferences have also discerned God's spirit for their specific needs in faith statements. The statements generated by the denomination or conferences are seen as confirmation of God's continued movement in the body of Christ.

The review of information concerning the social changes about divorce and remarriage, women in pastoral leadership, and military and membership indicate that these issues included significant wrestling with long held biblical positions. The process of dialogue included acknowledgement of previously held beliefs of sin and faithfulness. New learning about biblical passages were presented. Theological commitments were reaffirmed in light of new biblical interpretations that supported new avenues for faithful living. Another key element was open conversation by delegates that included responding to presentations by designated speakers. Virginia Mennonite Conference has consistently incorporated biblical and theological considerations as bases for changing long held beliefs. While there were significant disagreements, there was a sense of seeking to provide opportunity for concerns growing out of mission and ministry activity.

Discerning our differences recognizes that faith statements are not law but guiding principles for our life together. People and congregations are growing in awareness and commitment to faith statements. At times, people and congregations have felt uncomfortable with new language and concepts of faith statements and continue to use long-held language and concepts of previous faith statements. Recognizing the nature of the movement of God's spirit, persons engaged in mission and ministry uncover new ways of thinking and being that places them in the complexity of having moved beyond the faith statements of the body of Christ. The margin of difference by those not embracing new faith statements is similar to those that move beyond statements of faith. It is in recognizing these polarities in the body of Christ that give rise to the necessity of discerning our differences.

The primary virtue that is necessary in the age of diversity and the process of discernment is humility. In an age of individual preference and assertiveness, the ability to value another person's knowledge, experience and interpretation of events when it is different from our own will require vulnerability and trust. One of the ways humility is modeled is by the ability to give witness to what one believes to be true, supported with knowledge and personal experience without demanding allegiance to a singular point of view. Faithfulness is not only defined in matters of belief, but also in conduct when there is difference of opinion.

The meaning of membership

When individual interpretation of the Bible exists in a group, belief and practice will become more diverse. When congregations can interpret the Bible on given theological commitments, diversity will occur. Subsequently, membership in the group can be assessed on the bases of compatibility or compliance to the core convictions of the group.

Virginia Conference recognizes the importance of people having membership in the body of Christ, which occurs at baptism, confession of faith or letter of transfer. There is the commitment to the local assembly of believers being the primary entity, which holds member-

ship. Each congregation is expected to provide instruction around the teaching positions of the congregation and to engage in discipline of those members that persist in ignoring the teaching position of the church.

In Virginia Conference, congregations have held different positions on divorce and remarriage, women in pastoral leadership, and church membership and military involvement. The diversity of contexts where congregations are located has necessitated this practice. At the same time, members within a congregation have a wide range of belief and commitment. Congregations have approached variant beliefs among members in a variety of ways. In some congregations, leaders have discerned the degree which persons could hold variant positions of primary commitments. Leaders have presented the teaching position of the church, but have given permission for persons to hold individual interpretations of those commitments. In some settings, variance in belief and practice is met with accountability groups to bring greater clarity to commitments.

Virginia Conference could address congregations and their pastoral leaders being at variance with the Conference by developing a process whereby congregations and their leaders could request a variance on particular beliefs and practices. In this model, when a congregation can no longer support the church's position, the pastor would report to the overseer the specific area of concern and report their growing awareness. When a pastor desires a position that is at variance with the Conference, the pastor would place in writing to the overseer their unfolding awareness. The overseer would register the variant positions with the Faith and Life Commission.

The role of leadership

Leadership is a significant variable in each case study. The "membership and military" case study benefited immensely from the leadership of the Norfolk and Warwick District. The leaders associated with this social change provided a description of the reality of their ministries, provided information about their biblical and theological commitments, described their approach to pastoral relationships with persons engaged in military service, and invited feedback from a broad range of persons. In the Broad Street case study, Harrisonburg District, the overseer, FLC and Conference Council engaged in leadership in order to bring about a solution to the conflict. At the same time, the absence of a credentialed pastoral leader at Broad Street added to the complexity of the conflict for Conference leaders. In the case study on women in pastoral ministry, the primary leadership initiative comes from the denominational discernment and conference leaders seek to manage a constructive social change for their constituency.

The difficulty that is faced with church leadership is that numerous organizations may be involved and called upon to provide leadership. For example, in the Broad Street case study, Harrisonburg District, the overseer, FLC, Conference Council, other District leaders, and delegates to conference carry a leadership component. With multiple layer organization the clarity concerning responsibility, the authority to act, and the limits of leadership authority are key variables that emerge through these case analysis. The Broad Street case study demonstrates the activity of multiple leadership groups engaging in their sphere of

responsibility and remaining connected to other leadership groups that also have authority to act on the matter.

The individual's gifts and skills in a leadership role is a variable in the exercise of leadership. In the membership and military case study, Gordon Zook, a seasoned administrator with the breadth of church wide leadership responsibilities, is a principal contributor to the work in creating a document and guiding the process in Norfolk and Warwick Districts. A less experienced leader would not have achieved the same results.

Jim Shrag identified a key leadership task as "alignment" in the May-June 2003 "Equipping." He wrote,

"In an organization like a congregation, there are many voices calling for direction. Alignment is bringing all the interests together to forge a central focus, a direction. Alignment as a leadership task is necessary when focus is lost, when diversity exists within a group, and when goals need to be established. Alignment seeks to provide the answer to the question "which way are we headed?"

In most circumstances, the role of leadership is to assist a group of people in accomplishing their mission or to help them discover a way to solve a challenge that is being faced. In the last number of decades, congregational leadership has been associated with the development and facilitation of a process of decision-making versus authoritarian assertions by the key leader. The activities of leadership include gathering information, identifying persons to help solve the challenge at hand, to facilitate the group process, sharing information about the process with constituency and to ensure that persons participating in the discernment have a voice in the decision making process. This includes providing opportunity for the dissonant and minority voices to express their views and concerns.

Recognizing the power of fear and anxiety

Change creates anxiety and fear within individuals and groups. Let us recognize that in the last 5 years creating Mennonite Church USA by integrating the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church has produced anxiety and fear in our constituency. Simultaneously, in the Harrisonburg area, major agencies of the church were experiencing significant CEO leadership transitions: Mennonite Media Ministries (1998 CEO), Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community (1999 CEO), Eastern Mennonite Seminary (1999 academic dean) Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions (2002 president), Eastern Mennonite High School (2003 principal), and Eastern Mennonite University (2003 president). These leadership personnel changes contributed to uncertainty in "who is leading the church." Fear and anxiety limit people from taking risks and seeking constructive change. People cling to the known rather than venture into the unknown.

When information went into the community that Broad Street was allowing a covenantal ceremony for a same gender couple anxiety raced through the community. The cohesiveness of Virginia Conference following the discernment concerning MC USA was strained. There was fear that more congregations would leave VMC. In the MC USA discussions, uneasy leaders who feared acceptance of homosexual practice in MC USA were given reas-

surances that the homosexual problem was resolved. Broad Street became the test case for VMC concerning their resolve to uphold the denominational position.

Even with an outside facilitator, Broad Street and Virginia Conference could not find common ground. There is some awareness that the anxiety about mediation and dialogue contributed to a very narrow scope for the facilitator to lead a discussion. Subsequently, the mandate may even have overlooked the importance of the facilitator gathering data from principal parties before the meeting. The intake of information from principal parties could have contributed to a broader conversation.

When a group of people within a congregation or conference is anxious, there is a tendency to revert to establishing order by the use of power and authority. The immediate use of power by an individual may be appropriate in times of crisis. In times of high anxiety there is also the tendency to engage in labeling, polarities develop and defensiveness begins to emerge. Solutions that emerge often are associated with severance of relationships as an immediate corrective. One of the constructive ways leaders can deal with the presence of fear and anxiety in a group is the development of a process of discernment that seeks to address the primary issues that are causing uncertainty.

Assumptions about diversity

“Diversity” defined by Webster means “the condition of being different.” Differences abound in our life. There are 46 Mennonite groups in North America. Each group defines itself in a unique way. Richard Foster introduced the awareness of six distinct streams of spirituality that inform our reflection about God. Persons seem to migrate to one predominate stream for knowing and experiencing God. Myers-Briggs indicates that there are 16 personality types. Historians recognize multiple streams of Anabaptism that have informed contemporary understanding of Mennonite belief and practice. Diversity exists in our life including personalities, spiritual nurture, faith heritage, and theological commitments. Others have often viewed Mennonites as people of similar values, convictions and patterns of behavior. In the last two decades, there is a growing awareness among Mennonites that there are divergent beliefs, practices and patterns of behavior. Virginia Conference constituency also recognizes the breadth of diverse faith expressions within our group.

In three case studies, we recognize that members of Virginia Conference are demonstrating different practice on those issues. Example, while VMC allows for women in pastoral leadership some congregations would not call a woman to the lead pastor role. The Tidewater congregations have discovered ways to integrate persons with military involvement while some congregations in the Harrisonburg area have difficulty incorporating a police officer among their members. Provision has been made by VMC to incorporate persons who are remarried following a failed marriage, but numerous persons who remarry feel limited acceptance from constituency of VMC.

It is equally true that persons in Virginia Conference congregations come from a variety of Mennonite and other religious traditions. Other polarities in our conference include educated/uneducated, poor/wealthy, female/male, conservative/liberal, and various ethnic tra-

ditions now represented. In light of this diversity, conversations around faithfulness as a follower of Jesus in an Anabaptist Mennonite context are necessary.

Virginia Conference Mennonites adheres to the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective (1995). This statement of biblical conviction expressed in contemporary language provides clarity of core convictions for Mennonites in North America. Our diversity asks of us to be in conversation with persons who are moving to embrace the particular way we hold our core commitments. In light of the diversity present in Virginia Conference, people will always be discerning their convictions in relationship to our core commitments. The primary challenge faced by Virginia Conference is the way in which leaders guide and instruct on matters of faith. When leaders are seen as guiding persons on a continuum of faithfulness encouraging persons to move towards the core values of the group, Conference leaders will seek to enable congregations to mentor and care for persons growing towards maturity. When diversity is not valued, beliefs and practices are monitored, observed for divergence and maintenance of boundaries is accomplished through careful discipline of erring members.

Discernment: who speaks for God?

As the Church engages in mission, new awareness concerning human behavior, core convictions, and societal need emerges within the body of Christ. The Church in each era of time is called upon to discern faithfulness to God in the midst of the contemporary challenges.

Virginia Conference recognizes the importance of the continued experience of God speaking to the body of Christ, the Church. God reveals truth to the body of Christ through our encounter with scripture. It is in our encounter with scripture that sets the stage for our interaction with other believers and the corporate body of Christ. When the body of Christ engages in discernment through prayer, study of scripture and conversation within the body of Christ, the outcome of the discernment is the will of God and is proclaimed as the leading of God's spirit.

In order to discern God's movement in the Conference, Conference leaders gather and share information, hear testimonies of God's activity in the world in relation to the subject at hand, and have designated a group of persons to provide documentation as to the leading of God.

The contemporary challenge that may need clarification is related to group discernment through consensus taking or voting taking. The primary means of clarification of God's will in a group has been to have a leadership entity generate a resolution and invite the assembled body to cast a vote. A desire for the pursuit of consensus building as a model for discernment remains a concern.

APPENDIX 10

Church Membership and Military Personnel in Congregations of the Virginia Mennonite Conference

In light of the Virginia Mennonite Conference's historic and biblically based convictions on peace and the recent action by delegates to affirm Article 22 of *Confessions of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, which states that "as disciples of Christ, we do not prepare for war, or participate in war or military service," we conclude that loyalty to the military oath is incompatible with loyalty to one's covenant as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our desire is to call all our members away from other primary loyalties to freely serve their one Lord, Jesus Christ.

We further recognize that the congregations of Virginia Mennonite Conference use a variety of ministry styles to lead new believers out of military service. While Virginia Mennonite Conference does not endorse the practice of some congregations in extending the covenant of membership to persons currently under the military oath, the Conference wishes to remain in full relationship with these congregations and to continue in mutually respectful dialogue.

A vital goal of our confession is to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our lives and guiding our church toward an obedience that sustains us in the glorious hope of the peaceable reign of God.

Counsel that we give to congregations includes the following:

1. We urge our pastors, teachers, parents, and schools to lift up the Christ who showed us how to love enemies and suffer rather than threaten, to pursue growth in Christlikeness, and to model our Lord's way of reconciliation in all human relationships.
2. We believe obligation to military orders is incompatible with church membership and expect that candidates for membership in our congregations will move toward freedom from military obligations. We expect those credentialed for ministry by the conference to uphold the Mennonite Church's stance against participation in violence and war.
3. In situations where persons under military oath are moving toward membership or are already members but have not left military service, we ask congregations to consider these guidelines as they help persons move forward in the peace of Christ:
 - a. The person gives clear evidence of conversion to Jesus Christ as illustrated by Zachaeus (Luke 18), Thomas (John 20), Cornelius (Acts 20), and others.
 - b. The person is open to considering Jesus' teachings on peace and non-violence as gathered in our Confession of Faith, and the possibility of termination from military service at an early opportunity.
 - c. Pastors, congregational leaders and mentors will stay close to such individuals, assisting them in their Christian walk, encouraging them toward separation from the military, and finding ways to help them in their transition toward civilian life.

Adopted by Virginia Mennonite Conference Delegates, January 20, 1996
Reaffirmed by Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, July 15, 1999

1999 Progress Report and Recommendations
on Church Membership and Military Personnel

In line with the 1996 Conference actions, the Faith and Life Commission carried out a review of congregational implementation progress 1996-98 with the following report to the Conference in 1999:

Key Observations

1. There are a variety of methods, emphases, and energies with which congregational leaders have been teaching peace, non-violence and justice.
2. Pastoral and congregational discipling has led some persons to develop robust convictions against participation in military related occupations resulting in their leaving the military at costly personal and economic sacrifice.
3. The pilgrimage of VMC's discernment regarding congregational membership of military personnel has led us to recognize that this issue is only one dimension in the broader arena of Christian discipleship. Other challenges calling for constant vigilance of conference and congregational leadership include issues such as unfair corporate and industrial practices, along with moral, civic, economic, entertainment, media and similar powers of our society that militate against the Kingdom of God. Many of these are noted in "A Mennonite Statement on Violence," adopted by our churchwide assemblies in 1997 and included in our Virginia Conference Assembly report book last summer.

Recommendations

1. That congregations seek to become magnetic compassionate faith communities, equipped to draw people from all walks of life into their community.
2. That pastors and congregational leaders energetically and faithfully teach the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of the Biblical teaching on nonviolence, peace and non-participation in the military, as reflected in Article 22 of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.
3. That congregations and pastoral leadership continue to follow the spirit and counsel of the 1996 conference statement on Church Membership and Military Personnel in Congregations of the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the FLC Pastoral Letter of June 1996.
4. That early in 2001, the Faith and Life Commission again take initiative with congregational leaders to review progress of implementation of our 1996 statement, evaluating discipling processes, growth in congregational convictions on peace, and members' progress toward separation from military service.

**These additional recommendations were adopted by the Virginia Mennonite
Conference Delegate Assembly on July 15, 1999.**

Additional Initiatives

For additional information or copies of the following items, contact the Virginia Mennonite Conference office at 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802; phone: 540-434-9727 or 800-707-5535; e-mail: info@vmconf.org

1. A Pastoral Letter from the Faith and Life commission which was sent with the Statement, June 1996
2. The Warwick District of Virginia Mennonite Conference established a Committee to study alternatives to military service for enhancement. Its June 30, 1997 report recommends the establishment of a Program Oversight Committee for specific activity in:
 - a) sensitizing congregations;
 - b) financial assistance;
 - c) assistance for reentry into civilian life;
 - d) job training and apprenticeship programs.
3. A historical review of the conference process from 1990-1999 was prepared as part of the 1998-99 implementation review.
4. A summary report of the 1998 congregational and district survey was compiled and submitted to the conference delegates.

Original – January 24, 1986
Edited – January 23, 1998
Adopted – April 4, 1998

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“Criteria for Membership in Tidewater Area Mennonite Churches”

Outline of study document

- I. *WHY THIS STUDY***
Growing Churches in a Militarized Environment
Where to Draw What Lines
New Questions

- II. *DISCIPLING***
The Mandate to Make Disciples
Discipling in the First Century
Military Participation as a Discipleship Issue Today

- III. *ANABAPTIST AND EARLY CHURCH PERSPECTIVE***
Regulative Principles for Anabaptists
Early Church Practice

- IV. *BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE***
Peace as the Vision of the Old Testament
Peace in the Gospels
Peace in the Epistles
Peace and the Christian Life
Mennonite Confession of Faith

- V. *TIDEWATER EXPERIENCES***
Current Church Participation by Active Military People
Members With Previous Military Involvement
What if Current Members Join the Military?
Recent Congregational Experiences

- VI. *EMERGING UNDERSTANDINGS***
Reaffirmation and Confession
People on the Way
Implementation and Status

Recommendations to Conference Council

1. Develop a study guide as a supplement to the document “Embracing Faithfulness, Discerning Our Differences.” Congregations could use the study guide to review their own history on the three case studies presented in the document. The study guide could include suggested study material for biblical interpretation, congregational discernment, and congregational relationships to Virginia Conference and Mennonite Church USA.
2. Identify key issues that are at the forefront of constituency life and develop a discernment process that could become “a how to” in conference discernment. A number of issues that might be considered include: bioethics, human sexuality, healthcare, materialism, new pastor transitions, and overseer transition and education.
3. Virginia Conference Assembly continue the practice of delegate discernment on key issues of our life together. Affirmation was given for the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation about our life together at this past Conference Assembly. We recommend discernment be a key part of Assembly versus a continuation of the presentation of institutional reports without opportunity for engaging the material in meaningful ways.
4. Develop a leadership process whereby congregations and their leaders could request a variance on particular beliefs and practices. The leadership process may include the opportunity for a congregation or a credentialed leader to make a request for variant belief status. One of the important concerns was that the overseer and/or the Faith and Life Commission would be primary participants in discussions of variance.
5. Develop new forms of membership criteria for congregations in Virginia Conference that allow for the congregational distinctive. Associate membership or fraternal membership status may allow for the potential inclusion into Virginia Conference of the former Mt. Valley District and/or Cornerstone Fellowship congregations. Lancaster Conference has been granted permission by MC USA to offer congregations membership in Lancaster Conference without participation in the denomination. Similar opportunities for the former Mt Valley District and Cornerstone Fellowship may allow for renewed fellowship. Conference Council could explore these possibilities for our former constituency congregations as well.
6. Explore opportunities of healing and hope with Broadstreet Mennonite Church. While we recognize the authority for Virginia Conference to discipline congregations that have broken fellowship by their commitments, we also believe in the possibility of intentional relationships that can lead to restoration. We encourage the Conference Council to develop a mandate and identify persons to explore the possibility of reconciliation.
7. Review the process of congregational discipline by a conference. Our work did not specifically focus on church discipline. A study on this theme could be helpful for establishing procedures for dealing with congregations that may be at variance with the teaching position of the church.

8. Invite the Faith and Life Commission to review the orientation, tasks and accountability of the Overseers with the intent that the role provide closer supervision for both credentialed and commissioned leaders.
9. Encouragement is given to Conference Council to develop a mediation process promptly when potential division exists within Virginia Conference. Polarization of issues can emerge quickly, destroy meaningful communication and inhibits learning and sustained relationships. Conference Council as the executive body of Virginia Conference can engage in preventative leadership by exercising this leadership function in a timely fashion.
10. Faith statements of Virginia Mennonite Conference need to remain consistent with the Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective. Whether those faith statements have been written in the past or will be written in the future, Conference Council is urged to review those statements for consistency of belief and practice.
11. Educate clergy and lay leadership on the polity statements of Virginia Conference. During the recent leadership challenge dealing with Broadstreet, pastors, overseers, districts and congregations at times appeared to act independently of the leadership processes of Virginia Conference. A review of roles and responsibilities of these leadership entities could assist in providing clarity in future conflictual circumstances.
12. Develop guidelines of accountability for credentialed and commissioned leaders of Virginia Conference. While many of us have argued for the necessity of credentialed leadership as a key variable in a healthy congregation, district, and conference leadership relationships, one former congregation had commissioned leadership. Develop accountability structures that may incorporate congregations that are moving through leadership transitions or have chosen not to have a credentialed pastor.

APPENDIX 11

**Faith & Life Commission
Statement on Sexual Orientation**

The FLC approved the following statement for dissemination:

With particular attention to the unity within VMC, the FLC affirms the following:

- a. We affirm the call to all to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior and we affirm pastoral care for all persons regardless of sexual orientation.
- b. We hold the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) to be the teaching position of the Mennonite Church USA. Thus "We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life." (Article 19)
- c. Given the membership guidelines of the Mennonite Church USA, if a credentialed person conducts a covenanting ceremony for a same sex couple, their credentials will be immediately suspended while a review is underway. The suspension would be implemented by the FLC officers based upon fact-finding carried out by the respective overseer.

--Excerpt from the March 19, 2013, Minutes of the Faith & Life Commission