

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference
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Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference

Constitution & Bylaws

IN-MI Mennonite Conference



A
conference
of the
Mennonite
Church

Table of Contents

CONSTITUTION.....page 1

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BYLAW.....page 11

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CONSTITUTION OF THE INDIANA-MICHIGAN MENNONITE CONFERENCE

ARTICLE 1. IDENTIFICATION

Section 1. Name and Incorporation

This conference shall be known as the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference, an association of Mennonite Church USA congregations located primarily in Michigan and Indiana, and is incorporated under the laws of the state of Indiana as the successor to Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Mission Commission, Inc. May 31, 1990.

Section 2. Participants

While congregations form the primary organizational units of the conference, all members of associated congregations are considered members of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference by virtue of their congregational membership. Members of these congregations are represented in various conference groups such as the Conference Assembly and area councils via designated congregational delegates and leaders. Individual members of congregations have the right and privilege to attend all public sessions of conference, to speak and express their opinions, concerns and questions on all or any conference issues.

Section 3. Affiliation

The Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is a participating conference in the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly and its affiliated boards and agencies. The conference appoints delegates to the Delegate Assembly and three representatives to the Constituency Leaders Council as provided for in the Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA.

Section 4. Confession of Faith

The Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference accepts biblical faith as expressed in the stream of Anabaptist Mennonite documents including the Schleithem Confession (1527), the Dordrecht Confession (1632), the Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963), Affirming our Faith in Word and Deed (1979), and Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995).

ARTICLE 2. PURPOSE

The Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference is established by its associated congregations to undergird and connect congregations as they center their spiritual development in Jesus Christ. The conference unites members in

worship of God and fellowship with one another in openness to Holy Spirit presence, guidance and empowerment, and in the proclamation and embodiment of Christ's worldwide reign. The conference pursues its purpose by:

- a. arranging settings for common fellowship, worship, study and discernment,
- b. providing structures for mutual accountability among the members and congregations,
- c. leading and assisting congregations in their local, regional and worldwide witness,
- d. enabling congregations in their provision of adequate congregational leadership.

ARTICLE 3. CONGREGATIONS

Committed, caring communities of faith are the bases from which Christ is proclaimed in word and deed. Conference members shall participate regularly in the life of an associated congregation. The congregation is a local assembly of God's people united in worship, nurture, fellowship, evangelism, proclamation, service, discernment, reconciliation, mutual care and discipline.

ARTICLE 4. CONFERENCE ASSOCIATION

Section 1. Eligibility

A congregation is eligible for conference association when it can certify all of the following guidelines:

- a. The congregation maintains a list of members who have covenanted together in a common life of obedience to Christ,
- b. The congregation confesses a faith consistent with the historical Mennonite confessions of faith (ARTICLE 1, Section 4),
- c. The congregation provides for spiritual and administrative leadership with adequate material support for leaders,
- d. The congregation is willing to give and receive counsel in its relationship with nearby congregations and the conference,
- e. The congregation supports the work of the conference with active participation, prayers, personnel and funds.

Section 2. Procedures

Procedures for securing and terminating conference association shall be provided in the bylaws.

ARTICLE 5. DELEGATE CLUSTERS

The Executive Committee shall designate congregations in a given region of conference to be grouped into clusters. Delegates to conference within these clusters shall meet at least annually to share congregational concerns and interests and to offer counsel on conference issues. They may also nominate or affirm persons from their cluster to serve on the Executive Committee. Conference leadership may call for additional meetings. Generally the Executive Committee member of the cluster shall serve as the convener of the sessions.

ARTICLE 6. CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY

Section 1. Role and Function

There shall be a Conference Assembly convened as the gathered unit of conference and representing all associated congregations and conference leaders. The Conference Assembly shall provide for mutual fellowship, accountability, worship, deliberation and discernment. It shall review programs, establish policies and select leaders as provided in this constitution and bylaws and in harmony with the purposes for which the conference was established.

Section 2. Composition

Voting delegates to the Conference Assembly shall include the following:

- a. All ordained and licensed ministers with active congregational assignments,
- b. One elder or comparable leader from each congregation,
- c. One delegate representing financial matters from each congregation,
- d. One additional delegate for each 150 members or fraction thereof from each congregation,
- e. All congregational overseers and members of the conference Executive Committee.

Interpretation:

(a) If the congregation has a congregationally approved pastoral position that requires a ministry credential, and no one is currently named to that position, they may appoint an alternate from within the congregation with ministry credential to serve until a credentialed person is named to the position.

(b,c,d) Delegates shall be members of sound faith and judgment with responsible congregational participation. Delegates shall be broadly

representative of their congregation, including women and men, older and younger. Each congregation shall determine the length of terms for delegates named in points b, c and d of Section 2, and may appoint alternates for those delegate positions.

Section 3. Meetings

The Conference Assembly shall meet at least annually at such time and place as determined by the Executive Committee. The moderator of the conference shall preside. The Executive Committee may call additional sessions with at least 21 days written notice to all delegates. The Executive Committee shall serve as the Program Committee or designate a subcommittee to function in its behalf. A quorum shall consist of all properly recognized delegates present at a duly called assembly meeting.

Section 4. Officers

The conference moderator and moderator-elect shall be elected by the Conference Assembly. A secretary shall be elected by the Executive Committee.

Section 5. Decision Making

The Conference Assembly and other conference entities shall seek consensus or broad affirmation in all decisions. Where available time does not allow for consensus or where circumstances are not deemed to require broad affirmation, conference entities may proceed by majority vote. In such situations or in other matters not covered by the constitution or bylaws, decisions shall be in harmony with procedures generally known as Robert's Rules of Order.

ARTICLE 7. ADMINISTRATION

Section 1. Composition of the Executive Committee

There shall be an Executive Committee made up of one representative from each of the delegate clusters, at least one multi-cultural representative (i.e. African-American, Hispanic, Native American or other under-represented racial group), a representative to Menmonite Church USA Constituency Leaders Council, the conference treasurer, the conference moderator and the moderator-elect. The conference moderator shall chair the Executive Committee. All Executive Committee members shall be affirmed by the delegate body.

Section 2. Terms of Executive Committee Members

Delegate cluster representatives, the multi-cultural representative/s, the conference treasurer and the affirmed representative to the Constituency Leaders Council will serve three-year terms with approximately one-third being selected each year. The moderator-elect will serve two years as moderator-elect followed by two years as moderator. All Executive Committee positions, with the exception of moderator and moderator-elect who will serve as stated above, will be limited to three consecutive terms in the same assignment.

Section 3. Role and Function of Executive Committee

The Executive Committee shall be responsible for overall spiritual direction and coordination of vision, policies and decisions of conference. It shall function as the Board of Directors and Trustees, acting for the conference and responsible to the Conference Assembly. The Executive Committee shall provide for conference staffing needs in harmony with the bylaws.

Section 4. Program Commissions

Program commissions may be established to carry out specific portions of conference work. They shall be responsible to the Executive Committee and report their annual planning and activity to the Conference Assembly. Composition and functions of the program commissions shall be provided in the bylaws.

Section 5. Related Boards and Organizations

Special organizations and institutions may be established from time to time to carry out specialized programs compatible with the purpose of conference. Each shall be responsible to one of the commissions for ongoing mutual accountability as assigned by the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE 8. AMENDMENTS AND INTERPRETATION

Section 1. Amendments

This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority of all votes cast by Conference Assembly delegates, provided that a 60-day advance notice of the substance of the change has been mailed to delegates and has been announced in a conference publication. Without notice, amendments shall require a 90% majority.

Section 2. Interpretation

Conference Assembly shall have the right of final interpretation of any questions regarding this constitution.

BYLAWS OF THE INDIANA-MICHIGAN MENNONITE CONFERENCE

To provide direction and regulations for the effective implementation of conference organization and work, the following bylaws are hereby enacted.

1. PROCEDURES FOR ASSOCIATION WITH CONFERENCE

1.1. Securing Association with Conference

- a. A worshipping group may make application to become an associated congregation by contacting the conference office.
- b. Upon satisfactory certification of the group's eligibility, the Church Life Commission shall commend the congregation to the Executive Committee for reception as an associated congregation.
- c. The Conference Assembly shall take action in response to the Executive Committee recommendation.
- d. Members of an emerging congregation sponsored by the conference or an associated congregation shall be considered members of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. A conference-sponsored church plant shall have delegate status.

1.2. Terminating Association With Conference

- a. Request by a congregation for termination of its association with conference shall be referred to the Church Life Commission for procedures similar to application for association.
- b. If a congregation forsakes its eligibility, its association with the conference may be terminated, after due counsel with the congregation, upon recommendation of the Church Life Commission and Executive Committee and action of the Conference Assembly. All related decisions shall be properly recorded.
- c. Where there is dispute regarding ownership of property the Executive Committee shall provide for appropriate mediation among all concerned. The group that maintains relationship with conference receives priority.

1.3. Vote Requirement For All Membership Status Recommendations

All votes by the delegates regarding membership status shall require at least a 2/3rds majority (66 2/3%) vote of all votes cast in a duly called delegate meeting.

2. CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

2.1. Becoming Members

Persons may become members of a congregation by baptism upon personal

confession of faith, by affirmation of previous believer's baptism and current profession of faith, or by letter of transfer from other congregations of like faith. The receiving congregation shall discern persons' readiness for membership and shall be responsible for ongoing care and nurture in their walk of faith.

2.2 Termination of Membership

An individual's membership in a congregation may be terminated by personal request, by continued neglect of participation following counsel, by sinful and/or willful disobedience to God and the church with failure to repent. Such termination shall be processed with compassion and concern for reconciliation with time for reflection and repentance.

2.3 Organization and Leadership

Congregations shall organize themselves to enhance the growth and involvement of each member in the life and mission of the church. Members shall have access to decision-making processes and shall be responsible for mutual accountability with other members.

Leadership structures shall provide assignments for both spiritual oversight and program coordination. Spiritual oversight shall be assigned to a group such as a board of elders, including pastor(s) and overseer. Program coordination shall be assigned to a group such as a congregational cabinet. There shall be clear provision for liaison between those responsible for spiritual oversight and program coordination.

The congregation shall be represented by delegates selected as specified in the conference constitution. Delegates shall be two-way communication channels throughout the year. They shall communicate congregational perspectives to the conference as well as conference perspectives to the congregation.

The congregation is encouraged to appoint delegates to the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly as provided for in the *Bylaws for Mennonite Church USA*.

3. PROGRAM COMMISSIONS

3.1 Guidelines

Program commissions shall be established as needed by the Conference Assembly on recommendation of Executive Committee to plan and implement specific portions of the work of conference in line with the goals established by the Executive Committee. They are accountable to Executive Committee and will participate in a major review of their work and respon-

sibilities regularly. Commissions shall give an annual report of accomplishments to the conference.

3.2 Formation

Each commission shall consist of five members with three-year staggered terms. The chairperson, secretary and one commission member shall be affirmed by the conference delegate body. Two additional members shall be appointed by the Executive Committee. All commission members will be limited to three consecutive terms in the same assignment or on the same commission.

Commissions may provide for committees or ad-hoc task forces to assist in their work.

Section 3.3 Scope

- a. Church Life Commission shall attend to pastoral leadership and the quality of congregational life.
- b. Justice, Peace and Service Commission shall attend to issues of justice and peacemaking along with promoting service opportunities.
- c. Mission Commission shall attend to congregational witness and evangelism as well as resourcing church planting efforts.
- d. Nurture Commission shall attend to congregations as they provide for Christian nurture, worship, and life cycle enrichment.
- e. Stewardship and Finance Commission shall attend to stewardship education with congregations and the management of conference finances.

3.4. Mennonite Women (MW)

- a. Guidelines. The commission shall function under the guidelines of the churchwide organization and purpose of MW. They are encouraged to give an annual report of their accomplishments to the conference delegate body and are invited to consult with the Executive Committee for counsel and cooperation.
- b. Formation. MW shall be responsible for their own selection of officers and committees.
- c. Scope. MW shall be concerned with the needs and interests of women, both younger and older, in the life and ministry of the congregations of conference.

4. MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY RESOURCES

4.1 Area Councils

Congregations in given geographical areas shall be grouped by the Church Life Commission for purposes of cooperative relations, fellowship, service and counsel.

Pastoral leaders or designated congregational leaders along with overseers of such congregations may invite other credentialed persons in special ministry assignments to join them in serving as an area council. They shall elect their own chairpersons and meet at least bimonthly.

4.2 Overseers

Overseers shall be named for each congregation to provide objective counsel and personal pastoral resources to local congregations and their leaders. The selection and installation of an overseer shall be by joint consultation and approval of the area council, the congregation to be served and the Church Life Commission, who shall take initiative.

Overseers shall facilitate communication and help build good relationships between pastors and congregations, assist congregations to develop vision and goals with periodic review, and assist in resolving conflicts when they occur, in consultation with Church Life Commission.

4.3 Ministry Credentials

Pastors and those exercising other ministries shall be called by the voice of the congregation and licensed or ordained for their ministry upon approval of the Church Life Commission. The conference office shall maintain a record of licensed and ordained ministers whose credentials are recognized by the Church Life Commission.

Pastoral leaders shall carry responsibilities as designated by the congregation and Church Life Commission. They shall serve in harmony with qualifications established by the Church Life Commission.

Ministry credential qualifications, definitions and procedures are stated in the conference policy manual.

5. GIFTS DISCERNMENT

5.1 Gifts Discernment Committee

A Gifts Discernment Committee of five members shall be responsible to recommend members of conference to serve in the offices designated in the constitution and bylaws.

Four members shall be nominated by the Executive Committee for affirmation by the Conference Assembly and each shall serve two-year terms with two being selected each year. In addition, a chairperson shall be appointed by the Executive Committee.

5.2 Nomination Procedure

The Gifts Discernment Committee will consult with the Executive Committee in regard to its nominees. The nominees shall be interviewed concerning their interest, call and ability to serve.

Delegates may present additional nominees to the slate on the floor of annual sessions with the nominee's prior consent and in consultation with Gifts Discernment Committee and Executive Committee.

5.3 Executive Committee Cluster Representative Nominations

Each cluster will select a person as their nominee for cluster representative on the Executive Committee. The selection shall occur in the annual Delegate Cluster Meeting just prior to the expiration of the representative's current term. Each selection will be added to the slate of nominees presented for affirmation by Conference Assembly. The Gifts Discernment Committee shall lead the process for nomination.

5.3,1 Nominations shall be made by delegates at their fall Area Council Delegate Meetings. Gifts Discernment Committee, after consulting with Executive Committee, will present a name to the appropriate delegates at least two weeks prior to their February/March Delegate Cluster Meeting for affirmation.

5.3,2 Delegates may present additional nominees at their Delegate Cluster Meeting with the nominee's prior consent and notification and clearance of Gifts Discernment Committee in consultation with Executive Committee.

6. CONFERENCE STAFF

6.1 Executive Conference Minister

The Executive Committee shall recommend an executive conference minister for appointment by the Conference Assembly and with accountability to the Executive Committee. The executive conference minister shall serve as chief executive officer providing general supervision for the work of the conference and personnel supervision for conference staff.

6.2 Staff Ministers

The Executive Committee in consultation with the executive conference minister may appoint other staff ministers, subject to confirmation by the Conference Assembly.

6.3 Terms

The executive conference minister and staff ministers shall serve three-year terms and may be reappointed.

6.4 Support Staff

The executive conference minister may employ office support staff according to personnel policies established by the Executive Committee.

6.5 Job Descriptions

Job descriptions for each staff person shall be approved by the Executive Committee.

7. RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

7.1 Conference-Owned Organizations

Conference-owned organizations shall be operated by a board of directors of seven to twelve members which shall be accountable to the conference Executive Committee. Ordinarily boards shall be made up of three members elected by Conference Assembly for three-year staggering terms; additional members appointed by conference Executive Committee for three-year staggered terms; and the conference moderator or designee. Each board, along with the appropriate program commission, shall have opportunity to identify giftedness needed in new board members and make recommendations of such persons to the Gifts Discernment Committee and the Executive Committee. Board members may serve up to three consecutive terms.

Organizations currently owned are:

- a. Bethany Christian Schools, 2904 S. Main, Goshen, Indiana, shall be concerned with providing high quality education in the context of a Mennonite/Anabaptist theology.
- b. Amigo Centre, 26455 Banker Street Road, Sturgis, Michigan, shall be concerned with providing educational and recreational opportunities in a Christian atmosphere in the context of nature.

7.2 Affiliated Organizations

Mennonite-related ministry organizations may be affiliated with conference for mutual support and encouragement. These organizations provide their own boards and administrators. They may or may not receive financial support through conference and/or congregations. They are encouraged to provide an annual report of their accomplishments and financial status to the conference delegate body. They shall be assigned by the Executive

Committee to relate to one of the program commissions.

Affiliated organizations currently recognized are:

- a. Great Lakes Area Choice Books
- b. The Hermitage
- c. Menno-Hof
- d. Mennonite Mutual Aid
- e. Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes
- f. Mennonite Disabilities Committee (MDC) Goldenrod
- g. Oaklawn

8. AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended by a majority of all votes cast by Conference Assembly delegates, providing that a 60-day advance notice of the substance of the change has been mailed to delegates. Without such notice, amendments shall require a two-thirds majority.

9. PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

The current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* governs this organization in all parliamentary situations that are not provided for in the law or in its charter, bylaws, or adopted rules.