

Present: 50 delegates from 16 churches. See delegate list.

## Friday 25 June 1999

We were welcomed into a worshipping atmosphere by the Worship Team from LA Faith Chapel

### 1.0 We Gather to Worship

- 1.1 Welcome - Ruth Suter welcomed the delegates and opened in prayer.
- 1.2 Ruth reminded the delegates to sign in on the delegate sign in sheet
- 1.3 Ruth asked the representatives of churchwide agencies to stand and identify themselves.
- 1.4 Review of minutes - Ty reviewed the action items from North Hollywood (June 1998) and Fresno (February 1999).  
*Action #1:* To accept the minutes from North Hollywood and Fresno as presented.
- 1.5 Introductions: Ruth introduced the listening committee for this assembly. She reminded us that the purpose of the listening committee is to provide feedback to the delegates, and to keep the delegates on track. They are Libby Caes (Mennonite Community, Fresno), Tig Intagliata (Trinity, Phoenix), Ralph Mendoza (House of the Lord, La Puente).
- 1.6 Gary Daught welcomed us on behalf of Shalom Mennonite Fellowship. The Worship Team from Shalom led us in a call to worship by reading our Vision Statement and teaching us motions to accompany the reading

God calls us  
to be followers of Jesus Christ  
and, by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
to grow as communities of grace,  
joy and peace  
to grow as communities of grace  
seeking forgiveness  
giving forgiveness  
so that God's healing and hope  
flow through us to the world

We joined in the singing of songs of worship from the Hymnal.

### 2.0 We Hear God's Word

- 2.1 The reading of Word of God - Matthew 6:7-15
- 2.2 Moderators Address

Duane Oswald discussed the 3 M's: Motivation - We have it, Mission - We are doing it, Money - We ain't got it.

This is the 5th chapter of our story together. Unity of mission was our motivation for integration. And now unity of mission continues to be our motivation. We are bound together by our love of Christ, even though we do not always agree or feel comfortable with each other. We are defining what it is to be a multicultural church.

Duane told the story of our integration of denominations on the West Coast. We were reminded that it took time, and it took the flexibility of time for everyone to feel comfortable. Congregations wanted different levels of involvement. Duane suggested that some of these same questions are raised at the denominational level. Anxiety, mixed with enthusiasm. What can we share with the denomination:

- connections, community and relationships are critical to developing a life together and to solving problems
- God has a purpose for us, in our life together
- change, transition and struggle are a major part of growth. Conference work (integration) is messy. But we need faith and confidence that we can work this out together.
- Resources are vital (human and financial). We struggle constantly with our budget while we have thrived with great human resources. Both are required
- Love ties us together

### 3.0 We Respond to God's Word

3.1 We sang *God of grace and God of glory* in response

3.2 Grace Story - Libby Caes

Grace is not just something bestowed upon us, but it is God giving and caring... the continual invitation to be part of our life. My family recently moved from the east coast to the west coast. It takes time to develop community. I wondered who would be my friends, my soul mates in this new place. During the past week, I spent 3 days in a retreat center in Burlingame. I received a feast of gracious hospitality, silent community with others, walking a wooded path, journaling, sitting in a silent chapel... all feasting. I also read the NY Times and realized that there are others that are not feasting in the world. I received grace and now have grace to share.

3.3 We sang *Amazing Grace* in response (in english and in spanish)

3.4 Gary Daught led us in prayer

### 4.0 We Go to Serve

4.1 Introduction of Action Items - Ruth Suter

Ruth identified the business items which would be brought before the delegates over the course of the weekend.

- FY 2000 Budget
- Elections
- Membership Resolution
- Conference Policies and Procedures (for discussion)

4.2 Financial Report - Ruth

Ruth presented a summary of the financial picture of the conference, focusing on revenue and expenses. We were reminded that our income is primarily from contributions and interest income and that expenses are primarily spent on Conference Pastors, with some money spent on administration and projects.

Summary: Both Revenue and Expense are behind the budget we approved last June.

The floor was opened for discussion:

**C:** Why is the Congregational Nurture Committee budget still in existence when the committee has not met. **R:** We have used this money in the past for materials and for scholarships for assembly. The Board has put the committee on hold while deciding about structures. **C:** The Board should be more clear about plans with committee members **R:** This is good counsel

**C:** Are the staff 1/2 or 3/4 time? **R:** We pay three 1/2 time positions **C:** And we are not supporting any pastoral staff in congregations? **R:** True **C:** Remind you that this is at a cost in mission churches

**C:** How is this budget different that previous budgets? **R:** Primarily in a decreased allocation for the Evangelism and Church Development Committee.

**C:** Clarification that we should be careful when discussing subsidies. We have not provided subsidies to congregations for many years in this conference.

- 4.3 Offering: We sang together *Father I adore you* during the gathering of the offering.
- 4.4 Eric Yoder offered some organizational announcements
- 4.5 We adjourned the session with the singing of *Spirit of the Living God*

## Saturday 26 June 1999

### 5.0 We Gather to Worship

- 5.1 We were welcomed into worship by the Worship Team from Trinity Mennonite, Phoenix
- 5.2 Jeff Wright led us in a call to worship with the reading of scripture.
- 5.3 The Trinity Mennonite worship team lead us in songs of worship and praise.

### 6.0 We Hear God's Word

Tina Schlabach, co-pastor at Shalom Mennonite Fellowship, offered us the Word of God.

Tina relayed a story of a recent family reunion, where the family spent much time sharing of family stories, some new and some old. This reminded her of the joy and comfort of belonging to a family. She had a similar feeling last night at the conference meeting. It felt like an extended family, which I am joining for the first time. The stories of our biblical ancestors are also our family story, which we share.

This morning we look specifically of the Genesis story of twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. We will hear the story from the perspective of Jacob, with the anticipation of hearing the perspective of Esau this evening.

Snapshots of the life of the twins: the struggle in the womb, in the birth (the heel-grabber), the different paths of growing up (shepherd and hunter), the stolen blessing, Jacob bargaining with God for favor, Jacob working for Laban, traveling to his homeland to meet again with Esau, the preparations of gifts to appease Esau, the wrestling with God, naming of Israel and the blessing of God.

What is the meaning of this wrestling? It is Jacob struggling with Esau, with himself, and with God. He responds to an inquiry by revealing his name, Jacob. He takes the risk and is truly known by God. And God gives him a new name, Israel, one who strives/struggles with God. God recognizes the positive aspect of Jacobs struggle. Jacob's new name signifies God's continued commitment to Jacob. Jacob then receives the blessing, not a new blessing, but the same blessing with new meaning.

- When we find ourselves in conflict, we should invite God to touch, engage, wrestle with us, to struggle with us. We find it too easy to concentrate on others in the conflict, and not on God.
- We are invited to be real with God, to come the point where we can tell God our true names.
- We are invited to listen for a new name from God and a blessing.

### 7.0 We Respond to God's Word

- 7.1 Grace Story - Stan Shantz

Professional wrestling is becoming very popular, but it is predominately scripted. I like things in a certain order, I have lists. When I was a teen, I had a vision for my life. This script included a good job, a wife and 2.5 children. But along the way, I dropped out of school twice and I did not find a wife. I was not sure what

was going on. My mother then once said, "If you can't find a job, why don't you become a pastor". I avoided this for a long time. I wrestled with God over this. And eventually went to Indiana for training and served as a youth pastor. I had developed a new vision for my life. Things were going well and I met Cathy. We moved to Phoenix and things go well. Then we began to plan for a family. But the baby did not come. And again my perfectly planned world collapsed. Again I wrestled a lot with God. And with others. And with myself. And in the midst of this wrestling, there has been the beginnings of healing. God began to break through my walls. God is working now by providing Christiana Hee for us to adopt.

If God can work with me, he can work with anyone. God is with us, all of us.

- 7.2 We responded in the singing of *Amazing Grace*.

## 8.0 We Go to Serve

We were welcomed back from a break with songs of worship lead by the LA Faith Chapel Worship Team

- 8.1 Report from Jeff Wright - Southern California Area Minister

Jeff provided a summary of the work in Southern California in the five years since integration. We have added three new congregations, have four ready to join and seven additional emerging churches currently worshipping in Southern California.

Jeff introduced Pastor Greer of Faith and Love Christian Fellowship and Pastors Clement and Evelyn Nwani of Abundant Life Miracle Church. These congregations are welcomed into the family of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.

Jeff introduced Bert Newton as a person who works toward Peace and Justice in Southern California. He presented him a mug from the Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Committee and the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference in recognition of his work.

- 8.2 Report from Al Whaley - Arizona Area Minister

Al reminded us that his written report was in the delegate book. He also highlighted that both men's and women's retreats and children's camps are ongoing strong community events for the Arizona churches. He highlighted some of the plans and difficulties for work on the Hopi and Navajo reservations.

Al introduced new pastors at Good Shepard and Sunnyslope. God continues to do a good work in Arizona.

- 8.3 Report from Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower - Northern California Area Minister

Duane introduced the fact that ClareAnn will be leaving Northern California and Brian Bauman has agreed to take the job.

ClareAnn noted the written report in the delegate book. She read to us from Isaiah 43, "God is doing a new thing...", noting that work continues in the Bay Area church planting exploration project, with Brian Bauman having done a lot of work in this area.

Brian reported that the potential for church planting is huge in the Bay Area, as are the challenges. Let's see what God can do. Send your prayers.

- 8.4 Report from Ken Seitz - Pastoral Leadership Committee

Ken noted that with Al Whaley joining conference staff, John Lawrence has joined the committee from Arizona.

Ken introduced new pastors: Libby Caes - Mennonite Community Fresno, Lee Loots - First Mennonite San Francisco, Cal Kaufman - Sunnyslope Phoenix, Albert Asante - Labor For Christ Ministry Los Angeles and offered a prayer of commissioning of these pastors.

- 8.5 Duane asked ClareAnn to share a bit about her new ventures. She described the process of deciding to accept a 2.5 year assignment with Mennonite Central Committee in Indonesia. She expressed encouragement to the delegate body to stay open to the working of the spirit.

Duane offered a commissioning of ClareAnn and a prayer of sending.

- 8.6 Duane responded to the five new churches that are ready to be accepted into membership into conference (including Amor Viviente in Fresno) and explained that all five new churches will be formally added in February.
- 8.7 Duane noted that a vacancy exists for an Arizona representative on the Board of Directors and that nominations will be accepted from the floor later this afternoon.

We adjourned for lunch with a word of prayer.

## 9.0 We Gather to Worship

We were received back into session with the singing of songs led by the Koinonia Mennonite Worship Team

- 9.1 ClareAnn read from Paul's first letter to Timothy as a call to worship.
- 9.2 We joined in singing songs of worship and praise.
- 9.3 Grace Story: Chuwang Pam

Pastor Pam described the first building that LA Faith Chapel purchased and soon outgrew. He described a second building which was recently purchased. The sale of the first building yielded a profit and Pastor Pam announced that a tithe of profit will be forwarded to Pacific Southwest Conference.

- 9.4 We joined in the singing of *Amazing Grace* in Hausa and in English.

## 10.0 We go to Serve

- 10.1 Ty Buxman read a listing of the delegates and asked for corrections and updates from the delegates to be brought forward during the break.
- 10.2 Ruth Suter presented a proposed budget to the delegates. She described each line item and asked for discussion.

**C:** Clarification that the existing committee structure is under review and the Board of Directors will be looking at different organizational structures which will work for our conference.

**C:** The area ministers are all funded at 1/2 time. However, the Arizona position held by Al Whaley is a 1/3 position. This results in a 1/6 position which is still for available for hire.

**C:** It was interesting that last year we had such enthusiasm for a larger budget and that it pretty much fell flat. **R:** We need to also remember that we have astounding resources in conference. This is the big picture and the budget seems to be less important than meeting the budget. We also have several other sources of income (Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Board of Missions, etc.)

**C:** There is difficulty in having a committee composed of members from different geographic regions. This is a real practical problem with the representative committee structure. Perhaps we should move toward more work within regions.

**C:** Possibly use conference assembly as a setting to hold meetings since we meet anyway. **R:** This is still often hard for some of our members with 5-7 day per week job. This is hard to get away "early".

**C:** Has the board considered past suggestions of creating a 15-20 minute video? **R:** Perhaps the questions is more of, has a "director" or "producer" been identified. **C:** Perhaps a theme of what God is doing among us.

**C:** We are talking about a budget which supports approximately 40 churches. I am concerned that we don't have ownership in conference from many of the churches and therefore don't have the buy in to support the budget. **R:** We have addressed this at the Board level as well, mostly in terms of increasing communication with churches. This is a continued role of area ministers. **C:** Then we must take full responsibility for the budget

**C:** Yes, high expectation yields high commitment. In the last few years, we have planted new churches with the idea that we are joined together in shared values, including the shared value of partnering finan-

cially. **R:** Yes, and Myrna's note that more churches are giving in encouraging.

**C:** Suggest the possibility of conference dues. Or at least the suggestion from conference to congregations what is expected. The added benefit is that congregations who pay (invest) in conference will show up to see how their investments are doing.

Ruth offered a prayer over the budget.

**Action #2:** To approve the budget as presented.

- 10.3 Duane introduced Chuwang Pam and Peter Wiebe (our giving project consultants). Chuwang and Peter described the purpose and history of the Giving Project. They highlighted that a giving project seminar will be hosted by Trinity on Feb 17-18, 2000.
- 10.4 Duane raised the attention of the delegates to the membership policy of the Pacific Southwest Conference. He described the discussions that the Board has had and reviewed the policy as it currently exists.

Duane opened the floor for discussion:

**C:** Clarify the liability for conference if congregations are not incorporation **R:** There is some liability regardless, it is not clear if it is stronger or weaker.

**C:** Are the membership policies for new members or are existing congregations reviewed every five years or so? **R:** These are for new members, we have had discussions about updating rolls but have no current policy.

**C:** Are we fairly consistent with other conferences **R:** yes

- 10.5 Ruth introduced the U.S. membership resolution. She described that the U.S. delegates made the decision to integrate, but structural considerations occasionally bog people down. The one example of being bogged down is in the area of membership. The Canadians are presenting the recommendation of the membership committee for action to their delegates. The U.S. Boards have decided not to ask for action on the membership issue, resulting in no clear resolution on which congregations/conferences are a part of the new denomination. This resolution asks that the delegates adopt the guidelines as put together by the membership committee. The floor was open to discussion.

**C:** Commendations to the Board for leading in this area. Reminder to recognize that our brothers and sisters on the east coast are experiencing much more pain through out this process. Reminder that this leading role may have a tendency to separate us from the east. The intent should be one of leadership and not one of "this does not bother us". **R:** Good Counsel. We have been in consultation with other conference leaders and other leaders are also looking for ways to provide leadership.

**C:** How great is the danger that we may alienate some conferences from going along with integration now. **R:** This is a question that we would like to test with delegates. Currently the membership question is not even being asked in St. Louis. We want to provide a forum to at least ask the question, not necessarily under any illusion that the question will be answered.

**C:** Because of our history and our unique diversity here, we are in a position to be prophetic. We should not underplay this role.

**C:** Review briefly what the issue is for those of us who are new. **R:** The General Conference has historically maintained a congregational polity (i.e. congregations are members of the U.S. denomination) and the Mennonite Church has historically maintained a conference polity (i.e. conferences are members of the U.S. denomination). The membership committee is recommending a conference polity for the new integrated church.

**C:** What does a "loose affiliation" mean? **R:** This is the question. We don't know what the rules will be. As long as we caution against the sin of pride, we can be a real witness to the church.

**C:** I too am concerned with the possibility of not discussing. It is important to have open dialogue. **R:** I agree. If the delegates reject it, fine, we talked about it.

**C:** Is this the policy that our conference currently uses? **R:** This is our current polity. We are recommending to the delegates that this is a good way to do it. As a starting point for discussion.

**Action #3:** To approve the resolution as presented.

We adjourned for a brief break.

## **11.0 We gather for Worship**

We gathered together again in song.

11.1 Al Whaley led us in a responsive reading as a call to worship.

11.2 We joined together in the singing of songs of praise and worship.

11.3 Grace Story: Lacie Watkins-Bush

What is empathy, reconciling? What is this thing we call race? Usually when I think of race, I think of grace, or lack thereof.

Sometimes the most meaningful things come from the most mundane. I noticed that my make up was broken and I needed a new one. Nordstrom was having a free makeover day. This was a chance for me to have fun, to do something extravagant that I normally don't. At the counter, I was looked over. I was not offered my "free bottle of lotion". My friend put her free bottle in her purse and looked away when I highlighted that I had been overlooked. This is a picture of a definition of race, both on a personal level and a corporate level. What is racism? The described race prejudice plus power. The end of this story is not happy. My friend and I don't drive together anymore. The mutuality and caring that I expect from a friend was not there. What am I supposed to do? When we talk about grace, lets talk about real grace instead of transference of responsibility. What would it have been like if all the women would have returned their makeup? What would be like?

11.4 Al Whaley interviewed members of the Prescott church about the decisions that the congregation faces.

11.5 Annual Reports

11.5.1 Retreat Ministries (Jeff Wright) – Full report in binder. Retreat Ministries is planning to bring on an Executive Director. They are also working to get more involved in the life of Pacific Southwest Conference (PSMC).

11.5.2 Center for Anabaptist Leadership (CAL) - Jeff Wright – Full report in binder. CAL is owned by PSMC Southern California member congregations. PSMC is a valued CAL core partner.

11.5.3 Churchwide Agency Reports – Conference delegates also received brief reports from the following churchwide agencies: Bethel College/Council of Higher Education, Commission on Education, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Hesston College, Commission on Missions, Mennonite Voluntary Service, Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Publishing House.

11.6 Offering (Al Whaley gave thanks for the offering)

11.7 Other Business

11.7.1 Report of Listening Committee (Libby Caes) – The Listening Committee gives thanks to Shalom Mennonite Church for their warm welcome, good food, plentiful cold water, and the hard work that goes into hosting the conference. The Committee appreciated the Grace Notes sections of each session – story telling is important to the life of the conference. Financial resources are an issue, but lack of money does not seem to be impeding God's work. The Committee wondered how to enable and encourage more people/congregations (especially from Southern California) to attend assemblies. Perhaps modifying the frequency of gatherings in each location would help (e.g. in a three-year period hold three assemblies in Southern CA, two in AZ, and one in Northern CA). The committee noticed that we love to fellowship and worship together. This community fellowship and worship is as important as conference business (maybe more important). The committee is also aware of the tension surrounding the membership issue and U.S. integration. It affirms Pacific Southwest Conference leadership in bringing the Membership Resolution to Mennonite Church and General Conference delegates in St.

Louis. Finally, the committee recommends distributing conference notebooks in advance of the meeting so that delegates can come to Assembly well prepared.

- 11.7.2 Elections (Delegate Actions) – The floor was opened for nominations for the Board position of Arizona representative. Gary Daught was nominated. The Board recommended re-electing Board members who were willing to serve new terms.

**Action #4:** To elect Gary Daught to a two-year term as Arizona representative to the Board of Directors.

**Action #5:** To elect Ruth Suter (Asst. Moderator), Myrna Schwartz (Treasurer), LeahAnn Alcazar (Northern California rep), Lacie Watkins-Bush (Southern California rep) to new terms on the Board of Directors.

#### 11.8 Announcements (Duane Oswald)

- 11.8.1 Churchwide Appointments – Jeff Wright has been nominated to continue on Commission on Education (2-year term). Chuwang Pam has been nominated for Commission on Home Missions (2-year term). General Conference Mennonite Church delegates in St. Louis will act on both nominations.

- 11.8.2 Mid-Year Assembly – The PSMC mid-year assembly will be held in Southern California the first week-end in February. Location and details to follow.

#### 11.9 Closing Song - #105, *Christ we do all adore thee*

Closing Prayer/Benediction (Al Whaley)

Dinner (Hosted by Tucson Ten Thousand Villages Start-up Committee)

## 12.0 Saturday Evening Worship Service (Tucson Mennonite Fellowship)

We were welcomed into worship with a prelude by Fern Hieb, organist -- Wir glauben all an einen Gott (“We all believe in one true God”), J.S. Bach, God of Grace, Paul Manz

- 12.1 Call to Worship (Tina Schlabach)
- 12.2 Songs of Worship and Praise – I have decided to follow Jesus, solo by Nettie/Bessie Zazzi (Black Mountain) in the Navajo language, then the rest of the group joined in English, #400, Santo santo santo, #521, Come thou font, #139, Far, far away from by loving father
- 12.3 Scripture (Readers Theater) – Genesis 32:3-21; 33:1-17
- 12.4 Message – Forgiveness and the changing face of Esau (Gary Daught).

Genesis is a book of human relationships, struggle, life and blessing. It doesn't smooth over struggle. No one is passive. There is much at stake. The characters all demonstrate ambiguity: faithfulness and faithlessness. Good guys exhibit bad behavior. Bad guys show grace. A case in point is the Jacob/Esau story. Being the “good guy” is about responsibility to make sure God's blessing is distributed to all. Esau receives a lesser “blessing” from Isaac after Jacob purchases Esau's birthright and then tricks Isaac into giving Esau's birthright to him. After many years Esau holds the key to Jacob's responsibility and redemption. When Jacob returns, Esau forgives him. What has happened to transform Esau during those years? Perhaps, time heals wounds, or maybe Esau has become satisfied with his “lesser” blessing. But Jacob is changed too. He changes the reasons for the gifts he brings to Esau and recognizes the presence of God in Esau. Esau then accepts Jacob's gifts. Jacob is returning the blessing. This is the story of the transformation for both Jacob and Esau. The face Jacob (and we) confronts is the face of Esau (the long lost brother), and of God.

- 12.5 Communion (Al Whaley) – Readers' theater of current headlines (Peace and Justice Committee materials) and #781, prayer, communion (Choral Dorian, Jehan Alain, Fern Hieb – organist).
- 12.6 Open Response and Sharing

Acknowledge Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower's last meeting with PSMC as Conference Pastor and the blessing it has been to work with her. We praise God for what the Creator has done, and will do. It was a good day in Tucson with the children. Jesus tells us to learn from the children. Based on today's experience with

childcare, the future looks good. We thank Shalom for their hospitality. We are blessed by unity in diversity.

- 12.7 Closing -- #143 Amazing Grace (v 4-6). The congregation recited Vision: Healing and Hope as the closing benediction.

Celebration Music (Fern Hieb, organist) -- Toccata (from Symphonie V), Charles Marie Widor

PSMC  
 PROPOSED BUDGET  
 For the year ended June 30, 2000

	Budget Amount
Unrestricted revenues	
UI - Assembly income	2,000
UI - Church contributions	74,700
UI - Interest	11,000
UI - Other contributions	3,000
UI - L/R interest	9,000
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Total unrestricted revenue	99,700
Expenses	
Conference staff - AZ	28,560
Conference staff - NCA	28,560
Conference staff - SCA	31,190
Staff subsidy - SCA	-9,612
Cong nurture committee	1,000
Evang & church development	5,000
EC - Committee expenses	4,000
EC - Insurance	1,300
EC - Messenger	4,000
EC - Office expenses	1,500
Pastoral leadership comm	3,750
Peace & justice committee	1,000
Mennonite Church assembly	2,000
Rent - prepaid reclassified	0
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Total expenses	102,248
Restricted revenues	
RI - net assets	2,548
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Total restricted revenues	2,548
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Total net revenues	0
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# PACIFIC SOUTHWEST MENNONITE CONFERENCE

A Member Conference of the Mennonite Church and a Recognized District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church

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## Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Mennonite Church U.S. Membership Resolution

Jesus' call to make disciples and to share the good news with all people has been the central focus of the church from its beginning. As we enter the new millennium Jesus' call to unity and to mission has never been more urgent in the United States and throughout the world.

As we leave the 20<sup>th</sup> century we as a Mennonite Church need to recognize that integration is a reality. The delegate actions at Wichita 95, Winnipeg 97 and Orlando 97 affirmed integration. As General Boards and Program Boards start to integrate in the next two years, it would be unfortunate for congregations, districts, and area conferences, as each determines its timeframe for integration, to be left without defined status within the new denomination.

As we prepare for the imminent arrival of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference urges area conference and congregational delegates to act on the membership question of integration. To base membership in the Mennonite Church U.S. on the historic criteria of area conference discernment is the wisest course in enabling all parts of the church to embrace the spirit of mission and unity that guided the church at Bethlehem, Normal and Wichita, and was reaffirmed by actions of our delegates in Orlando and Winnipeg. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, it is the urgency of evangelism that unites us. "...As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain...now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation..." (2 Corinthians 6:1-2b). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the report from the Membership Committee to the General Boards (March 25, 1999)\* sets forth clear, familiar, and a historically consistent means for discernment of membership as we realign and transform the Mennonite Church in North America.

As an area conference we affirm the struggle of the Membership Committee during the past two years to develop and articulate the vision for membership in the new denomination. The process has been challenging. Discerning the Way has not always been clear. As an area conference, we also affirm the resultant *Guidelines for Membership in the New Mennonite Church*. We encourage other area conferences, districts, and congregations to affirm this work as well.

For these reasons, we invite the wider church to join with us in endorsing the *Guidelines for Membership in the New Mennonite Church*, and we bring the following Resolution for Membership Formation for delegate action at St. Louis 99:

*Be it resolved that the "Guidelines for Membership in the New Mennonite Church" proposed to the Joint General Boards by the Membership Committee (March 25, 1999) be accepted as the basis for the formation of the Mennonite Church U.S., and be implemented upon the completion of the incorporation of the Mennonite Church U.S.*

\*Attachment: *Guidelines for Membership in the new Mennonite Church*.



St Louis 99

# Guidelines for membership in the new Mennonite Church

## I. Basis for membership

The new integrated Mennonite Church desires to be a people of God characterized by a commitment to biblical foundations and to Anabaptist perspectives. While the integrating churches are of various backgrounds and formations, we believe the Holy Spirit has called the new Mennonite Church to unite in faith and in mission (Acts 1-2).

Membership signifies a mutual commitment to build on the true foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11); to become “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22); to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14).

### Covenant

Membership is a voluntary covenant between and among four inter-related communities of faith: congregations, area conferences, country church bodies, and international fellowships.

Congregations are formed of individual members; area conferences are constituted by member congregations; area conferences and their constituent congregations join together to form country church bodies; country church bodies join for international affiliations. Once made, a covenant of membership is nurtured in a spirit of mutual commitment to Jesus Christ and to the body of Christ, the church.

### Accountability

Membership assumes accountability before God and toward one another. Accountability has an inward and an outward dimension, with a biblical commission supporting both aspects. Looking inward, the church is commissioned to be a ‘binding and loosing’ fellowship (Matthew 16:13-20; 18:15-20; John 20:23; Ephesians 4:15-16).

The joyful obligation of membership includes the calling to build up the body of Christ through mutual discernment of the will of God. Looking outward, the church is commissioned to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 10; Acts 1:8). Membership includes the invitation to become a community engaged in mission and service.

### Unity

Members are called to unity in Spirit, “so that the world may believe that [the Father] has sent [the Son]” (John 17:21; see also Ephesians 2:14-22). The church is called to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and love, as it strives to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-6).

As witness to God who is one, and to Jesus Christ who was sent to reveal the will of God, the new Mennonite Church desires that members give faithful expression to their unity as the body of Christ. The Mennonite churches have heard this call to unity ever more clearly in recent years.

### Diversity

Within the context of unity, the new Mennonite Church welcomes diversity among its constituent entities (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12). The church is an interdependent and diverse body of believers who together form the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 3:25-29; Colossians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:9-10).

This body includes people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9), creating a colorful multicultural family of God.

*“No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).*

## II. Policy and practice of membership

1. Our vision for the Mennonite Church includes the invitation to Christian church bodies of common faith and mission to affiliate with the Mennonite Church in order to support and strengthen the fellowship and mission of an Anabaptist witness in North America and around the world.

2. Based upon the decision made at Wichita '95 to integrate, the congregations and conferences that are currently members of The Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and/or of an area conference of one of these three bodies, are welcomed and received into the membership of the new Mennonite Church.

*(An “Attachment” to these Guidelines addresses the current dilemma of congregations that have been disciplined by one area conference and are no longer members of that conference, but continue to hold membership in another area conference.)*

3. Members of the Mennonite Church are expected to give faithful attention to the Scriptures, to accept the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,” and to uphold statements of Christian faith and life made by the Mennonite church from time to time. They are also expected to participate in the church’s life and mission through the generous contributions of time and personal

resources, all given in commitment to Jesus Christ, in response to the grace of God, and in loving service to the church in which the Holy Spirit lives and works.

4. Congregations have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process for membership of persons joining their congregation. They do so in consultation with their area conference and in consideration of expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain congregational decision making regarding members as part of the legacy of congregational polity.

5. Conferences have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process for membership of congregations within their area conference. They do so in consultation with their country church body and in consideration of expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain conference decision making regarding member congregations as part of the legacy of conference polity.

6. Country church bodies (Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church U.S.) are formed as area conferences and their congregations join together. Country church bodies have the authority to determine the criteria and the responsibility to implement the process whereby conferences become members of the Mennonite Church U.S. or the Mennonite Church Canada. They do so in consideration of the expectations for membership in the Mennonite Church. We retain church-wide decision making regarding member conferences as part of the legacy of denominational polity.

7. Congregations attain membership in the Mennonite Church through their membership in an area conference. Congregations that currently are members only of the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, or the Conference of Mennonites in Canada but not of an area conference need to take steps to join an area conference. They shall do so within two years of the adoption of these guidelines. Also, congregations that are presently members of an area conference only but not of the

Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, or the Conference of Mennonites in Canada will become members of the country church bodies of the Mennonite Church through their membership in their area conference.

8. Congregations will hold membership in only one area conference. Where dual affiliation of a congregation with more than one area conference already exists and is perceived to serve the best interests of the congregation and their conferences at this time, dual conference membership may be retained as long as mutually agreed upon. We also recognize that certain congregations will find it beneficial to maintain ties to other conferences and/or church bodies.

9. We recognize the possibility that from time to time a congregation may seek a new area conference relationship. Out of mutual respect for one another, no congregation shall separate or be separated from one conference nor subsequently be accepted by another conference without consultation among the conferences and congregations concerned.

10. In recognition of the differences in how conferences process issues, we offer the option of provisional membership (non-voting participation) to conferences that are not ready for full membership. This permits participation as such conferences continue to evaluate their membership status. A five year limit is placed on provisional membership.

11. A congregation or conference that is currently a member of one of the integrating church bodies, but is hesitant about becoming a member of the Mennonite Church, should process its concerns with the church body in which it presently holds membership. Given the voluntary nature of the Mennonite Church, conferences and congregations that choose not to join the Mennonite Church are free to sever their current connections and unite with a church body of their choice. It is hoped this would take place in a cordial spirit, by mutual agreement of the groups involved, and only as a last resort.



# Attachment

## to the guidelines for membership

*On the dilemma concerning former dual-member congregations*

### A. Introduction

The Membership Committee has deliberated prayerfully concerning the situation of the four congregations that were formerly dual members of conferences, but have now been disciplined by one of the conferences while retaining membership in the other. Implicitly, the issue at hand concerns not only these four congregations. In various and significant ways, it touches other congregations and area conferences as well as the entire church.

The Membership Committee has sought clarity on the issue before us, and has concluded that a resolution to the dilemma needs to be found. The resolution needs to answer the following question: What guidance can the Mennonite Church offer to area conferences that find themselves in divergent relations to formerly dual-membership congregations when these area conferences become members of the one integrated Mennonite Church?

### B. Proposals

The Membership Committee offers the following observations and guidelines on this specific issue.

1. We begin with the observation, based on the Guidelines for Membership, that membership of congregations in the integrated Mennonite Church is determined by the area conferences to which congregations belong. Thus we propose that a solution to the dilemma created by the dual-membership situation needs to be sought at the area conference level. This becomes necessary if and when an area conference perceives the continuing membership (of a formerly dual-membership congregation) in one of the area conferences of the integrated Mennonite Church to be problematic.

2. We affirm the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective” and the relevant statements of the church, such as the Saskatoon (1986) and Purdue (1987) statements, as well as “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love” (Wichita, 1995), as the common basis for discernment. We also note that there was significant agreement at the Consultation on Membership (Kansas City, March 1999) on the stance that “extending the invitation of membership to persons in same-sex relationships is not in keeping with the faith statements of the Mennonite Church.” As well, at the Consultation there was also considerable caution against moving to expel congregations that accept persons

who are in same-sex relationships. This grew out of a strong desire to find other ways short of expulsion to note variance in practice and to retain the opportunity to minister to such persons and congregations.

3. The Guidelines for Membership propose there be consultation between conferences before separation from membership occurs. While this is the way for the future, it is also a commentary upon the recent past. We recognize that in some cases such consultation was attempted, while in other cases it was not. Nonetheless, the current dilemma could be a sign of ‘unfinished business’ among conferences and congregations. Thus it may be necessary to revisit the issue, difficult as that may seem. A resolution requires that both conferences, of which the respective congregation was formerly a member, should work together with the congregation in question to find a resolution to the dilemma. Because of the accomplishment of integration, we are called in a renewed way to exercise our accountability as the church of Christ. We recognize that the initiative outlined here may not need to be undertaken if the conferences involved do not see the formerly dual-membership congregation’s current membership status as problematic.

4. We offer the following counsel as guidance in proceeding toward a resolution:

- heed the Biblical injunction to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)
- accept the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective”
- uphold the church-wide statements agreed upon by the church
- follow the principles as stated in the joint commitment, “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love”
- seek the support and counsel of the wider Mennonite Church
- decide upon a time (perhaps several years) for bringing closure to the dilemma
- consider the help of facilitators
- seek counsel from neighboring congregations and conferences

5. We warmly invite conferences to become members of the Mennonite Church (in U.S. and in Canada) as outlined in the Guidelines for Membership, and in this way express their commitment to pursue accountability among members of the Mennonite Church.