

Lancaster Mennonite Conference
GUIDELINES REGARDING A CHANGE IN CONFERENCE
OR DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

PURPOSE: To provide a healthy, consistent decision-making process for Lancaster Conference congregations considering a change in conference or denominational affiliation. These guidelines are intended to maintain the integrity of the conference and protect the congregation from unnecessary conflict and division. They are not designed to limit the congregation's freedom to choose a new affiliation.

1. The district bishop is expected to inform the Bishop Board Executive Committee of a congregation's or district's interest in considering a change in conference or denominational affiliation.

The Executive Committee will assign another bishop and/or Conference Minister to assist the district bishop in the discernment process. Executive Committee will report that assignment to the Bishop Board.

2. The role of the assisting bishop and/or Conference Minister will include:
 - representing Lancaster Conference in the discussions
 - reflecting the concerns of Lancaster Conference for due process
 - maintaining objectivity in the discussions
 - approving written communication to the congregation regarding the process
 - being present in congregational meetings and decision-making
 - keep the Bishop Board informed during the process
3. A written plan must be developed and distributed to all congregational members and shared with the Bishop Board Executive Committee. The written plan should include the following considerations:
 - a defined basis that gives reason for the consideration of the change of affiliation (*pastor and leadership team*)
 - a rationale for how the change could enhance the life and ministry of the congregation (*pastor and leadership team*)
 - a description of the process and level of resolve and healing to promote peace in the Spirit of Christ, if differences are factors in the decision (*bishop, assisting bishop, and conference minister*)
 - a clearly outlined description of the new structure, affiliation, and accountability (*pastor and leadership team*)
 - a plan addressing the handling of any material assets affected by this change (*bishop, assisting bishop, and conference minister*)
 - a plan for spiritual care for those preferring not to leave (*bishop, assisting bishop, and conference minister*)
 - The assisting bishop or conference minister will coordinate this process and compile the information into the written plan to be shared with the congregation and the Bishop Board Executive Committee.

4. The decision-making process shall include congregational meetings in which members are free to discuss the issues openly.
5. Any decision to change affiliation will require a 2/3 affirmative vote by the congregation, affirmation by the existing district leadership, and affirmation by the Bishop Board.
6. Any congregational decision to change affiliation shall be communicated by letter to the Bishop Board Executive Committee and signed by both the Pastor and Congregational Chairperson (or other recognized congregational leaders). Following Bishop Board acknowledgment of a congregation's decision to leave LMC, a period of up to three-months will be provided for another conference or credentialing body to request the transfer of their leader(s) credentials from LMC. If there is no request for a transfer during this three-month period, the credential will be terminated. Credentials will not be transferred to an individual congregation.
7. In those cases where a bishop, along with some or all of the congregations he oversees, is considering leaving LMC, the Bishop Board Executive Committee will appoint a bishop and/or Conference Minister to oversee congregational and district decision-making according to the above guidelines, as well as any discernment regarding potential oversight responsibilities of the leaving bishop. The resident bishop will continue to carry the usual oversight responsibilities in the district.`
8. Within twelve months of a congregation's decision to terminate affiliation with LMC, two persons representing the conference will seek to conduct an exit interview with the pastor and another member of the congregation. The interviewers should be conference leaders who had little or no involvement with the congregation's departure from the conference. The objective of this interview will be to listen carefully in order to obtain a clear summary of the congregation's perspective on the underlying issues, the process, and the outcome of the change in affiliation.

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