

# **Constitution of the Lancaster Conference of Mennonite Church USA**

## **Our Mission**

Lancaster Mennonite Conference  
is committed to the continuing  
work of Jesus Christ.

We gather in congregations  
to worship in Christ's name,  
to minister the grace  
of our Lord Jesus Christ  
to one another, and  
by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
to go forth as workers  
in God's kingdom.

We partner with a  
network of organizations  
to equip people for ministry,  
to exercise mutual care,  
and to extend God's salvation,  
healing, and hope to the world.

**Adopted by  
Lancaster Mennonite Conference  
Board of Bishops  
September 2000**

## PREAMBLE

The Lancaster Conference of Mennonite Church USA has emerged from the association of Mennonite congregations and ministry which began in Eastern Pennsylvania in the early 18th century.

Our Anabaptist ancestors in Europe adopted the “*Schleitheim Confession of Faith*” in 1527 and the “*Dordrecht Confession*” in 1632. In 1725, the “*Dordrecht Confession*” was adopted at a conference of Pennsylvania Mennonite Ministers.

As a Conference we accept the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 1995 which defines our basic understandings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. Congregations may choose instead to adopt either the 1921 “*Fundamentals of Christian Faith*” (Articles of Faith), or the 1963 “*Mennonite Confession of Faith*” as their guiding documents.

Believing that a statement outlining the offices and organizations, with their proper responsibilities and relationships, can be helpful in advancing the cause of Christ and his church, we do hereby adopt this Constitution on September 17, 1977.

Revised September 18, 1986

Reprinted 1989

Revised, September 20, 1990

Revised, September 1993

Reprinted 1995

Revised 1997

Revised 2005

## Article I. NAME

This organization of congregations and districts shall be known as the Lancaster Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA with the office and place of business at 2160 Lincoln Highway East, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, or at such other place as determined by the Conference Leadership Assembly.

## Article II. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the authority of the Word of God, shall be:

1. To assist the Conference congregations and their members in carrying out God's purpose for his church and to provide the necessary structures and administration;
2. To foster a full understanding of Christ-centered living in its membership, to the end that the unity of the church be preserved and fellowship between believers and between congregations be maintained;
3. To promote purity of doctrine and life among the membership;
4. To provide leadership and direction in the mission of the church, promoting church extension, and coordinating evangelistic activities;
5. To formulate guidelines for the exercise of brotherhood, peace, stewardship, and discipleship;
6. To provide opportunities for the leadership of our congregations and districts to fellowship and share together in times of worship, inspiration, and discussion of Biblical doctrines and issues relating to the work of the church.

## Article III. CONGREGATIONS

**Section 1: Purpose.** The congregation is a body of believers in Jesus Christ meeting for worship, fellowship, reconciliation, nurture, service and witness, admonition, and discipline. All that God intends the church to be and do must certainly be experienced in the local congregation.

**Section 2: Membership.** Persons who have a testimony of Christian conversion and who give evidence that they are in harmony with the faith and practice of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference may, with the approval of the congregation, become members of a congregation upon believer's baptism, upon confession of faith, or by church letter.

**Section 3: Relation to Conference.** A congregation is eligible to become a member of Lancaster Conference and to be represented in the Conference Leadership Assembly when it makes the following commitments:

1. Acceptance of and adherence to Biblical faith as expressed in the 1921 "Fundamentals of the Christian Faith," the *1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith* or the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995).
2. Willingness to participate in mutual fellowship and counsel with the Conference; and
3. Willingness to share responsibly with the Conference in its interest, prayers, personnel, and funds.

**Section 4: Relationship to the Denomination.** The primary external relationship of the congregation is to the conference. A secondary external relationship is to the denomination. All congregations are invited to participate in the life of the denomination, but choosing to abstain does not jeopardize the congregation's relationship to the conference.

**Section 5: Goals and Covenants.** Congregations are encouraged to develop goals and covenants to assist the members in a life of obedience to the Lordship of Christ and implementation of our Conference guidelines.

**Section 6: Leadership.** The ministry of the congregation will normally consist of minister(s), deacon(s), and the district bishop(s). [Some districts use the title “overseer” or “supervisor”. The title “bishop” as used in this document shall be understood to include those who function as bishop with the title of overseer or supervisor.]

In addition to normal preaching and pastoral duties, the ministry shall represent the congregation to the district and to the Conference Leadership Assembly. The congregation will organize to meet its goals and utilize the gifts of the congregation in worship, mutual sharing, and witness and service. The congregation is requested to send representatives to the Annual Meeting and district or Conference organizations.

**Section 7: Securing or Terminating Affiliation.** Any congregation desiring to become affiliated with the Lancaster Mennonite Conference shall submit such request to the Bishop Board. The Bishop Board shall consider for approval all such requests in consultation with the district involved and report to the Conference Leadership Assembly. Any request for disassociation with the Conference shall follow the same pattern, using the guidelines established by the Bishop Board.

## **Article IV: DISTRICTS**

### **Section 1: Purpose.**

1. To provide fellowship beyond the local congregation;
2. To broaden the base of Christian association and nurture for youth and other special interest groups;
3. To secure a stronger and more effective group for the operation of mutual aid and other service programs;
4. To provide broader resources for evangelism and outreach;
5. To gain efficiency in handling the financial responsibilities of the congregation, particularly to lend assistance to the smaller congregations;
6. To strengthen the opportunity of fellowship and counsel for pastors and provide strength and unity in teaching and discipline.

**Section 2: Membership.** Districts shall be made up of congregations which for geographical or other reasons of affinity, such as language or culture, find it advantageous to share together in fellowship, administration, and outreach.

Any new district arrangement must have the approval of the Bishop Board and the mutual consent of any existing districts which may be involved and shall be reported to the Conference Leadership Assembly.

**Section 3: Organization.** As units of the Conference, districts are responsible to carry forward their own programs and to expedite the recommendation and resolutions of the Conference Leadership Assembly. The ministry of the district shall meet regularly under the guidance of the bishop(s). The district shall:

1. Give guidance to the congregations in nurture, discipline, and unity of practice;
2. Give counsel for ordinations, licensing, and transfers by the authorization of the Bishop Board and in providing pastoral oversight of all congregations within the district;
3. Encourage, coordinate, and finance outreach programs beyond the strength of single congregations; and
4. Guide and administer the programs of the subsidiary organizations of the church on an intercongregational basis.
5. Implement the recommendations and resolutions of the Conference Leadership Assembly and the Bishop Board.

**Section 4: Relation to the Conference.** Districts shall:

1. Work faithfully to promote the organization, interest, and unity of the Conference within the congregations of the district; and
2. Fill all appointments to the boards and subsidiary organizations of the Conference as indicated by the constitutions of the Conference and its subsidiary organizations.

**Section 5. Relation to Bishop Board.** Each district shall be represented to the Bishop Board by their bishop(s) for mutual sharing.

## Article V. **BISHOP BOARD**

**Section 1: Purpose.** The Bishop Board shall meet for mutual fellowshiping, sharing, and for giving overall leadership to the spiritual life of the Conference, and to coordinate and give counsel to the districts of Conference.

**Section 2. Membership.** The Bishop Board consists of all the bishops from the districts in the Conference. Each active bishop has one vote in Bishop Board. Whether active or retired, bishops shall have voting privileges in groups in which they serve as Bishop Board or Conference appointees.

**Section 3. Organization.** The Bishop Board shall be the Executive Board of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference and shall organize itself for the carrying out of its responsibilities by the election of the following officers: moderator, assistant moderator, secretary, and treasurer. Other standing or temporary committees may be appointed as necessary from time to time. The officers of the Bishop Board (*ARTICLE VI, Section 6*) shall have four-year staggered terms and may be reelected, with one elected each year by secret ballot, majority vote.

The active members of the Bishop Board present in a duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum to do business. When less than two-thirds (66 2/3%) of the active bishops present vote, the motion shall be lost. Four-fifths (80%) of the Bishop Board voting shall give an affirmative vote before items are brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly for ratification. Elections shall be by plurality vote. All other actions and decisions shall be by a two-thirds (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of those voting.

Staff persons may be appointed and/or employed as necessary to implement the work of Conference and its programs. Their duties should be clearly outlined by the Conference Officers.

**Section 4: Meetings.** The bishops shall normally meet monthly. Special meetings may be called by the Officers of Conference or by the request of one-third (33 1/3%) of the active membership of the Bishop Board.

**Section 5: Executive Committee.** The Bishop Board shall have an Executive Committee consisting of the officers of the Bishop Board and three bishops elected by the Board. The additional members shall have three-year staggered terms and may be reelected. The Executive Committee shall act on behalf of and make recommendations to the Bishop Board. Their work shall be reported to and approved by the Bishop Board. The Executive Committee may employ a Conference Coordinator, a Conference Minister and other staff as required to carry out its work. Staff members, administrators and officers of conference agencies shall not be eligible to be a member of the Bishop Board Executive Committee.

The Conference Coordinator shall coordinate activities of the Conference and implement the actions of the Executive Committee and the Bishop Board.

The Conference Minister shall, as requested, assist the bishops in personnel and credentialing matters, especially as related to working with other conferences or the denomination, shall assist in resolving congregational or leadership difficulties, or in other matters of conference life as requested.

**Section 6: Other Committees.** The following committees are appointed by the Bishop Board and are directly responsible to them:

1. The **Religious Welfare Committee** and **Conference Advisory Committees** are appointed to represent Bishop Board and Conference concerns to Philhaven and Lancaster Mennonite Schools, respectively;
2. The **Finance Committee** is responsible to review departmental board budgets, to prepare a suggested offering schedule for the congregations, and to make recommendations to the Bishop Board in fiscal matters.
3. **Other committees** may be appointed as deemed necessary.

## **Article VI. CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP ASSEMBLY**

**Section 1: Purpose.** The Conference Leadership Assembly shall:

1. Provide an opportunity for fellowship, inspiration, and spiritual challenge;
2. Promote unity in discipleship and administration;
3. Assist districts and congregations in defining faith and practice;
4. Serve as a forum to share concerns, suggestions, etc. for the life of the church;
5. Recognize: new church plants; the transition from church plant status to that of congregation; the transferring of congregations into or out of the conference; and, the transferring into or out of the conference of credentials of individuals from or to other conferences.
6. Adopt statements on current issues for distribution to the congregations;
7. Serve as channel of communication between conference congregations and churchwide boards and programs;
8. Serve as the governing body of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference for legal purposes.

**Section 2: Membership.** Each bishop, minister, deacon, deaconess, and chaplain, ordained or licensed, whose ministry is recognized by Lancaster Mennonite Conference, shall be a member of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Conference Leadership Assembly members in continuing congregational or institutional staff assignments shall be considered as active members. Each active member shall have one vote in the Conference Leadership Assembly.

**Section 3: Meetings.** The Conference Leadership Assembly shall normally convene semi-annually, the third Friday in March and the third Friday in September, at a place designated by the Bishop Board. The program of the Conference Leadership Assembly shall be prepared by a planning committee and approved by the Bishop Board.

**Section 4: Quorum.** The active Conference Leadership Assembly members present in a duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum to transact Assembly business.

**Section 5: Duties.** Conference Leadership Assembly members shall:

1. Represent their congregations to Conference Leadership Assembly;
2. Interpret the Conference Leadership Assembly work, reports, and program to their congregations;
3. Participate in the fellowship, discussion, and decision making at all Conference Leadership Assembly sessions; and
4. Give their attention and best judgment to all matters brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly and render their decisions according to the principles of Scripture and the convictions of the constituency which they represent, not simply on the basis of personal preference.

**Section 6: Officers.** The moderator, assistant moderator, secretary, and treasurer, elected by the Bishop Board, shall be the Officers of the Conference Leadership Assembly and shall preside at this Conference Leadership Assembly.

**Section 7: Elections and Decisions.** Recommendations brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly by the Bishop Board for official action shall be ratified by a two-third (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of those voting. Leadership Assembly elections to the Conference or agency committees or boards shall be by plurality vote. Other Leadership Assembly decisions shall be by two-third (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of those voting. Absentee ballots, with slates and proposed actions, shall be made available to all active credentialed members of Conference at least two weeks prior to the day of Conference Leadership Assembly. The Conference office shall receive signed absentee ballots by close of business the day prior to Conference Leadership Assembly for them to be counted as valid ballots. For any item introduced on the Assembly floor or with less than the requisite two week notice, three-fourth (75%) affirmative vote of those voting shall be required for passage.

## **Article VII. AGENCIES AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS**

**Section 1: Purpose and Membership.** The work and witness of the Conference shall be directed by the following conference agencies which are accountable to their own governing boards and accountable to LMC as provided in Section 2, below:

1. **Eastern Mennonite Missions** - EMM equips, sends, and supports workers in global witness and service in the way of Christ;
2. **Friendship Community** – Friendship Community is a Christian ministry supporting people with developmental disabilities in Lancaster County and surrounding counties. The vision of Friendship Community is to be a community which affirms the worth of all people, responds to families and individuals seeking a Christian program, supports personal growth and wholeness, advocates for community and church inclusion, and provides opportunities for spiritual growth and service.
3. **Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society** – The mission of LMHS is to provide an educational program focused on the collection, preservation, and interpretation of books, manuscripts, and artifacts related to the historical background, religious thought and expression, culture, and family history of Mennonite and Amish-related groups originating in Pennsylvania.
4. **Lancaster Mennonite Schools** – LMS exists to provide an excellent K-12 education in a nurturing environment that prepares students for lifelong learning and invites them to personal faith, Christlike witness, peacemaking and service in a global society.
5. **Landis Homes** - The ministry of Landis Homes is to serve aging adults and their families by honoring and enriching their lives in a community of Christ-like love
6. **Philhaven** - As an expression of Christ's love, Philhaven strives to improve the mental health of the residents of our service area by: providing services which promote hope, healing and reconciliation; encouraging a healthy relationship with self, others and God; responding creatively to the needs of those we serve; and working collaboratively with others
7. **Sharing Programs** - It shall be the mission of Sharing Programs of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference to assist the Anabaptist family of churches in caring, sharing, and burden bearing. All activities and programs shall be planned with the goals of exemplifying Christ and fostering spiritual sensitivity to God and one another

**Section 2: Organization.** Each Conference agency shall have governing documents such as articles of incorporation and bylaws. Any changes to such governing documents shall become effective only after consideration by the Bishop Board Executive Committee and approval by the Bishop Board.

**Section 3: Other:** Other LMC fraternal organizations (**Camp Deerpark, Camp Hebron, Day Seven Ministries, Garden Spot Village, Harmonies Workshop, Mennonite Home Communities, No Longer Alone Ministries, VisionCare Ethiopia and Welsh Mountain Home**) and Conference-related organizations such as **Mennonite Women, and Lancaster Area Council of Mennonite Schools**, support the work of Conference.

## Article VIII. CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING

**Section 1: Purpose.** There shall be a meeting annually of representatives of each congregation of Lancaster Mennonite Conference to serve the following functions:

1. To report the work of each of the conference agencies;
2. To provide an occasion for the constituency to respond to and give counsel to the programs of the Conference;
3. To provide a channel for communication between congregations and agencies and the staff who carry out the programs;
4. To provide for teaching and discussion related to issues and priorities before the church;
5. To provide opportunity for fellowship; and
6. To elect persons to the boards of agencies and Conference-related fraternal organizations of the Conference, as requested.

**Section 2: Conference Congregational Representatives.** Each congregation that is a member of Lancaster Mennonite Conference is requested to send representatives to the Conference Annual Meeting. Congregations may send three representatives for the first 150 members or less, and an additional person for each additional 150 members or fraction thereof. At least one of the congregational representatives shall be an ordained or licensed person. In addition, all bishops are representatives.

**Section 3: Organization.** The moderator and assistant moderator of the Bishop Board shall function as moderators of the Annual Meeting sessions. The Moderator and Secretary of the Bishop Board, the Conference Coordinator, three persons elected by the Annual Meeting delegates, and additional co-opted members shall plan the Annual Meeting with the approval of the Bishop Board Executive Committee.

**Section 4: Meeting.** The Annual Meeting, known as “Celebration of Church Life”, shall be held each spring in connection with the spring sessions of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Special efforts shall be made to keep primary emphasis on witnessing, disciple-making and missions in these Conference Annual Meetings.

## Article IX. RELATIONSHIPS

The Lancaster Mennonite Conference seeks to relate in responsible ways with Mennonite Church USA. Lancaster Conference and its congregations are eligible to send delegates to the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly and to churchwide organizations calling for representation.

The Lancaster Mennonite Conference also welcomes continued relationships and exchange with overseas churches, giving and receiving counsel. Fraternal delegates are invited to attend Conference sessions and to visit congregations.

## Article X. DISSOLUTION

Should the organization be dissolved, and after provision has been made for payment of all the liabilities of the organization, all of the assets of the organization shall be disposed of exclusively for the purposes of the organization in such manner, or to such organization or organizations organized and operated exclusively for charitable or religious purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as amended. The recipients of such assets to be distributed shall be selected by those bishops, active and retired, who have served Lancaster Conference for at least ten (10) years as bishop.

## **Article XI. AMENDMENTS**

This Constitution may be altered or amended by a three-fourth (75%) affirmative vote of those members of the Conference Leadership Assembly casting votes. Signed absentee ballots shall be permissible (as above). Proposed amendments must be previously approved by the Bishop Board and the substance of the proposed change shall be distributed to each member of the Conference Leadership Assembly at least 30 days before a meeting of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Without such notice, however, a proposed amendment may be passed if there is a nine-tenth (90%) affirmative vote of the active members present at the Conference Leadership Assembly.