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Constitution of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference

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.

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Adopted by
Lancaster Mennonite Conference
Board of Bishops
September 2000

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PREAMBLE

Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC) formally 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 also 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
Revised 2017

85 **Article I. NAME**

86 This organization of congregations and districts shall be known as the Lancaster Mennonite Conference
87 with the office and place of business at 2160 Lincoln Highway East, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, or at such
88 other place as determined by the Conference Executive Council.
89

90 **Article II. PURPOSE**

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

- 93 1. To assist the Conference congregations and their members in carrying out God’s purpose for his
94 church and to provide the necessary structures and administration;
95
96 2. To foster a full understanding of Christ-centered living in its membership, to the end that the unity of
97 the church be preserved and fellowship between believers and between congregations be maintained;
98
99 3. To promote purity of doctrine and life among the membership;
100
101 4. To provide leadership and direction in the mission of the church, promoting church extension, and
102 coordinating evangelistic activities;
103
104 5. To formulate guidelines for the exercise of brotherhood, peace, stewardship, and discipleship;
105
106 6. To provide opportunities for the leadership of our congregations and districts to fellowship and share
107 together in times of worship, inspiration, and discussion of Biblical doctrines and issues relating to
108 the work of the church.
109

110 **Article III. CONGREGATIONS**

111 **Section 1: Purpose.** The congregation is a body of believers in Jesus Christ meeting for worship,
112 fellowship, reconciliation, nurture, service and witness, admonition, and discipline. All that God
113 intends the church to be and do must certainly be experienced in the local congregation.
114
115

116 **Section 2: Membership.** Persons who have a testimony of Christian conversion and who give evidence
117 that they are in harmony with the faith and practice of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference may, with the
118 approval of the congregation, become members of a congregation upon believer’s baptism, upon
119 confession of faith, or by church letter.
120

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

- 124 1. Acceptance of and adherence to Biblical faith as expressed in the 1921 “Fundamentals of the
125 Christian Faith,” the *1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith* or the *Confession of Faith in a*
126 *Mennonite Perspective* (1995).
127 2. Willingness to participate in mutual fellowship and counsel with the Conference; and
128 3. Willingness to share responsibly with the Conference in its interest, prayers, personnel, and funds.
129

130 **Section 4: Relationship to the Extended Mennonite Church.** The primary external relationship of the
131 congregation is to the conference. Secondary external relationships may be formed to other parts of the
132 extended Mennonite church. All congregations are invited to network with other Mennonite churches and
133 organizations in ways that complement the mission and vision of Lancaster Mennonite Conference.
134

135 **Section 5: Goals and Covenants.** Congregations are encouraged to develop goals and covenants to

136 assist the members in a life of obedience to the Lordship of Christ and implementation of our Conference
137 guidelines.

138
139 **Section 6: Leadership.** The ministry of the congregation will normally consist of minister(s), deacon(s),
140 and the district bishop(s). [Some districts use the title “overseer” or “supervisor”. The title “bishop” as
141 used in this document shall be understood to include those who function as bishop with the title of
142 overseer or supervisor.]
143

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

149
150 **Section 7: Securing or Terminating Affiliation.** Any congregation desiring to become affiliated with
151 the Lancaster Mennonite Conference shall submit such request to the Bishop Board. The Bishop Board
152 shall consider for approval all such requests in consultation with the district involved and report to the
153 Conference Leadership Assembly. Any request for disassociation with the Conference shall follow the
154 same pattern, using the guidelines established by the Bishop Board.
155

156 **Article IV: DISTRICTS**

157
158 **Section 1: Purpose.**

- 159 1. To provide fellowship beyond the local congregation;
- 160 2. To broaden the base of Christian association and nurture for youth and other special interest groups;
- 161 3. To secure a stronger and more effective group for the operation of mutual aid and other service
162 programs;
- 163 4. To provide broader resources for evangelism and outreach;
- 164 5. To gain efficiency in handling the financial responsibilities of the congregation, particularly to lend
165 assistance to the smaller congregations;
- 166 6. To strengthen the opportunity of fellowship, training and counsel for leaders and provide
167 strength and unity in teaching and discipleship.
168

169 **Section 2: Membership.** Districts shall be made up of congregations which for geographical or other
170 reasons of affinity, such as language or culture, find it advantageous to share together in fellowship,
171 administration, and outreach.
172

173 Any new district arrangement must have the approval of the Bishop Board and the mutual consent of any
174 existing districts which may be involved and shall be reported to the Conference Leadership Assembly.
175

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

- 180 1. Give guidance to the congregations in formation, mission and discipleship;
- 181 2. Give counsel for ordinations, licensing, and transfers by the authorization of the Bishop Board and in
182 providing pastoral oversight of all congregations within the district;
- 183 3. Encourage, coordinate, and finance outreach programs beyond the strength of single congregations;
- 184 4. Guide and administer the programs of the subsidiary organizations of the church on an inter-
185 congregational basis;

186 5. Implement the recommendations and resolutions of the Conference Leadership Assembly and the
187 Bishop Board.
188

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

- 190 1. Work faithfully to promote the organization, mission and unity of the Conference within the
191 congregations of the district; and
- 192 2. Assist in finding persons qualified to serve on the boards and subsidiary organizations of the
193 Conference as indicated by the constitutions of the Conference and its subsidiary organizations.
194

195 **Section 5. Relation to Bishop Board.** Each district shall be represented to the Bishop Board by
196 their bishop(s) for mutual sharing.
197

198 **Article V. BISHOP BOARD**

199
200 **Section 1: Purpose.** The Bishop Board shall meet for mutual fellowshiping, sharing, and for giving
201 overall leadership to the spiritual life of the Conference, and to coordinate and give counsel to the districts
202 of Conference. Individual bishops are responsible for the missional engagement and the spiritual health of
203 leaders and congregations under their oversight.
204

205 **Section 2. Membership.** The Bishop Board consists of all the bishops from the districts in the
206 Conference. Each active bishop has one vote in Bishop Board. Whether active or retired, bishops shall
207 have voting privileges in groups in which they serve as Bishop Board or Conference appointees.
208

209 **Section 3. Organization.** The Bishop Board shall organize itself for the carrying out of its
210 responsibilities by the election of the following officers: moderator, assistant moderator, secretary, and
211 treasurer. Other standing or temporary committees may be appointed as necessary from time to time. The
212 officers of the Bishop Board (*ARTICLE VI, Section 6*) shall have four-year staggered terms and may be
213 reelected, with one elected each year by secret ballot, majority vote.
214

215 The active members of the Bishop Board present in a duly announced meeting shall constitute a quorum
216 to do business. When less than two-thirds (66 2/3%) of the active bishops present vote, the motion shall
217 be lost. Four-fifths (80%) of the Bishop Board voting shall give an affirmative vote before items are
218 brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly for ratification. Elections shall be by plurality vote. All
219 other actions and decisions shall be by a two-thirds (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of those voting.
220
221

222 **Section 4: Meetings.** The bishops shall normally meet bi-monthly. Special meetings may be called by
223 the Officers of Conference or by the request of one-third (33 1/3%) of the active membership of the
224 Bishop Board.
225

226 **Section 5: Conference Executive Council.** The Conference shall have a Conference Executive Council
227 consisting of the officers of the Bishop Board and six to eight credentialed members of Conference
228 (including three bishops), all elected by the Bishop Board. Members other than the officers of the Bishop
229 Board shall have three-year staggered terms and may be reelected. The Conference Executive Council
230 shall act on behalf of the Conference Leadership Assembly and shall serve as the governing body of the
231 Conference between sessions of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Their work shall be reported to
232 and reviewed by the Bishop Board. The Conference Executive Council may employ a Conference
233 Minister and other staff as required to carry out its work. Staff members, administrators and officers of
234 conference agencies shall not be eligible to be members of the Conference Executive Council.
235
236

237 The Conference Minister shall, as requested, assist the bishops in personnel and credentialing matters,
238 especially as related to working with other conferences or denominations, shall assist in resolving

239 congregational or leadership difficulties, or in other matters of conference life as requested.

240

241 **Section 6: Other Commissions, Committees and Task Forces.**

242

243 1. The **Credentialing Commission** is appointed by and responsible to the Bishop Board to issue
244 credentials, provide training opportunities for emerging leaders, monitor continuing education of
245 credentialed leaders, and monitor the requirements of government laws and regulations. Regular
246 reports shall be provided to the Bishop Board of their activities.

247 2. The **Finance Committee** is appointed by and responsible to the Conference Executive Council to
248 review departmental board budgets, to prepare a suggested offering schedule for the congregations,
249 and to make recommendations to the Conference Executive Council in fiscal matters.

250 3. **Other Committees and Task Forces** may be appointed as deemed necessary.

251

252 **Article VI. CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP ASSEMBLY**

253

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

255 1. Provide an opportunity for fellowship, inspiration, and spiritual challenge;

256 2. Promote unity in discipleship and administration;

257 3. Assist districts and congregations in defining faith and practice;

258 4. Serve as a forum to share concerns, suggestions, etc. for the life of the church;

259 5. Recognize: new church plants; the transition from church plant status to that of congregation; the
260 transferring of congregations into or out of the conference; and, the transferring into or out of the
261 conference of credentials of individuals from or to other conferences.

262 6. Adopt statements on current issues for distribution to the congregations;

263 7. Serve as channel of communication between conference congregations and church-wide boards and
264 programs;

265 8. Serve as the governing body of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference for legal purposes.

266

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

272

273 **Section 3: Meetings.** The Conference Leadership Assembly shall normally convene semi-annually, at a
274 place designated by the Conference Executive Council. The program of the Conference Leadership
275 Assembly shall be prepared under the oversight of the Conference Executive Council.

276

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

279

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

281 1. Represent their congregations to Conference Leadership Assembly;

282 2. Interpret the Conference Leadership Assembly work, reports, and program to their congregations;

283 3. Participate in the fellowship, discussion, and decision-making at all Conference Leadership
284 Assembly sessions; and

285 4. Give their attention and best judgment to all matters brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly
286 and render their decisions according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in and through principles of
287 Scripture and the convictions of the constituency which they represent, and not simply on the basis

288 of personal preference or inclination.

289
290 **Section 6: Officers.** The moderator, assistant moderator, secretary, and treasurer, elected by the Bishop
291 Board, shall be the Officers of the Conference Leadership Assembly and shall preside at the Conference
292 Leadership Assembly.

293
294 **Section 7: Elections and Decisions.** Recommendations brought to the Conference Leadership Assembly
295 by the Bishop Board for official action shall be ratified by a two-third (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of those
296 voting. Leadership Assembly elections to the Conference or agency committees or boards shall be by
297 plurality vote. Other Leadership Assembly decisions shall be by two-third (66 2/3%) affirmative vote of
298 those voting. Absentee ballots, with slates and proposed actions, shall be made available to all active
299 credentialed members of Conference at least two weeks prior to the day of Conference Leadership
300 Assembly. The Conference office shall receive signed absentee ballots by close of business the day prior
301 to Conference Leadership Assembly for them to be counted as valid ballots. For any item introduced on
302 the Assembly floor or with less than the requisite two week notice, three-fourth (75%) affirmative vote of
303 those voting shall be required for passage.

304 305 **Article VII. AGENCIES AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS**

306
307 **Section 1: Purpose and Membership.** The work and witness of the Conference shall be aided by the
308 following conference agencies which are accountable to their own governing boards and accountable to
309 LMC as provided in Section 2, below:

- 310
311 1. **Eastern Mennonite Missions** - EMM equips, sends, and supports workers in global witness and
312 service in the way of Christ;
- 313 2. **Friendship Community** – Friendship Community is a Christian ministry supporting people with
314 developmental disabilities in Lancaster County and surrounding counties. The vision of Friendship
315 Community is to be a community which affirms the worth of all people, responds to families and
316 individuals seeking a Christian program, supports personal growth and wholeness, advocates for
317 community and church inclusion, and provides opportunities for spiritual growth and service.
- 318 3. **Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society** – The mission of LMHS is to provide an educational
319 program focused on the collection, preservation, and interpretation of books, manuscripts, and
320 artifacts related to the historical background, religious thought and expression, culture, and family
321 history of Mennonite and Amish-related groups originating in Pennsylvania.
- 322 4. **LMC Legacy Foundation** -
- 323 [5. **Sharing Programs** - Sharing Programs, while technically still a conference agency, is in the final
324 stages of being closed. Upon formal closure this paragraph will be removed without further action
325 required.]

326
327 **Section 2: Organization.** Each Conference agency shall have governing documents such as articles of
328 incorporation and bylaws. Any changes to such governing documents shall become effective only after
329 consideration by the Bishop Board and approval by the Conference Executive Council.

330
331 *[The following Section is not part of the Constitution and is attached as Memoranda that will be*
332 *updated periodically. It is current as of March 31, 2017]*

333
334 Other LMC fraternal organizations include (**Black Rock Retreat, Camp Deerpark, Camp Hebron,**
335 **Choice Books, , Garden Spot Village, Harmonies Workshop, Jubilee Ministries, Kairos, Lancaster**
336 **Mennonite School, Landis Communities, Mennonite Home Communities, New Person Ministries,**
337 **No Longer Alone Ministries, River of Hope, and The Potter’s House**) and Conference-related
338 organizations such as **Mennonite Women, and Lancaster Area Council of Mennonite Schools,** support

339 the work of Conference.]
340

341 **Article VIII. CONFERENCE ANNUAL MEETING**

342
343 **Section 1: Purpose.** There shall be a meeting annually of representatives of each congregation of
344 Lancaster Mennonite Conference to serve the following functions:

- 345
- 346 1. To celebrate missional activity in conference congregations.
 - 347 2. To highlight the work of each of the conference agencies, fraternal organizations and other
348 conference-related organizations;
 - 349 3. To provide an occasion for the constituency to respond to and give counsel to the programs of the
350 Conference;
 - 351 4. To provide a channel for communication between congregations and agencies and the staff who
352 carry out the programs;
 - 353 5. To provide for teaching and discussion related to issues and priorities before the church;
 - 354 6. To provide opportunity for fellowship.
- 355

356 **Section 2: Conference Congregational Representatives.** Each congregation that is a member of
357 Lancaster Mennonite Conference is encouraged to send representatives to the Conference Annual
358 Meeting. While the Annual Meeting is designed for credentialed and lay leaders and members of LMC
359 congregations, it is open to the general public.

360
361 **Section 3: Organization.** The moderator and assistant moderator of the Bishop Board shall oversee the
362 Annual Meeting sessions. The Annual Meeting program shall be planned under the joint oversight of the
363 Bishop Board and the Conference Executive Council.

364
365 **Section 4: Meeting.** The Annual Meeting, known as “Celebration of Church Life”, shall be held each
366 spring in connection with the spring sessions of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Special efforts
367 shall be made to keep primary emphasis on witnessing, disciple-making and missions in these Conference
368 Annual Meetings.

369

370 **Article IX. RELATIONSHIPS**

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372
373 The Lancaster Mennonite Conference seeks to relate in responsible ways with other conferences and non-
374 LMC organizations where such relationships can be mutually beneficial and serve to enhance the ministry
375 and mission of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. Such relationships may be formalized by the execution
376 of a Memo of Understanding or other similar document.

377
378 The Lancaster Mennonite Conference also welcomes continued relationships and exchange with overseas
379 churches, giving and receiving counsel. Fraternal delegates are invited to attend Conference sessions and
380 to visit congregations.

381

382 **Article X. DISSOLUTION**

383
384 Should the organization be dissolved, and after provision has been made for payment of all the liabilities
385 of the organization, all of the assets of the organization shall be disposed of exclusively for the purposes
386 of the organization in such manner, or to such organization or organizations organized and operated
387 exclusively for charitable or religious purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or
388 organizations under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as amended. The recipients

389 of such assets to be distributed shall be selected by those bishops, active and retired, who have served
390 Lancaster Mennonite Conference for at least ten (10) years as bishop.

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392

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Article XI. AMENDMENTS

394

395 This Constitution may be altered or amended by a three-fourth (75%) affirmative vote of those members
396 of the Conference Leadership Assembly casting votes. Signed absentee ballots shall be permissible (as
397 above). Proposed amendments must be previously approved by the Bishop Board and the substance of
398 the proposed change shall be distributed to each member of the Conference Leadership Assembly at least
399 30 days before a meeting of the Conference Leadership Assembly. Without such notice, however, a
400 proposed amendment may be passed if there is a nine-tenth (90%) affirmative vote of the active members
401 present at the Conference Leadership Assembly.

402