

1 ORIGINAL

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3
4 Credentialing Review Document for Mountain States Mennonite Conference (MSMC)

5 January 31, 2018

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7 Background and Rationale

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9 While following the same polity manual, different conferences within MCUSAMC USA are arriving at
10 differing answers to the question of who is eligible for credentialing. In light of these tensions, the
11 Leadership Board of MSMC appointed a credentialing review committee in 2016 to consider our
12 current credentialing process. This credentialing review committee considered a functional
13 understanding of what it means to be in relational accountability responsible mutual relationship with
14 one another, by seeking to embody the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and remain consistent with Biblical and
15 Anabaptist teachings and practices – through study, prayer and discernment. The committee
16 considered how views of credentials are changing within our context and among generations. The
17 committee reviewed its credentialing process with the goal of outlining a way that fits MSMC’s context
18 in this moment while providing a bridge toward our future.

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20 At the annual assembly in August 2017 the credentialing review committee presented a draft to the
21 delegates for approval that led to follow up discussion. Their draft was also discussed at
22 Pastor/Spouse in November 2017, was distributed to all MSMC pastoral ministers for response and
23 was discussed with the Ministerial Council. This document from CMT represents revisions based on
24 feedback from these forums and represents the current working document of the CMT and MC.

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26 We sought to uphold these understandings in our process:

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- We wish is to strengthen congregational and calling bodies participation in this process of
28 granting, accountability, and “holding” of credentials;
 - We seek to honor setting apart persons with a credential for ministry and the understanding
29 that we are all gifted with spiritual gifting as a part of the “priesthood of all believers”;
 - We desire strong relationships between those who are credentialed, the calling bodies and the
30 Conference;
 - We desire to expand the understanding of who may be credentialed while increasing the
31 opportunity for relational accountability among the Conference, congregations/requesting
32 bodies and credentialed leaders. We believe this model will assist us in this time of transition
33 in our churches and denomination to expand our concept of who is a spiritual leader while also
34 holding relational accountability to a high standard.
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40 Premises

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1. We start with the credentialing processes as defined by Mennonite Church USA’s *“A Shared
42 Understanding of Ministerial Leadership” (2017)*¹ as our guideline. We understand that in our
43 denominational system, the Conference is the credentialing body.
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¹ This document has Biblical foundations and understandings for the call of a pastor. Throughout the
text it works collaboratively and in partnership with *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*
(1995).

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2. The congregation and the Conference share in granting of credentials and accountability of credentialed pastors. The Conference confers and “holds” these credentials at the request of the calling congregation. Therefore, those credentialed are accountable to both their calling/home congregation and the conference of which the congregation is a member.
 3. Credentialing serves as an affirmation, validation, and recognition of a call to ministry and spiritual leadership. The ministerial credential also provides professional recognition.
 4. At times a member congregation may call a pastor or other spiritual leader with different views than others in the Conference or the denomination. These views usuallypresumably fit with the calling congregation. Deference is given to the discernment of the congregation unless there is evidence of harm caused to the calling body or a history of ethical violationsit appears there are concerns (1) the congregation is not adequately considering² the affect of its decision on the congregation, conference and broader denomination, or (2) there are ethical issues or evidence of misconduct that the congregation is not adequately considering.
 5. “Relational accountability”Engaging in responsible mutual relationship by proximity is an important part of the character and function of MSMC. In our by-laws we have outlined practical ways for our congregations to be in relational accountability with one another. However, we have not outlined similar expectations for credentialed members of MSMC. With the proposal as stated below, we recognize the value of developing a resilient community by nurturing relationships that can sustain conflict and differences. To this end we encourage nurturing healthy and vibrant relationships between congregations as well as between other ministry leadership of conference congregations.
 6. The Conference grants credentials not only to pastors, but also to chaplains, and other persons in ministry. The Conference Ministerial Council is open to requests for credentialing for folks from member congregations who are involved in special ministries with continuing support from their congregation. Accountability in these cases is shared both by the institution that employs them (if applicable) and their home congregation.

77 **We propose the following:**
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80 MSMC Plan 81

- 82 1. MSMC leadership provides resources and training to congregational leadership and search
83 committees in the context of identifying and hiring a pastoral candidate for a congregational
84 call. This support includes utilizing all the resources, support and vetting provided by MC USA;
85 thus, reinforcing the congregation’s relational mutual responsibility within MSMC and MC USA.
86 As part of this process, all candidates are required to complete the MLI, to agree that a
87 background check be performed, and cooperate with the reference-gathering process until the

² Our denominational accountability involves consideration of how our decisions affect the broader church. For example, see *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership* pages 33 and 56.

88 MLI process is complete. This is true even when a person holds a credential in another
89 denomination.

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91 2. MSMC acts as the direct relational mutual responsible contact for MC USA. Congregations are
92 encouraged to contact their Conference Minister upon learning of an opening of a pastoral
93 position. Conference Ministers will make contact with the Ministerial Council with questions or
94 as they see fit during the search and interview of candidate process. Conference Ministers
95 serve as a guide to congregational Search Committees through the interviewing and hiring
96 process, and for assistance to the congregation in taking credentialing steps (licensing,
97 ordination, installation).

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99 1.3. A congregational or organizational representative will be present for part of the
100 credentialing interview and will take ownership for implementation of any follow up
101 recommendations by the MSMC Ministerial Council.

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103 2.4. Each ~~active~~ credentialed leader will in active ministry is expected to:

- 104 a. Participate in Healthy Boundary Training³, as well as subsequent refresher training,
105 hosted by MSMC with the option of submitting a request for a waiver to the
106 Ministerial Council should their place of employment already offer a similar
107 training;
- 108 b. Participate in one yearly continuing education opportunity provided by the
109 Conference;
- 110 c. Attend at least 2 of the regional pastor gatherings per year or 1 group set up for
111 your ministry focus (like chaplaincy) per year. Respect and engage with the counsel
112 of the gathering of other ministers in the group;
- 113 d. Make attending the pastorspastors' retreat, Annual Assembly and the Faith and Life
114 Forum(s) a priority;
- 115 e. Be in regular conversation with their Conference minister or submit a personal
116 formation plan (especially in the case of being employed outside a congregational
117 context);
- 118 f. Utilize comparable forums as arranged in collaboration with the Conference
119 Minister in situations where geography or other reasons which may compromise
120 the ability to comply with the above expectations.

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122 3.5. The Conference will set up forums for persons in different ministry situations to share
123 and support each other, including provision of information and opportunities for continuing
124 education.

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126 5.6. Because relational ~~accountability~~ mutual responsibility is crucial, credentials will be
127 moved from active to inactive if a credentialed person experiences a period of time without a
128 call. The credential can be reinstated when this changes. This follows the procedure
129 articulated in our *“Shared Understanding of Church Ministerial Leadership.”*

³ Ministers are held accountable to broad ethical standards supported by guidelines such as can be
found on the following links: <http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct/> and
[http://mennoniteusa.org/news/ministerial-sexual-misconduct-policy-procedure-provides-updated-](http://mennoniteusa.org/news/ministerial-sexual-misconduct-policy-procedure-provides-updated-process-church/)
[process-church/](http://mennoniteusa.org/news/ministerial-sexual-misconduct-policy-procedure-provides-updated-process-church/).