

Proposed Central Plains Mennonite Conference Unity Process

*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me
and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:23b*

At the formation of Central Plains Mennonite Conference (CPMC), two families of congregations with a rich shared heritage of Christian commitment, Biblical discipleship and Anabaptist faith were joined together. With such a major change and a denominational merger taking place, it was natural to focus on differences between congregations. At times our concern with being faithful to Scripture led to mistrust between those of differing views, thus hampering our common mission and work together.

In 2009, the Conference Council appointed the Unity Task Group to recommend ways “to preserve and enhance our unity so that we can be the church of Jesus Christ together, even though we do not agree on everything.” The Unity Task Group, representing a broad spectrum of Mennonite experience and theology, gathered to explore and embody that unity. Together we discovered our deep yearning for living, breathing, growing relationships that embody Jesus’ hope for the world.

We now invite the congregations of CPMC to be enriched by our differences as well as our unity, living together in ways that empower our fellowship, worship, and mission. In the same spirit as the early church, recorded in Acts, which was not deterred from spreading the gospel by its internal disputes, we of CPMC can fulfill our common mission with a spirit of unity and shared commitment.

To foster cooperative work and positive relationships within CPMC, the Unity Task Group proposes that delegates to the annual meeting take the following actions:

1. Agree that the essential unity of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is summarized by four affirmations:
 - a. Jesus is Lord
 - b. Scripture is authoritative
 - c. The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective guides us
 - d. We prayerfully seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance

Agreement with these affirmations, by congregations and individuals, defines the basis for rich fellowship and full membership in the conference.

2. Ask Conference Council (or its successor) to organize a process that fosters understanding between churches with different ministry contexts and viewpoints, placing special emphasis on

finding unity and strength in diversity. Activities to encourage and strengthen relationships between congregations throughout the conference might include:

- a. Shared mission, service work, and fellowship
- b. Bible study and worship
- c. Opportunities for joint conversation and Biblical discernment that acknowledge and celebrate our diversity of experience, missional context, and hermeneutical understandings

3. Reserve the use of the variance policy for serious violations of the four “unity affirmations” listed above for a period of three years. After three years Conference Council (or its successor) will conduct a review of the conference's experience to consider and determine what our unity and variance policies shall be in the future.

We ask each other to be the living fulfillment of Jesus' prayer (John 17:23b) by doing the hard work of remaining in relationship even when we disagree.

The Unity Task Group also agrees that the variance policy, as it has been applied to Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship for nearly seven years, has not achieved its stated redemptive goal or stimulated meaningful dialogue, which might reasonably be expected to lead to that end. Therefore, in addition to the actions proposed above, the Unity Task Group recommends that Saint Paul Mennonite Fellowship be removed from provisional status and be reinstated to full membership in Central Plains Mennonite Conference in the hope of restoring open conversation and moving our conference toward a unity of the Spirit.

Submitted by the Unity Task Group May 12, 2010:

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Endorsed by Conference Council with gratitude to the task group and to God. May 15, 2010