

## A worship litany for use with the Central Plains covenant study

### Background can be shared before the reading:

What are the roots and reasons that birthed the Covenant of Spiritual Practices for Central Plains Mennonite Conference and its aim to maintain our unity through belief and practice?

We know a majority of Central Plains' pastors value unity where we disagree. This is something we should recognize and celebrate.

However, our value of unity doesn't mean we always know how to 'maintain this unity in the bond of peace.' Currently, our conference and denominational by-laws refer to beliefs we hold in common. Commonly held beliefs are essential for maintaining communal identity.

It is reasonable for the conference to expect that member congregations actually manifest these beliefs in their common life. But there are times when congregations may not be in agreement on all significant levels of faith and practice.

Experience has shown that it is difficult on a practical level to hold one another accountable for a difference in beliefs.

There is a close relationship between belief and spiritual practice. Our beliefs tell us what we value and they orient us toward how we practice our faith. As we live out our faith by following Jesus' commandments, these experiences shape our beliefs. In all of this, the Holy Spirit is the counselor who reminds us of everything Jesus taught us and who enables us to obey (John 14:15-26). We can trust that as our sisters and brothers live out spiritual practices outlined in this covenant, the Holy Spirit will shape their beliefs.

Since belief and spiritual practice are so closely related, this document proposes that we agree to be accountable to one another not only for holding common beliefs, but also for implementing a set of common spiritual practices.

Commonly held beliefs are essential for maintaining communal identity. Our 1995 Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective will continue to guide the faith and life of our conference.

Commonly held *practices* may be even more important for maintaining communal identity. And here are the reasons:

1. First, it is difficult to see someone's beliefs, but it is not difficult to observe their practices.
2. Second, spiritual practices shape our beliefs. As we obey Jesus, we come to know Jesus, and this knowing becomes belief.
3. Third, spiritual practices shared by the community powerfully shape the identity of the community.

It is for these reasons that Central Plains is moving toward A Covenant of Spiritual Practices. Listen now to this covenant. Listen with open ears and open hearts.

## **Covenant of Spiritual Practices for Central Plains Mennonite Conference**

**Narrator:** Being God's Faithful Community: A Covenant of Spiritual Practices for Central Plains Mennonite Conference

**Voices 1-6** In response to God's unqualified love for us, we covenant to common practices through which we submit ourselves completely to the purposes of God who longs to transform us into the likeness of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Narrator:** These are the common covenantal practices through which we seek to be transformed into Christlikeness. Through these practices, we seek renewal by the Holy Spirit.

**Voice 1:** We will worship God as the central act of our common life whenever the church is gathered

**Voice 2:** We practice prayer, fasting and generous giving to separate ourselves from the influence of the principalities and powers of this age and to make us available to fully participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**Voice 3:** We will prayerfully study the Bible together weekly in our congregations and whenever the conference gathers, guided by qualified teachers for the purpose of increasing our competence in reading, interpreting, and applying the scriptures in an Anabaptist perspective to our everyday lives and to the critical issues of faith we face in the world.

**Voice 4:** We will accept and offer hospitality believing it creates the context for God's kingdom to appear in our midst, particularly as we minister to the poor, the hungry, the prisoner and the stranger.

**Voice 5:** We will study the Bible with neighbors and strangers, inviting them to become disciples of Jesus.

**Voice 6:** We will practice peacemaking by extending loving-kindness and forgiveness to our brothers and sisters as well as to our neighbors and enemies.

**Voices 1-6** In response to God's unqualified love for us, we covenant to common practices through which we submit ourselves completely to the purposes of God who longs to transform us into the likeness of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**ALL:** May God's Spirit move among us.  
May God's Spirit transform us.  
May we mature together as the Body of Christ.