

Radical Center

Introduction

Lancaster Mennonite Conference is facing and has faced polarizations of theological interpretations and contemporary issues. Unfortunately, our history is one of pain and division resulting from these polarizations. The following draft comes from an ongoing conversation among the *Landisville Manor District* pastors as we struggle together to find a response that embraces a Christ-like radical center.

Our discussions lead us to believe that the current “crisis” within Mennonite Church USA is, in fact, an opportunity. Lancaster Conference has an historic opportunity to work through our differences in a way that **strengthens unity and does not require a solution in which congregations must decide which “side” of the split they will follow**. This opportunity can lead Lancaster Conference to practice unity in diversity in a way that brings hope and healing to other conferences navigating disagreements.

Radical Center

We would like to propose a way forward that will allow Lancaster Conference to lead in developing pathways that embrace unity within our diversity. This radical expression represents the origin of our faith with Christ’s love as the center of all we do instead of hot button issues of the day. We recognize that it is not always possible to arrive at a consensus within institutional structures (i.e. congregations, districts, conferences, or denominations). However, we want to strive to create a magnetic atmosphere of covenantal relationships and a joint identity as children of God that will move us forward unified because of the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ.

In order to move forward as a unified, yet diverse community, we acknowledge and affirm those perspectives that have come about through interpretation of the Scriptures and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Even as believers, for the time being, we are only able to “see through a glass, darkly” and “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV). Indeed, were we to take a closer look at other aspects of our theological understanding and beliefs, we would be sure to find additional scripturally supported issues that, though we disagree, we do not afford them the power to cause division among us.

We do **not** support a position of moral relativism and acknowledge that we must not avoid dealing with potentially divisive issues. However, we maintain that there is a way that we can commit to struggling together more effectively using New Testament principles. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the center toward which we gravitate (John 14:6). Those who hold to his teaching are truly his disciples (John 8:31-32). Jesus promised His Spirit of Truth to guide us into all truth (John 15:13-15). The radical center is committed to Jesus, to holding his

teaching and surrendering to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. We all acknowledge our sin and gratefully receive God's grace, forgiveness, and love. Our position of **radical center** is one that is able to engage the viewpoint of differing opinions while freely continuing to seek inspiration from the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the community. This will require that all members continue to struggle with what it means to be a reflection of Immanuel and live lives that reflect the incarnational nature of our God. We recognize that this will be messy, but believe that struggling together, with our diverse understandings, causes us all to grow stronger in Christ.

We will value everyone as a human being created by God for the purpose of love and relationship, remembering that we are all dependent upon the Savior and no one is exempt from God's love. Let us be brave and humble ourselves to serve everyone without condemnation because we have received the same love. Let us recognize that we are all on a journey with the Lord and we still have so far to go. Let us not construct boundaries of judgment but allow the Spirit to work and allow ourselves to be confidently surprised by the transforming power of the Spirit. In this journey, may we not be surprised that the greatest transformation happens in us.

Proposal...A New Vision for LMC

Vision:

God is calling the church to a great purpose and is sending us into the world to incarnate the Good News of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has inaugurated the eternal Kingdom - the new heaven and the new earth. By the transforming power of the risen Christ, we participate in God's mission to redeem, renew, and restore all things to God's shalom. God is calling us to be people of Christ's peace, conduits of God's healing and hope.

Because Jesus Christ is the center of our faith and life . . .

- **We value a way of seeing the world through eyes of God**
- **We value a way of reading Scripture through Jesus**
- **We value a way of living the Christian life as disciples**

Organization:

We envision Lancaster Mennonite Conference congregations committed to faithful living and missional multiplication through making disciples and birthing new faith communities. LMC congregations are invited to enter covenant in a framework that:

- embraces the values and commitments noted above
- uses the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) as a guide for living in the context of our community
- represents the love, grace, and reconciliation of Jesus Christ

- empowers all God's people for effective ministry and leadership
- creates a viable context where **leadership represents the diversity** of our conference
- encourages leaders to gather, share testimony and find agreement with their decision in scripture and coming to unity with the Spirit (Acts 15 & John 17).

Mission:

Acts 10-11 & 15 show Peter on mission, witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles and taking his story back to the leaders in Jerusalem. As a conference we commit to vigorous engagement in mission through:

- making disciples through transformational discipleship
- calling, training, and nurturing leaders to birth new communities and expressions of faith
- partnering in congregational revitalization
- engaging in ministries of healing and hope in our communities

Collaboration

We seek to engage with Anabaptist and other Christ-centered communities and ministries regionally, nationally, and internationally to fulfill God's mission

Covenant

We covenant together to walk with Jesus our Redeemer into the life-giving flow of the Spirit of God, which flows like a river of life from the throne of the Lamb (Rev. 21, 22). We commit to follow God's call and join the movement and leading of the Holy Spirit in the following ways:

- Enjoying God
- Encouraging Others
- Equipping Disciples
- Engaging the World

We are committed to becoming a community where **accountability is valued above control, and division as a solution is suspect**. We acknowledge the importance of context in both understanding and communicating truth and refuse to take advantage of positions of privilege and power to win favor for our viewpoint at the expense of others. We humbly commit to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

We do these things so that all may live by the river of God and step into the waters as people of Christ's peace. We are appointed as God's disciples to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. The fruit brings healing to those around us (John 15).