

**Joined in Faithfulness:
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan
Decisions on Authority and Autonomy**

**MC Sask delegate decisions following
recommendations of an appointed
five-member Task Force 2001-2002**

May, 2002

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PREAMBLE

Over the course of approximately 18 months the congregations of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan (MC Sask) considered questions of authority and autonomy with the help of an appointed Task Force of five people. The congregations spoke, the Task Force listened, and the result was a series of recommendations.

These recommendations were considered individually by the delegates of MC Sask under the leadership of the General Council and the Conference Moderator at three formally scheduled delegate meetings. The first one took place at the annual delegate meeting in February, 2001 at Mount Royal Mennonite Church, Saskatoon; the second one at a specially called delegate session on November 24, 2001 at First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon; and the third at the annual delegate meeting in February, 2002 at Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current. Attendance ranged from 110 at First Mennonite to well over 160 delegates at the annual delegate meetings.

After careful discussion and occasional modification, delegates adopted each recommendation with noticeably more than the required 2/3 majority. These decisions are now being given back to you, the congregations, to incorporate into the life and spirit of who we are as MC Sask. May they help to make of us—MC Sask-- a faithful expression of the Church of Jesus Christ and the will of God. May they also help to nurture understanding and togetherness among us. May they guide us in being a church for all who would experience God's healing and hope.

RECOMMENDATION #1

That the Congregations of CoMoS [hereafter referred to as "Mennonite Church Saskatchewan" (MC Sask) as per the name change] accept the following definition of MC Sask:

- a) MC Sask is Congregations voluntarily joined together in relationships of love, caring and mutual accountability for the purpose of serving the Kingdom of God in a way described by the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. As such, MC Sask does not exist separate from the Congregations, and is the Congregations joined in relationship and gathered in meeting and ministry.
- b) MC Sask is Congregations whose will is expressed through the delegate body and administered through the General Council, the various Commissions and the central office.
- c) MC Sask has authority which rests in the congregations as expressed through the delegate body.

RECOMMENDATION #2

That the General Council of MC Sask review every aspect of its Annual Conference with the goal to transform it into an event that will:

- a) be at the centre of our life as a Conference of faithful and believing congregations.
 - b) inspire individuals and congregations in the work of God.
 - c) clearly demonstrate the importance of Mennonite congregations in Saskatchewan existing as MC Sask.
 - d) provide ample space, time and opportunity for the interaction of delegates on a wide variety of issues and topics crucial to our existence as congregations and conference.
 - e) plan an agenda that facilitates learning from each other, coming to a clearer understanding of God's Truth, and developing a deeper sense of unity in the faith.
- a) plan an agenda that creates balance between delegate business sessions and other kinds of sessions and workshops, thus making the event inviting to many more people.

RECOMMENDATION #3

That the General Council or designate be mandated to design a model of Leadership for MC Sask that will be deliberate and overt in helping the congregations of MC Sask to:

- a) develop a clear sense of identity that includes a bold proclamation of our Anabaptist/Mennonite theology.
- b) form an empowering and inspiring vision for ministry.

- c) nurture relationships that will be the cords of unity respectful of diversity that draw and hold us together.
- d) provide each other with the resources, training and information we need to be a united, Mennonite, missional people in Saskatchewan with partnerships in Canada and around the world.

RECOMMENDATION #4

1. That the congregations of MC Sask commit themselves to calling only such pastors as are or can be credentialed by MC Sask.
2. That MC Sask adopt the following policy with regard to pastors, associate pastors, youth pastors and lay pastors:
 - a) That the Pastoral Leadership Commission be directly involved with a congregation in determining a suitable list of candidates for pastoral ministry.
 - b) That all pastoral candidates to be credentialed by MC Sask shall:
 - i) accept the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) as their confession of faith and accept such other statements as may from time to time be adopted by MC Sask.
 - ii) have studied at one of our Mennonite Church schools OR that they will do so (in a program designed jointly by the candidate and PLC with due consideration of every local situation) during the first three (3) years of their term. The congregation will cover the financial and time costs required.
 - c) That PLC annually organize at least two (2) pastor gatherings in addition to the seminary course and the pastor peer groups, at which pastors would meet to discuss issues of faith, theology, practice, ministry and being Conference.
 - d) Pastors would be expected to attend as many as possible but at least one per year and at least four (4) in a three (3) year period.

RECOMMENDATION #5

1. When any Congregation (A) perceives another Congregation (B) to be at variance with Mennonite Church Sask. self-definition, Congregation A is asked to engage in dialogue with Congregation B to gain understanding and build relationship. The Congregations are encouraged to involve the Conference Pastor in preparation for and engagement in dialogue.
2. When #1 does not resolve the matter, the Congregations are encouraged to involve a conference-appointed mediation/listening/facilitating committee to define the issue(s), create understanding, build relationship and seek resolution.
 1. If, after #2 the Listening Committee, Executive and/or either Congregation deems it helpful, the involvement of the conference will be sought as follows:
 - a) A year of study in the congregations, including at least one study conference, facilitated by PLC or its designate;
 - b) At the subsequent annual meeting, a decision will be made on further action. This needs to include (but not be limited to):
 - i) Establish time frame(s) and further study if necessary;
 - ii) Determination of dissenting Congregation's status.

The above process was largely determined by and is to be implemented in the context of the following six principles:

1. The Conference must have and maintain a clear statement of its 'Confession of Faith'.
2. Whatever action is initiated must be in the context of relationship and taken in a way that maintains the integrity of relationship.
3. There must be constructive and ongoing dialogue across the Conference, between Congregations who disagree, and between Conference and Congregations.
4. The process must be given enough time to be thorough and careful, but there must be provision for closure within a reasonable length of time.
5. The Conference must take action including the limitations of some privileges for Congregations who decide to move outside the outline of beliefs held to be important and central (foundational) to Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.
6. The Conference not excommunicate any congregations.

RECOMMENDATION #6

That IV, 5(1) of the by-laws be changed to read:

Any congregation which supports the Mission Statement set out in part II and agrees with and adheres to the *Confession of Faith* as set out in Part III and such other positional statements as the Conference may from time to time adopt, may become and/or remain a member congregation with full privileges.

Note: This Recommendation was referred to the By-law Committee for further action.

RECOMMENDATION #7 & #8

BE IT RESOLVED that at this time we as MC Sask affirm our understanding of Biblical sexuality as outlined in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, and expanded on by the Stratford '98 statement on this same matter. However, in light of differing understandings surrounding the topic of Homosexuality, MC Sask continue a "Season of Discernment" of not more than 4 years in which the General Council of MC Sask, or its designate, lead the Church in seeking God's will...

- i) in our response to gays and lesbians; and
- ii) in our response to congregations who accept into membership people in same-sex covenanted relationships.

Note: Recommendation #7 refers to a **Season of Discernment** in describing a period of four years in which MC Sask is to continue to seek an understanding of God's will where we at this point disagree. This disagreement centers on the place and role of people in same-sex covenanted relationships in our Congregations and Conference. The phrase "Season of Discernment" was deliberately chosen.

Season suggests a somewhat flexible yet defined time period for this discernment. **Discernment** suggests that God's Will has been made known, but we as God's people need to discover what that Will is. The intent is that in speaking to each other, listening carefully, and seeking the mind of God in prayer we will find a new sense of what is God-ly and a new will to be both united and diverse in a Spirit-inspired relationship of love.

The delegate body has asked the General Council of MC Sask to give careful leadership to making this **Season of Discernment** meaningful and helpful for all its member Congregations.

RECOMMENDATION #9

BE IT RESOLVED that the Leadership of MC Sask prepare us for and lead us in a re-covenanting service to be held not later than the Annual Conference in 2004. Such a service would be an opportunity to renew:

- a) our commitment to each other;
- b) our appreciation for significant diversity within MC Sask;
- c) our common commitment to being an Anabaptist/Mennonite conference as defined by the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*; and
- d) our vision to be a missional people of God, living and worshipping in Saskatchewan and committed to ministry—service and evangelism—around the world through a variety of partnerships.