



Our Understandings

As a supplement to our Covenant, we have agreed on the following Understandings regarding (1) the meaning of the covenant, (2) the process we call covenanting, (3) church life, and (4) leadership. We recognize that our Understandings may be modified as we grow in our view of the nature of the church and as we assess our congregational needs. The following version was affirmed on June 21, 2009.

The Meaning of the Covenant

Our use of the phrases “caring for the world” and “proclaiming Jesus as Liberator and Lord” include bringing people to the starting point on their Christian pilgrimages. Our mission is to all people, rich and poor, oppressed and oppressor. When we talk about “caring for the world,” we include those people with whom we have personal contact. We see the “world” as local and global, personal and systemic.

We affirm Jesus as Lord and as the norm by which we are to judge our actions. He is the one whom we seek to serve above all principalities and powers that compete for our allegiance. However, his lordship comes through servanthood. Those who follow him are to serve, not to seek positions of authority over each other.

The way of the cross is to affirm Jesus’ way of life in spite of the consequences—even at the risk of death. It is to be willing to suffer for the cause of truth, to love one’s enemies, to use means that are consistent with one’s ends, and to reject the use of violence and warfare. We affirm that the life of risk for the sake of right brings freedom and new life. Walking the way of the cross is possible to the extent that we are in close relationship with the triune God. Commitment to the church involves a commitment to reflection, contemplation, and prayer. Both reflection and action, both being and doing, are essential to the Christian life.

We see the Christian life as a pilgrimage in which we seek to grow in the level of our commitment to Christ and to learn new ways of serving God.

Covenanting

Every year during Holy Week, we indicate our membership by covenanting with each other. Covenanting refers to sign our Covenant, an agreement to follow the way of Jesus Christ and to share in the life of Mennonite Church of the Servant. People who desire to share in the life of MCS—that is, to covenant with us—should seek spiritual discernment by discussing it with their Servant Group, a shepherd, or the pastor.

The process of seeking discernment occurs once a year during Lent, the season leading up to Easter. During this season, we share our spiritual pilgrimages with our Servant Group or with a shepherd or pastor.

Membership in MCS requires:

- Baptismal vows
- Completion of Newcomers' Class
- Annual affirmation/signing of the covenant

In membership we commit to:

- Participating in congregational worship and congregational decision making
- Participating in a Servant Group for nurture and mission
- Engaging in regular spiritual practices
- Using our gifts (spiritual, material, and otherwise) within the church
- Giving financially to MCS on a regular basis
- Sharing our spiritual pilgrimages annually

We recognize that there are instances in which members may be unable to participate in all aspects of the life of the congregation, for example, absence because of other Christian commitments, college, health concerns, short-term intense commitments, work, etc. In such cases, we encourage members to continue to covenant and to participate in the life of the church to the best of their abilities. These and other persons who wish to change the way they relate to the congregation and/or its smaller groupings are asked to process the change with their Servant Group, a shepherd, or a pastor. Members who move away should try to commit themselves to another Christian group where they live. The church, as the body of Christ, is to be experienced where one lives.

Church Life

The Mennonite Church of the Servant holds regular Church Life meetings to make decisions and to strengthen our life together as the body of Christ. Basic decisions are made by consensus of the members who are present during any particular meeting. In this process of decision making, members attempt to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Only members can block consensus.

Consensus means not necessarily full agreement with one another, but that everyone is willing for the church to move ahead, perhaps with a heavy heart, in recognition of the leading of many brothers and sisters and the sense of the group as a whole. The process of consensus seeks, first of all, the will of God as known to us through the Spirit. Our first task in decision making is to set aside our own assumptions and biases and listen to what the Spirit is saying to us.

Decision making by consensus seeks, then, to hear all points of view on the issue before the church, since sometimes the minority viewpoint may reflect more deeply God's truth. However, we recognize that our decisions never reflect the full wisdom of God. We need to be open to hearing new insights at all times and then revising our decision. Consensus may mean waiting longer to make the decision, but when the decision is finally reached, support for that decision will enable it to be carried out more quickly and enthusiastically. The role of the moderator in consensus is to make sure all points of view are heard, to suggest times for prayer when appropriate, and to summarize the discussion occasionally, testing for whether consensus has been reached.

Under certain circumstances, the church life meeting may make decisions by use of the lot, a centuries-old practice of Mennonites. Use of the lot is limited to those situations in which (a) having to reach consensus on one of two or more options or persons would harm the unity or relationships within the church or (b) after gathering all necessary information and hearing all points of view, there are no strong feelings within the church or no strong sense of the Spirit's leading after prayer and discussion, and a decision must be made so quickly that there is no time to wait on consensus. God can work through the lot to bring unity to the church.

Servant Groups

The church is the body of Christ that is covenanted together and meets for regular Sunday worship. We encourage members and participants to be part of one of the Servant Groups, which are small enough for face-to-face interaction and for welcoming new people. A Servant Group may come together around a specific outward mission (based on the mission group model from Church of the Savior, which brings people together around common visions for mission). Or it may come together around the common purpose of discovering, and growing in, the abundant life of Christ (based on the cell group model). In addition, Servant Groups include Bible and book studies, prayer, personal nurture, sharing, and accountability. As a growing part of the body of Christ, these Servant groups will generally be open and intentionally inviting of new people to explore Christian faith and to join in the mission of the group.

Sharing Fund

A small [Sharing Fund](#) shall be kept in the bank account for the use of participants who have special financial needs. Such money can be considered a loan or a gift. These funds are made available by the treasurer after approval by two shepherds or a shepherd and the pastor. The current Sharing Fund policy gives details for administration of this fund.

Leadership

Positions are filled as needed after discerning each other's gifts. We take our roles joyfully as our service to God and each other. We seek to affirm and encourage each other as we all work together for the glory of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shepherds will give attention to the spiritual growth and direction of the church, both as a whole and individuals within it. Shepherds will be discerned and called for staggered two-year terms, to work as a leadership team with the pastor(s).

Trustees will have staggered two-year terms and be responsible for the following:

- Assuming legal responsibility for relating to the state and the world in such areas as incorporation, taxes, maintaining titles of ownership of church property, and maintaining insurance.
- Overseeing management of church property, including maintenance and repairs.
- Preparing a church budget recommendation.
- Working with the church treasurer.

Pastor(s). Paid pastoral staff will be called as necessary. The pastor(s) will normally be reviewed every three years. Responsibilities will include:

- Preaching and teaching regularly.
- Being chief administrator for the church and handling correspondence.
- Articulating and guarding a clear vision for the church.
- Helping represent the church to the larger church body and the neighborhood.
- Preparing agenda and recommendations for shepherds.
- Counseling and visitation as needed.
- Leading the congregation in outreach.

Other congregation-wide roles such as *moderator, recorder, and treasurer*, as well as committees and other specific roles in the church are appointed for one-year terms as part of the annual gift discernment process. Terms begin and end in September.

Church Council. The Church Council will be made up of the shepherds, the trustees, pastor(s), moderator, and treasurer. The responsibilities of the Church Council include:

- Overseeing the activities and committees of the church, such as worship, education, mission, trustees, and servant groups.
- Overseeing pastoral staff.
- Preparing agenda and recommendations for Church Life meetings.