



## Congregations Considering Leaving Current Conference or Mennonite Church USA

1. Withdrawal from Mennonite Church USA
  - a. Process - Building on the Membership Guidelines which encourages mutual respect for one another when a relationship is ending we suggest the following steps:
    - i. Congregational leadership will share with conference leadership that they are considering leaving the Area Conference and Mennonite Church USA
    - ii. A conversation between congregational leaders and Area Conference leadership will happen before any decision has been made
    - iii. When a congregational decision is made, a letter stating this decision will be sent to the Area Conference office.
    - iv. The Area Conference office will notify Leadership Development that the congregation has officially left Mennonite Church USA
    - v. A public service of acknowledgement of the end of relationship
  - b. Implications for credentialed leaders - Here are some basic understandings and steps to follow in these instances.
    - i. When a congregation leaves an area conference, that area conference will no longer hold and is no longer responsible for the credentials of persons associated with that congregation. This will include those serving within the congregation and those who are serving outside of the congregation.
    - ii. For archival reasons, the conference will enter documentation into the credentialed person's file and then transfer the credential to the Leadership Development Office. The credential will be considered by the denomination as "inactive" (A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership, p. 90).
    - iii. According to the Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership this credential is not valid for performing ministerial functions nor does Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have responsibility for the person holding an inactive.
    - iv. The congregation may recognize this credential as valid, but they should know that they are alone responsible for the credential.
    - v. When a congregation leaves a conference, the conference minister should communicate these understandings to the congregation and the person(s) whose credentials were formerly held by the conference. A copy of this communication should be sent to Leadership Development. (A sample letter is attached.)
    - vi. Record of the credential will remain in Leadership Development database for archival purposes.

- vii. If the congregation has no intention of remaining with Mennonite Church USA, the pastor's credentials are terminated effective with the date of departure.
  - a. If the pastor is not in agreement with the decision to leave, s/he is encouraged to join another Mennonite Church USA congregation.
  - b. If "a" is not an option, credential can be held with some continuing accountability plan in place. Length of such holding is indeterminate. (Office of Ministerial Leadership Office 2002ff)
  
- 2. Seeking to move to another conference within Mennonite Church USA
  - a. Process - The Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA has outlined the following process (Article III, 3.b of the Mennonite Church USA Bylaws and Membership Guidelines, Part II, No. 12).
    - i. A congregation is required to follow a process of discernment with their conference of origin before another conference may formally consider their application for membership.
      - a. Normally this process will require several meetings of the congregation's leaders with leaders of the conference they wish to leave (at least three meetings is suggested).
      - b. With their application for membership in the new conference the congregation will present a joint congregation/conference of origin statement to the receiving conference which states reasons why the congregation wants to change area conference affiliation
      - c. When the congregation/conference of origin meetings were held, with a summary of the discussion of the meetings
      - d. How or if this affects any other matters in the conference of origin
      - e. The matters that have been resolved in the congregation, Conference of origin relationship along with those that may remain unresolved
    - ii. In the event that a conference has taken disciplinary action that separates a congregation, and that congregation subsequently applies to another conference for membership, the conference to which the congregation applies for membership is required to follow a process of discernment with the congregation\*s conference of origin. The conference to which the congregation is making application for membership will initiate several meetings with the conference of origin to discuss the congregation\*s dismissal, and their application for membership into the receiving conference.
      - a. The conference of origin will supply the conference to which the congregation is making application, a written statement of reasons why and how they separated the congregation.
      - b. The receiving conference will supply a statement to the conference of origin explaining why, and on what time frame; they are considering accepting the congregation into membership.
    - iii. Both conferences will notify the Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA when either of these processes begins and will supply copies of the statements named above. The executive director reserves the right of

counsel throughout the process, but will respect the polity of Mennonite Church USA that rests final discretion of membership of congregations with area conferences (Bylaw Article IV, 2.a).

*Adopted by Mennonite Church USA Executive Board, June 26, 2004*

- b. Implications for credentialed leaders
  - i. When the intention of the congregation is to join another Mennonite Church USA Area Conference, the original area conference will hold the credential for up to one year while the congregation is in the process of transferring.
  - ii. If the process of transferring to another conference takes longer than a year, the credential may be transferred to the Leadership Development Office.
  - iii. During this transition process the pastor is expected to be in active relationship with the conference they are moving towards. The pastor will be accountable to the leadership of this conference during this exploratory phase.
  - iv. If after two years, the congregation has not joined an area conference within Mennonite Church USA the credential will become inactive. According to the Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership this credential is not valid for performing ministerial functions nor does Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have responsibility for the person holding an inactive.

December 13, 2013  
Leadership Development Office  
Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann

This document is the result of looking at existing Mennonite Church USA documents, building on the Membership Guidelines and receiving input from Area Church/Conference Ministers' Meeting in Phoenix 2012.

(Today's date)

Dear (credentialed minister and congregational name):

SUBJECT: CREDENTIAL STATUS OF (CREDENTIAL MINISTER)

This letter is to officially recognize your congregation's desire to leave (*said*) conference of Mennonite Church USA. This affects the credential our denomination holds for your pastor, (*name*).

As a result of the congregation's choice to leave the conference and choosing not to be part of Mennonite Church USA, our area conference will no longer hold and is no longer responsible for the ministerial credentials of persons associated with your congregation. This includes those serving within the congregation and those who are serving outside of the congregation.

The credential of (*said minister*) is now considered invalid for performing ministerial functions and Mennonite Church USA and its member conferences have no responsibility or liability for the actions of the person holding this invalid credential. Your congregation may recognize this credential as valid, but you should know that you alone are responsible and liable for the credential.

If the credential was in good standing (*you may want to comment case by case on this*) when the congregation left, the denomination will acknowledge and transfer the credential should another recognized credentialing body request it.

Sincerely,

(Conference Minister)

cc: Leadership Development, Mennonite Church USA