



Biblical Mennonite Alliance

MINISTER'S MANUAL

Containing Formulas For Various Occasions With
Suggestions For Pastors

- BMA Policies and Documents
- Minister's Manual
- Forms and Records



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INTRODUCTION

The Biblical Mennonite Alliance was officially established on June 5, 1998 in West Salem, Ohio, as an “organization of congregations and ministers which we believe Christ has called into being for ‘such a time as this’”. The commitment of this Alliance is “to the world-wide propagation of that inerrant Word in order to provide fellowship, instruction, accountability, prayer, missions, and service opportunities to the congregations and ministers of conservative Anabaptist theology and practice.” Recognizing the trend to drift to the right or the left, we purpose to stand firmly upon the unchanging Truth of God whatever the cost. In other words, if it was good enough for the New Testament churches, it is good enough for us!

BMA has adopted the Mennonite Confession of Faith of 1963 as a minimum expression of its doctrine. It is understood that we discourage members from merely conforming to the minimum but rather we desire for the entire constituency to rise to the practice of every precept of the Word of God.

This Ministers’ Manual is put forth as a tool in one handy volume of all pertinent information for ministry and BMA relationships. As in any such volume, improvement is regularly needed. We solicit your suggestions to that end.

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Part 1

BMA

POLICIES

AND

DOCUMENTS

CONSTITUTION

of the
Biblical Mennonite Alliance
February, 2016

Preamble

Jesus Christ, having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-12).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Savior, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminence, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion. It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men, thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church truth, ordinances and officers; and especially has He ordained His system of doctrine, living, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, we, as duly ordained Anabaptist ministers of the gospel, fully acknowledging the priesthood of all true believers, yet sensing God's definite direction in providing for the leadership and guidance of His sheep, and acting by Christ's authority as delegated to us, do hereby establish this constitution as a structural outline of the organization of congregations and ministers which we believe Christ has called into being for "such a time as this."

Article I Name

This organization shall be called **BIBLICAL MENNONITE ALLIANCE**.

Article II Mission Statement

Acknowledging the Holy Scriptures as God's timeless truth which is completely sufficient for all of man's needs (Matt. 4:4), the Alliance is committed to the world-wide propagation of that inerrant Word in order to provide fellowship, instruction, accountability, prayer, missions, and service opportunities to the congregations and ministers of conservative Anabaptist theology and practice.

Article III Doctrine

The Alliance endorses the Mennonite Confession of Faith of 1963 as a minimum expression of its doctrine.

Article IV Membership

Introduction

The Alliance shall be composed of congregations and ministers who embrace and promote the practice of biblical doctrines as understood and defined by the Alliance in the "BMA Position and Policy Statement" and other adopted documents (see appendices). This includes working harmoniously with Alliance procedures.

A. Congregational Membership

Congregations may be received into Alliance membership after thorough examination by the Council of Overseers and satisfactory vote of the Alliance. The ordained ministers of each member congregation shall also be its voting messengers to the Alliance. These ministers must also be members of the Alliance. If a congregation is without an ordained minister, the Council of Overseers may authorize a lay or licensed leader to vote on behalf of that congregation provided that said individual is fully examined using the approved ministerial questionnaire. Such authorization shall be in effect only as long as the congregation is without ordained leadership.

B. Ministerial Membership

1. The ministerial membership of the Alliance shall consist of ordained men such as overseers, bishops, ministers, and deacons. They shall be the final decision-making body of the Alliance.
2. Ordained ministers may become members of the Alliance by satisfactory vote of the Alliance ministers after they have been given written and oral examinations arranged by the Council of Overseers concerning their call to the ministry, doctrinal beliefs, life practices, and positions on church polity. As a prerequisite to the oral examination, a written recommendation must be submitted by the candidate's regional overseer.
3. Ministers who come from non-BMA congregations and embrace and promote BMA values may become affiliate members. They may hold office with the exception of serving on the Board of Executors and the Council of Overseers.
4. Ordained ministers who are involved in full-time evangelistic, missionary, or Bible conference ministries may become members of the Alliance by the above process provided that they are recommended by the overseer of their region.

5. Alliance members who are in good standing in the Alliance but no longer hold membership in a BMA congregation shall be given the option to 1) become an affiliate member, or 2) withdraw from the Alliance. All affiliate members shall participate in a BMA region for the purpose of fellowship and accountability.

Article V Meetings

A. Annual Convention

Each summer, the Alliance will hold a multi-day meeting which will include Biblical exposition, training in ministry, prayer, fellowship, and mutual sharing. The entire Alliance constituency shall be encouraged to attend.

B. Ministerial Enrichment

Each winter, there will be a multi-day meeting for the Alliance ministers. The program shall include Biblical exposition, training in ministry, prayer, fellowship, and mutual sharing.

C. Business Sessions

All business sessions shall be scheduled by the Board of Executors. Quorum for business sessions shall be the members present.

Article VI Regionals

- A. The Alliance shall be divided into regions for purposes of local fellowship and accountability. Each of these regionals shall operate under the watchful care of an overseer. When a regional exceeds seven congregations, the Council of Overseers will initiate a process for the formation of an additional regional(s).
- B. All the BMA ministerial members in a region are encouraged to meet quarterly under the leadership of their Regional Overseer for fellowship, prayer, and accountability. One of these meetings will be held during Ministerial Enrichment, and one of them will be held during the summer Convention.

Article VII World-wide Missions

- A. Taking the great commission of our Lord very seriously, the Alliance will endeavor to do its part to carry the gospel into all the world, attempting to establish biblical Anabaptist churches wherever our missionaries labor. BMA mission work shall prioritize unevangelized fields (those with less than 5% Christian population); however, such shall not be the exclusive BMA missionary thrust. Under-evangelized fields shall also be given appropriate consideration.
- B. The mission agency known as DestiNATIONS International (DNI) is and is to remain a wholly-owned and integral subsidiary of Biblical Mennonite Alliance.

- C. DNI shall be directed by a mission board consisting of seven Alliance ministers nominated by the Council of Overseers and elected by the Alliance. The DNI Board will be accountable to the Council of Overseers on policy issues, to the Board of Executors for the execution of said policies, and ultimately to the Alliance for the conduct of all Alliance mission work. The term of office for DNI board members shall be five years. A board member may not serve on the board more than two consecutive five-year terms, not to exceed ten consecutive years. A former board member may be elected to the board after having been off the board for at least a year.

- D. The board is authorized to appoint sub-committees (which should be chaired by an Alliance minister and may include laymen from Alliance congregations) to handle most collateral responsibilities. Long term ministries that are supplemental to church planting, such as an orphanage, should be overseen by sub-committees. Such appointments shall be subject to the approval of the Alliance. The term of office for sub-committee members shall be three years. A sub-committee member may serve three successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.

- E. The administrative officer of the mission shall be a President. He shall be an ordained minister, a member of the Alliance, nominated by the Council of Overseers in consultation with the Mission Board and elected by the Alliance. To be eligible for this office the candidate must evidence a strong commitment to the BMA missionary vision as summarized in section A of this article. The term of office for the President is 4 years. He shall be an ex-officio (voting) member of the DNI board.

- F. Great care shall be taken by those with oversight responsibility in the mission to guard the doctrinal stand of the Alliance in all areas of missionary activity.

- G. The President, in concert with the DNI board, shall prepare an annual Guideline Budget covering all aspects of Mission operations which shall be presented to the Alliance for approval at the annual Convention Business Session.

Article VIII Short Term Missions and Service Ministries

Introduction

BMA shall provide various world-wide opportunities for short-term mission experience, voluntary service and compassion ministries. These are seen as distinct from, yet complementary to, the regular BMA mission program.

- A. To administrate these programs a three-member Voluntary Ministries Committee of Alliance ministers and lay members of Alliance congregations shall be appointed by the Board of Executors and confirmed by the Alliance. The term of office for committee members shall be three years with a one term succession possible. A committee member may not serve more than six consecutive years without at least a one year break. The committee shall be chaired by an Alliance minister preferably with experience in voluntary

ministries. The chairman shall be chosen annually by the committee with the assistance of the BMA moderator or assistant moderator.

- B. The committee will be accountable to the Council of Overseers on policy issues, to the Board of Executors for the execution of said policies, and ultimately to the Alliance for the conduct of its assigned ministries.
- C. The committee shall actively work to provide short term mission and voluntary service opportunities to enable BMA youth (and others) to serve the Lord, edify the church and gain missionary experience. For purposes of this section, short term missions shall be defined as of one year duration or less. The committee shall diligently work to enlist our youth in these programs and maintain accountability structures in the best interests of the Alliance. When the short term mission or voluntary service ministry directly involves the responsibilities of DNI, the committee shall operate under and in concert with DNI.
- D. The committee shall oversee BMA interests in disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and voluntary work projects. Bona fide efforts shall be made to cooperate with and supplement the work of other Anabaptist relief agencies as long as the positions and policies of BMA are not compromised. Where feasible, special effort shall be made to harmonize work projects with other BMA outreach.
- E. As the need arises, the committee will facilitate alternative service for conscientious objectors.

Article IX Training Institutions

Introduction

Recognizing that training for Christian service is essential as illustrated by the three year training course that Christ conducted for the disciples, the Alliance has two schools for the training of its leaders and members for Christian service — the Elnora Bible Institute - A Ministry of Biblical Mennonite Alliance (EBI) and the Mission Training Center (MTC). These schools are and shall continue to be wholly owned and integral subsidiaries of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance. Extreme care shall be taken in the structure and operation of these institutions to insure as much as possible that there is no compromise of the doctrines and applications of the Alliance.

A. Elnora Bible Institute - A Ministry of Biblical Mennonite Alliance

1. The EBI shall be directed by a board of five Alliance ministers nominated by the Council of Overseers and elected by the Alliance. The EBI board shall be accountable to the Council of Overseers on policy issues, to the Board of Executors for the execution of said policies, and ultimately to the Alliance for the operation and doctrinal purity of the Institute. The term of office for EBI board members shall be five years. A board member may serve two successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.

2. The EBI board shall concentrate on structuring an educational and social environment at the Bible Institute that first involves spiritual formation and second provides intellectual stimulation in the area of Biblical knowledge and understanding. The board may appoint sub-committees (which should be chaired by an Alliance minister and may include laymen from Alliance congregations) to help handle those responsibilities that do not directly relate to the educational mission of the Bible Institute. Such appointments shall be subject to the approval of the Alliance. The term of office for sub-committee members shall be three years. A sub-committee member may serve three successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.
3. The administrative officer of the EBI shall be a Principal. He shall be an ordained minister, a member of the Alliance, nominated by the Council of Overseers in consultation with the EBI board and elected by the Alliance. The term of office for the Principal is four years. He shall be an ex officio (voting) member of the EBI board.
4. The Principal, in concert with the EBI board or board-appointed ad hoc committee, shall prepare an annual Guideline Budget covering all aspects of the Institute's operations which shall be presented to the Alliance for approval at the annual Convention Business Session.

B. Ministry Training Center

1. The MTC shall operate under the general supervision of the DNI board. A sub-committee of Alliance ministers and lay members of Alliance congregations shall be appointed by the DNI board and confirmed by the Alliance specifically to oversee the affairs of the Center. The chairman of said committee is to be an Alliance minister. The term of office for sub-committee members shall be three years. A sub-committee member may serve three successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.
2. The administrative officer of the MTC shall be a Director. He shall be an ordained minister, a member of the Alliance, nominated by the DNI board, approved by the Council of Overseers, and confirmed by the Alliance. The term of office for the Director shall be five years. He shall be an ex officio (voting) member of the MTC sub-committee.
3. The Director shall be accountable to the President of DNI in cooperation with the chairman of the MTC sub-committee.
4. The Director in concert with the sub-committee shall prepare an annual Guideline Budget covering all aspects of the Center's operations which shall be presented to the Alliance for approval at the annual Convention Business Session.

Article X Publications

Introduction

Believing in the importance of publishing materials for information, instruction, and discipleship, the Alliance shall make every effort to provide relevant literature available to its constituency. This would include original essays, pamphlets, booklets, books, and periodicals.

A. Publications Board

The publications ministry of the Alliance shall be directed by a board of three Alliance ministers nominated by the Council of Overseers and elected by the Alliance. The Publications Board shall be accountable to the Council of Overseers on policy issues, to the Board of Executors for the execution of said policies, and ultimately to the Alliance for the content of its publications. Materials of an instructional nature that bear the endorsement of BMA must be reviewed by the Publications Board. The board shall be responsible to insure that theological purity is not violated by any BMA publications. The term of office for Publications Board members shall be three years. A board member may serve three successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.

B. Editor of Publications

The administrative officer of the Publications Board shall be the Editor of Publications. He shall be an Alliance minister nominated by the Council of Overseers and elected by the Alliance. The term of office for the Editor is four years. He shall be an ex officio (voting) member of the Publications board. The Editor may appoint, with the approval of the Publications Board, various sub-committees from the membership of Alliance congregations to assist him in his task. Such appointments shall be subject to the approval of the Alliance. The term of office for sub-committee members shall be three years. A sub-committee member may serve three successive terms and be reelected after having been out of office for at least a year.

C. Intra-Alliance Communication

A regular newsletter including congregational and regional Alliance news, elucidation of Alliance positions on contemporary issues, and open forum topics will be published. Other informational literature may be published at the discretion of the Publications Board.

D. Teaching Literature

The Publications Board shall do whatever is feasible to provide instructional materials for use by BMA congregations. This would include such things as New Believers' Class curriculum, Sunday School curriculum, and other materials to enhance and promote Biblical discipleship.

Article XI Officers

A. Regional Overseers

1. Regional Overseers shall be selected by their respective Regionals as follows: the Alliance Moderator and/or the Chairman of the Council of Overseers shall assist the regional ministerial members through a nomination and selection process resulting in the combined leadership of each congregation submitting one nomination. Two-thirds of the total congregational members voting on the matter from the regional congregations must then ratify the selection by vote. Finally, the Alliance must confirm the selection.

2. A Regional Overseer must be a minister of an Alliance congregation with considerable experience in the ministry and who demonstrates capability in supervision.
3. Term of office for a Regional Overseer shall be five years with re-appointment possible.
4. The duties of the Regional Overseer shall include:
 - a. Organize and conduct quarterly Regional meetings.
 - b. Motivate to holiness and maturity by loving example and counsel all those ministers and congregations under his oversight while avoiding “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”
 - c. Assist local ministers in resolving congregational problems.
 - d. Develop vision and encourage growth and multiplication of congregations.
 - e. Communicate decisions of the Council of Overseers to local ministers.
 - f. Represent the region to the Alliance.
 - g. Promote Alliance programs and activities.
 - h. Report regional activities to the Council of Overseers.
 - i. Facilitate the process of licensing and ordaining new leaders in the region.
 - j. The above does not require the regional overseer to administer the ordinances.
5. In summary, the responsibilities of the regional overseers are to be seen as primarily pastoral and preventative rather than administrative. While a regional overseer may indeed be called to assist with conflict resolution, his primary objective should be to provide shepherding support in creating a culture of peace.

B. Council of Overseers

1. The Council of Overseers shall be composed of all the regional overseers. There shall be no limit to the size of this group.
2. The duties of the Council of Overseers shall include:
 - a. Give leadership in policy-making for approval by the Alliance.
 - b. Be the appellate body in cases where problems cannot be resolved at the regional level.
 - c. Be responsible to discipline congregations and ministers who turn away from the Alliance doctrines and their respective applications.
 - d. Prepare appropriate reports to the Alliance of Council actions.
3. The Chairman of the Council of Overseers shall be nominated during a regularly called meeting of the Council and be elected by the Alliance. He must meet the requirements of a regional overseer but need not be currently serving in that capacity. He will act as liaison between the Council of Overseers and the Board of Executors. The term of office for the Chairman is four years.

C. Board of Executors

1. The Board of Executors of the Alliance shall consist of seven members: Moderator, Assistant Moderator, Secretary/Treasurer, Chairman of the Council of Overseers, President of DNI, Principal of EBI, and Editor of Publications.

2. The Moderator, Assistant Moderator, Secretary/Treasurer, and Chairman of the Council of Overseers shall be elected by the Alliance after having been nominated by the Council of Overseers. They must be ministerial members of BMA and members of an Alliance congregation. Regional overseers shall not normally serve on the Board of Executors.
3. The Board of Executors is to be seen as the administrative arm of the Alliance.
 - a. It shall be responsible to see that the work of the Alliance goes forward and that tasks are completed.
 - b. It is not a policy-making or legislative body. Co-ordination of all the parts and ministries of the Alliance shall be the responsibility of the Board of Executors.
 - c. The Moderator or Assistant Moderator shall preside at the meetings of the Alliance.
 - d. The President of DNI, the Principal of EBI, and the Editor of Publications shall implement Alliance decisions pertaining to their respective responsibilities.
4. Board of Executors' term of office shall be four years.

D. Term Limitations

The following officers shall not serve more than two successive terms: Moderator, Assistant Moderator, Chairman of the Council of Overseers, and Secretary/Treasurer. (Exceptions to this section may be made by official action of the Alliance upon recommendation by the Council of Overseers when such is deemed necessary.)

Article XII Administrative Secretary

In order to facilitate the business of the Alliance, an Administrative Secretary shall be appointed to care for the organizational and operational details. He shall receive reasonable remuneration for his services (to be set by the Board of Executors).

A. Qualifications

1. He shall be a BMA ministerial member.
2. He shall manifest the gift of administration including attention to details.
3. He shall be able to make adequate time available in his schedule for timely completion of BMA related tasks.

B. Duties

1. He shall maintain a working office for BMA which shall include filing space and sufficient equipment to fulfill his BMA related responsibilities. The office need not be solely dedicated to BMA purposes but shall be secure for the orderly conduct of BMA business.
2. He shall assist in planning the various BMA Board and committee meetings with view to synchronizing schedules, arranging for meeting locations, and coordinating business considerations.
3. He shall be responsible for all general correspondence and communications from the BMA office to the ministerial body.
4. He shall act as recording secretary for BMA Business Sessions and Board of Executors' meetings and shall see to the reproduction of all necessary

ballots and reports, etc. He shall follow up these meetings with all correspondence details such as thank you notes, notification of speaker assignments, etc.

5. He shall prepare the Annual Directory for printing together with other programs and BMA materials.

C. Selection, Accountability, and Term of Office

1. The Administrative Secretary shall be appointed by joint action of the Council of Overseers and the Board of Executors subject to the approval of the BMA ministerial body.
2. He shall be directly accountable to the Board of Executors for the conduct of his BMA responsibilities.
3. The term of office shall be four years and shall be staggered opposite the Moderator's term. Indefinite reappointment shall be permitted.

Article XIII Exempt Organization Policy

No part of the net earnings of the Alliance shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its members, officers, or other private persons, except that the Alliance shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in this constitution. No substantial part of the activities of the Alliance shall be the carrying of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Alliance shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of this document, while maintaining tax exempt status, the Alliance shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on by an organization exempt from federal income tax under section 602 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code or any corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Article XIV Dissolution

Upon the dissolution of the Alliance, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Article XV Amendments

This constitution may be amended by the Alliance at a regular business session by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting provided that the proposed amendment is presented in writing to the Alliance ministerial body at least thirty days before the vote is taken.

Record of ratification and amendments:

Ratified June 5, 1998. Amended August 8, 2003; August 4, 2006; August 3, 2007; February 19, 2011; January 26, 2013 [Article XI.A.1.]; July 26, 2013 [Article IV, B, 5; Article X.A]; July 24, 2015 [Article IV]; January 30, 2016 [corrections of wording and punctuation; length of term for DNI board members changed from seven to five in Article VII B.]. January 27, 2018 [Article VIII changed VMC to VMB]. July 28, 2018 [Article VIII-B: added a liaison from Board of Executors for VMB.] July 26, 2019 [Article XI-C-2: VMB chair to serve as a member of Bd. of Executors; Delete liaison in VIII-B.] Feb. 1, 2020 [Article 9-B: Changed "Missions Training Center" to "Ministry Training Center"].

1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith

Summary Statements

This is a brief version of the Confession of Faith adopted by Mennonite General Conference in 1963 at Johnstown, PA. See the full 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith for more detailed information and supporting Scriptures.

1. We believe in one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that God has revealed himself in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inspired Word of God, and supremely in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. We believe that in the beginning God created all things by His Son. He made man in the divine image, with free will, moral character, and a spiritual nature.
4. We believe that man fell into sin, bringing depravity and death upon the race; that as sinner, man is self-centered and self-willed, unwilling and unable to break with sin.
5. We believe that there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who died to redeem us from sin and arose for our justification.
6. We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, a free gift bestowed by God on those who repent and believe.
7. We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, effects the new birth, gives guidance in life, empowers for service, and enables perseverance in faith and holiness.
8. We believe that the church is the body of Christ, the brotherhood of the redeemed, a disciplined people obedient to the Word of God, and a fellowship of love, intercession, and healing.
9. We believe that Christ commissioned the church to go into all the world, making disciples of all the nations, and ministering to every human need.
10. We believe it is the will of God that there should be ministers to teach the Word, to serve as leaders, to administer the ordinances, to lead the church in the exercise of discipline, and to serve as pastors and teachers.

11. We believe that those who repent and believe should be baptized with water as a symbol of baptism with the Spirit, cleansing from sin, and commitment to Christ.
12. We believe that the church should observe the communion of the Lord's Supper as a symbol of his broken body and shed blood, and of the fellowship of his church, until his return.
13. We believe in the washing of the saints' feet as a symbol of brotherhood, cleansing, and service, and in giving the right hand of fellowship and the holy kiss as symbols of Christian love.
14. We believe that God has established unique roles for man and woman, symbolized by man's bared head in praying and prophesying, and by woman's veiled head.
15. We believe that Christian marriage is intended by God to be the union of one man and one woman for life, and that Christians shall marry only in the Lord.
16. We believe that Christians are not to be conformed to the world, but should seek to conform to Christ in every area of life.
17. We believe that Christians are to be open and transparent in life, ever speaking the truth, and employing no oaths.
18. We believe that it is the will of God for Christians to refrain from force and violence in human relations and to show Christian love to all men.
19. We believe that the state is ordained of God to maintain order in society, and that Christians should honor rulers, be subject to authorities, witness to the state, and pray for governments.
20. We believe that at death the unsaved enter into everlasting punishment and the saved into conscious bliss with Christ, who is coming again, and will raise the dead, sit in judgment, and bring in God's everlasting kingdom.

from Herald Press, Scottdale, PA
Adopted by BMA June 5, 1998

POLICY ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Adultery: An Act or a State?

A basic but often unidentified issue involved in discussions about what a person who has committed adultery should do in order to repent is this: was his sin of adultery only an act, or is it considered to be an ongoing state of sin? If it was an act of sin only, then the person may acknowledge his sin, be forgiven, and be careful not to repeat it again. This allows one to continue in the remarriage relationship. If, however, adultery is a continuous state of sin until the present partner is put away, complete repentance and full assurance of God's forgiveness do not exist until the adulterous union is discontinued.

Both positions have very serious implications. If adultery is an act only, then to require separation is to needlessly break up homes and to lay a heavy and unnecessary burden on persons who desire to repent. It could also result in placing a stumbling block in the path of earnest seekers. If adultery is a state, however, then to assure persons of forgiveness while living with their partner (with the first spouse still living) is to give them a false hope of salvation and to sanction their going to hell since no adulterer will enter the kingdom of heaven (I Cor. 6:9). It also undermines the foundations of marriage and weakens the will to work through marriage difficulties.

How does God view adultery...as an act or a state? We believe the Bible clearly presents adultery as an ongoing state of sin until the adulterous union is discontinued. Read and meditate on the following passages:

Genesis 20 As long as Abimelech had another man's wife under his roof, he was a "dead man" until he released her to go back to her rightful husband, even though he had not yet touched her. This was true for even a pagan king.

Ezra 9 and 10 Though a somewhat different situation, ie. marrying foreign women, their unions were illicit and their sin was considered to be removed only when they separated themselves from their wives. (10:2-4, 10, 11)

- Jer. 7:8-11 (Note preceding context) The Israelites were committing adultery and then going to the Temple and saying, “We are safe’--safe to do all these detestable things...” God said they were trusting in deceptive, worthless words.
- Mal. 2:13-17 God hates divorce, the breaking faith with the wife of one’s youth. Can He accept in our time that which He once hated? Is it only the act of breaking faith that He hates, or does He hate both the act and the ongoing state of breaking faith?
- Mt. 14:3,4 (NAS) John the Baptist rebuked Herod for taking his brother Philip’s wife. He did not say: “It is not lawful for you to have taken her” but rather “It is not lawful for you to have her”. Some say the sin was that of incest. Actually, Herod had committed two sins: adultery and incest. The only way to repent of both was to release the woman. John was rebuking a sinner, which shows that immorality is sin, not only for the saint, but also for the sinner. If adultery were merely an act, John died in vain. He should have been more discreet and sensitive, calling only for Herod to say he was sorry and giving permission to continue on with Herodias. Instead, Jesus commended John as being the greatest man born of women. Note also in Mk. 6:18 John’s warning to Herod was repeated, continuous action: “For John had been saying...” This is why Herodias nursed a grudge against John. If he had said, “Just recognize you sinned, but stay with her and don’t commit adultery again with another woman”, Herodias wouldn’t have had reason to be so upset with John.
- Lk. 16:18 (NKJV) If adultery and divorce effectively terminate the marriage relationship so that the divorcee may then be remarried, how could Jesus’ words be true: “Whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery”? Notice also that he says “whoever”, not merely the Christian who does it.

Mk. 10:10-12 Jesus clearly states that remarriage after being divorced is adultery.

Rom. 7:2,3 Only death breaks the marriage bond. If the woman marries another man “while her husband is still alive” (not: “before her husband divorces her”), she is an adulteress. It does not say “she commits an act of adultery” but rather “she shall be called an adulteress”. Some say that this is only an example used to illustrate our relationship with the Law. Granted, it is an example. However, the teaching about our relationship with the Law can only be true if the example also is true. It is hard to think of how one could improve on this passage in terms of its simplicity, clarity and conciseness.

I Cor. 7:10,11 The Lord’s command through Paul: no divorce, no separation. But if separation does occur, then no remarriage. Either the individuals must remain unmarried or else be reconciled.

I Cor. 7:39 Marriage is for life, not until divorce separates.

Following are other related passages and perspectives that point to adultery as being an ongoing state of sin until the adulterous union is discontinued:

1. The marriage vow states “till death do us part”, not “till divorce do us part”. God takes vows very seriously as seen in Eccl. 5:4-6. God honors the first vow, the first union. Sinful vows should be repented of and sinful actions put away, not continued. The second vow was not a legitimate vow.
2. What is the meaning of repentance? With all other kinds of sins, we tell a person that true repentance means putting away sin; only then can he be sure of God’s forgiveness. The following passages demonstrate this truth: Prov. 28:13; Mat. 3:8 and context; Lk. 3:8-14; Acts 26:20—we prove our repentance by our deeds, not by our words. See also II Cor. 7:11.

3. I Cor. 5:1 says the man “has his father’s wife,” not took his father’s wife. As long as he was calling himself a brother, they were not to associate with him but rather to expel him from the church. This indicates that his immoral relationship was an ongoing state. Other gross sins are listed as reason for the same action by the church.
4. Consistency calls for discontinuing the adulterous marriage. If two people live in fornication, in order for them to repent we tell them they stop living together as unmarried people. If a person lives in incest, we tell him to discontinue that relationship. If two persons of the same sex are married, they must get out of that union, whether or not the State says it is legal. With other sins it is the same: someone who has stolen goods must return them, not merely say he is sorry for having taken them. A person who has kidnapped someone must release the person before we would be sure he had truly repented. Why, then, would this not apply also to divorced and remarried persons living in adultery?
5. The fruit of both approaches. Viewing adultery merely as an act fills churches with adulterous unions, undermines existing marriages, justifies having leaders that are divorced and remarried, and shuts the mouths of Christians and church leaders from speaking out against adultery in a society that is becoming more immoral and perverse. Today, many churches are very little different from the surrounding society in their morals.

Viewing adultery as an ongoing state, however, promotes a life of holiness and purity in churches which take this Scriptural position, and provides solid foundations for marriages, a basis for facing difficulties in marriage, and courage and authority to confront sin both in the church and in the society. This approach best harmonizes Scripture passages on the topic and follows the practice of the Early Church in the first centuries.

Responses to questions:

1. **What about the “exception clause” (Mt. 5:32).** Jesus here clarifies in which situation a man is causing his wife to become an adulteress. He does not give permission for remarriage; in fact, he forbids remarriage even to the adulterous woman. In Mt. 19:9, a very good case can be made for the position that divorce in certain limited cases

is permitted but not remarriage; ie. that the exception clause modifies only the first part of the verse, not the last part. This position allows for separation in certain limited cases, such as homosexuality and prostitution without giving permission for remarriage. This position best harmonizes with other Bible passages on the topic and is the position of the Early Church for the first five centuries (See: Jesus and Divorce, by Heth and Wenham, p. 22). This position also makes the best sense of the disciples' expression of surprise (Mat. 19:10) about the strictness of Jesus' teaching against divorce and remarriage in contrast to the liberal position the Jewish Rabbi Hillel for "any and every cause" and the conservative position of Rabbi Shammai permitting remarriage in the case of infidelity.

2. **What about I Cor. 7:15?** "A believing man or woman is not bound..." Bound to what? In observing the context, it seems the best understanding is to say: "He/she is not bound to fulfill his/her marital rights if the unbelieving spouse voluntarily leaves. He/she is not bound to force the unbeliever to stay." To say that this "not bound" passage means that one may divorce and remarry causes Paul to contradict himself in what he says in vs. 10, 11 (by God's direct command) and v. 39.
3. **Didn't Paul say that "each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God called him" and "to remain in the situation which he was in when God called him"?** (I Cor. 7:17, 20, 24) Yes, but God does not call people into a state of adultery. They should remain only in situations that are not sinful, as per the examples given: circumcision, being a slave. To apply this to a remarriage situation requires one to also say that a person who is single or a widow(er) when he accepts Christ must always remain that way.
4. **Didn't Paul say that if you are loosed from a wife you may marry without sinning?** Actually, what he said is "Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned..." (I Cor. 7:27,28 NKJV). He did not say "if you remarry, you have not sinned." To marry if one's spouse has died is not sin, but to use this passage to justify remarriage while the first partner is living causes Paul to contradict himself in this same chapter (vs. 10, 11, 39) and in his teaching in

Romans 7:2-3, to contradict the teaching of Jesus (Mk. 10:11,12; Lk. 16:18) and also the understanding and practice of the Early Church. One must ask the question: how may a person properly be “loosed from a wife” in order to marry again? The Scriptural answer is: the death of the partner (I Cor. 7:39; Rom. 7:2,3). Furthermore, in the context of “loosing,” Paul is not speaking about divorcees, but about virgins and widows (7:25-40).

5. **Doesn't God forgive? Doesn't his mercy cover our sins?** God's mercy becomes ours when we confess and abandon our sins (Prov. 28:13). Otherwise we are sinning deliberately, and as long as one remains in that state there is no forgiveness (Heb. 10:26-31). Note also Titus 2:11-14: the grace of God teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions—not continue on in them. See also I Jn. 3:7-10. If adultery was sin in the beginning when first committed, common sense indicates it continues to be sin when it continues to be committed. That is the way we view all other sins. Why would it be different with adultery?
6. **What if I divorced my spouse before I was a (committed) believer in Christ? Doesn't that allow me to remarry (or to stay with my present spouse)?** We need to remember that marriage was not first of all a Christian institution and is valid whether one marries as a Christian or not. Adultery is not a sin that only Christians can commit. If marriages were valid only for Christians, then we would have to tell all unbelievers that their marriages are worthless and that in God's sight they are not married. This approach would also conflict with the passages in Genesis 20 and Matthew 14 where Abimelech and Herod, as unbelievers, were clearly condemned by God in what they had done.

Conclusion: We believe that the teaching that adultery is merely an act of sin which the grace of God covers while allowing the adulterous couple to continue together is an example of what Jude warns: “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, *who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality...*” (v.4 NIV; italics added).

Therefore, in view of the Scriptures cited above, we conclude that adultery is an ongoing state of sin that can only be truly forgiven when divorced and remarried persons separate. “He who covers his sins will

not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (NKJV).

For additional reading on this position:

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage, John Coblentz, c.1992, Christian Light Publications, 98 p.

Till Death Do Us Part?, Joseph A. Webb, c.1996, Webb Ministries, PO Box 520729, Longwood, FL 32742-0729, 274 p.

Jesus and Divorce, the Problem With The Evangelical Consensus, William Heth and Gordon Wenham, c. 1984, Nelson Publishers, 287 p. (No longer in print)

—Written by Allen Roth

Adopted by BMA, August 7, 1999

A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO DIVORCED AND REMARRIED PERSONS

How shall we respond when divorced and remarried persons come to us and our churches? What advice do we have for them? This is certainly one of the most difficult issues we face in pastoral work, made all the more so by the fact that Christian leaders and churches differ so deeply on this matter. Here are some suggestions to consider:

1. First of all, make sure you know what you believe and why. Read and meditate on relevant Scripture passages. Think carefully through the implications of adultery as an act or an ongoing state of sin. To counsel divorced or remarried persons when you yourself are uncertain of Scriptural teaching will neither be helpful for you nor for the persons involved.
2. Prayerfully go as soon as possible to the person(s) after you discover there may be a divorce and remarriage involved, but do not prejudge the situation until you hear from the person himself. There are many possible variations and we should not quickly pass judgment until we have all the facts. Don't postpone your inquiry too long. The longer you wait, the more you weaken your case and concern. If you wait too long, the person can say, "If you really believed that I am living in a state of adultery, why didn't you come sooner?" By waiting so

long, your friendship overtures can be viewed as being manipulative, hypocritical, and self-serving. When you go, ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, pray for His direction and courage. Then expect him to work through you and for you.

3. Before you go, prepare yourself spiritually and emotionally to meet with the person/couple. The session could be a very emotional one. The person/couple may respond with anger, with grief, with denial of guilt, with counter-charges, or with a desire to study God's Word on the topic, with acceptance of wrong-doing, and a desire to get out of the adulterous situation. We are not responsible for their reaction. We are responsible to lovingly speak the truth, to respond in a Christ-like manner and to walk alongside those person(s) who desire help in doing the will of God. We are also responsible to appropriately maintain confidentiality in the matter and to avoid sharing shameful details of immoral behavior (Eph. 4:12). We should try to treat the person(s) as we would like to be treated if we were the person being confronted.
4. Do not begin your visit with lecturing or condemning. Rather, begin by asking like this: "I have heard that you are divorced and remarried. Is this true?" Then listen to their explanation respectfully. While listening carefully to them, listen also to the Holy Spirit within you for His indication about how you will continue.
5. You may then ask something like this: "Have you thought about how this fits with what the Bible says, for example, in Luke 16:18?" Ask them to read it from the Bible and to explain their point of view.
6. You may ask if they would be open to reading what the Bible has to say on the subject and give them a list of relevant Scripture references. (See attached list.)
7. They may have questions and want to discuss various Bible verses. This is a great opportunity. They may also be interested in articles, booklets and books on the subjects. Choose carefully those you will recommend. You should have read them first yourself. I prefer having them read the Bible passages first before they get into other

resources. You may want to recommend a resource for them. Ask if you may discuss it with them when they finish.

8. While they are reading the Bible/other resources, pray for them regularly. Pray for God to open their eyes, to sensitize their consciences, to protect them from deception and from persons who would confuse them or justify them in their sin. It is helpful to find one or two other persons with whom you can agree in united prayer for this couple. However, choose carefully prayer partners who will guard confidentiality and who are persons of prayer.
9. If you are asked by the person(s) involved what you think they should do, be wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove and courageous as John the Baptist. This is a very sensitive moment indeed, particularly in view of our society with its love of lawsuits, including suits against clergy for malpractice in counseling. You may want to answer something like the following: “You ask God what He wants you to do. According to what I have read in the Bible, if I were in that situation, I feel I would need to...”
10. When a person asks you, “What do you think about...?”, it is wise as much as possible to reply with “The Bible says...”
11. As we relate with the person(s) we need to remember to be kind and firm. We reflect both the holiness and the love of God. “Dealing redemptively” with the person includes “speaking the truth in love.” It is not redemptive to withhold or soft-pedal the truth. We must be sympathetic as the person wrestles with the implications of his sin and its consequences. We must also be firm and not dilute the truth of God’s Word. This is not an easy balance to achieve. Some of us are more inclined to be merciful and will struggle to stand firm. Others of us are more prophetic and will need to ask God to make us care deeply for the person.
12. We will also need to be very patient with the person/couple. It will doubtless be a process, longer than we would wish, and will be a struggle for them as they work through the issue. Some will angrily walk away from us, leaving us to deal with our pain as well. This is the way of the cross. Others will struggle, question, doubt, question again. In it all, we need to be loving and firm. God will save and

deliver some as we walk faithfully with Him proclaiming the truth in love.

13. A most difficult aspect of this issue is how to relate with born-again people who come to us in a divorced and remarried state. Perhaps we will relate differently with those who divorced and remarried before becoming believers than with those who did so, as born-again believers, against better knowledge. In the case of the latter, surely I Cor. 5:11 would apply: "...you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral...With such a man do not even eat." It seems rather clear that this "eating" is not restricted to the Lord's Supper.

With those persons who have come to Christ for salvation and then discover the sinfulness of their remarriage relationship, it seems Christ-like to exercise patience with them as they wrestle with and decide what their response will be to this aspect of genuine repentance. We will need to depend much upon the Holy Spirit to guide us about when and how to broach the subject, and how long we can relate with them as new brothers and sisters in Christ while they struggle with the claims of Christ in this area of their lives.

Resources:

Article:

"Do Divorced And Remarried Persons Need To Separate? Adultery: An Act or a State?", by Allen Roth.

Books:

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage, John Coblenz, c.1992, Christian Light Publications, 98p.

Till Death Do Us Part?, Joseph A. Webb, c.1996, Webb Ministries, PO Box 520729, Longwood, FL 32742-0729, 274 p.

Jesus and Divorce, the Problem With The Evangelical Consensus, William Heth and Gordon Wenham, c. 1984, Nelson Publishers, 287 p. (No longer in print)

BIBLE PASSAGES RELATING TO MARRIAGE, ADULTERY, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Old Testament Passages

Genesis 1:27,28	Job 31:1, 9-12
Genesis 2:24	Proverbs 5, 6 and 7
Genesis 20	Proverbs 22:14
Exodus 20:14-17	Proverbs 28:13
Leviticus 20:10	Jeremiah 7:9,10
Deuteronomy 5:18-21	Hosea 4:1,2
Deuteronomy 24:1-4	Malachi 2:10-17
II Samuel 11 and 12	Malachi 3:5
Ezra 9 and 10	

New Testament Passages

Matthew 1:18-20	I Corinthians 6:9-11
Matthew 5:27-32	I Corinthians 7
Matthew 14:1-12	Galatians 5:19-21
Matthew 19:1-12	Ephesians 4:17-19
Mark 6:14-29	Ephesians 5:5-13
Mark 10:1-12	I Thessalonians 4:3-8
Luke 16:18	Hebrews 13:4
John 4:16-18	Jude 4
John 8:1-11	Revelation 2:20-23
Romans 7:2,3	Revelation 21:8
I Corinthians 5:9-13	Revelation 22:15

Adopted by BMA, August 7, 1999

BIBLICAL MENNONITE ALLIANCE

Position and Policy Statements

The following doctrinal and practical Biblical application commitments, initially established at the birth of BMA, are intended as requirements for BMA pastors and congregations.

1. The Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963) forms the basis for our statements of belief and practice. We recommend a thorough acquaintance with the principles and standards contained therein. Congregations are encouraged to develop written positions, policies, and statements of encouragement on pertinent contemporary issues. Some issues with Alliance-wide interest may result in proposals for consideration and adoption by the Alliance.
2. We agree that the church is the pillar and guardian of the truth. As such, it has a vested interest in the education of its families through Sunday School, preaching, and meaningful worship. Since Christ is the fountainhead of all true knowledge, every effort should be made to provide a complete Christ-centered, high quality education for the children of our congregations. The believing father is primarily responsible to prepare his child(ren) for all of life. In the interests of its accountability to the Scriptures, each local brotherhood is expected to assist and encourage its fathers in this responsibility (Deut. 6:6-9; Eph. 6:4; Col. 2:3; I Tim. 3:15).
3. We agree that the proper application of the headship order is for the Christian man to take seriously the Biblical commandment to be a Christ-like leader in the home and congregation and for the woman to complement him as his helper.
4. We agree that, in order to maintain a clear witness, the best application of the Biblical requirement of “long hair” for the sisters is “natural length.” We also agree that the best application of the headship ordinance is that the sisters wear their veiling as a part of their regular attire. While a uniform style is not required across the Alliance, we do expect a veiling (or covering) of substantial size. We believe Christian men should have short hair and unveiled head.

5. We agree that the personal appearance of the true Christian believer must present a clear witness to Biblical teachings in such matters as modest apparel, gender distinctions, and simplicity. We agree to refrain from all decorative jewelry, the wedding band, and any makeup that alters the natural appearance.
6. We agree to urge our constituency to exercise Spirit-directed caution in the use of all media. Whenever the use of any media promotes an ungodly worldview or desensitization to sin, such use must be avoided (Psalm 101:3). Congregations should hold heads of households accountable for media use in their homes.
7. We agree that divorce and remarriage is outside the will of God and thus unacceptable. A second marriage with a former spouse living constitutes a state of adultery, requiring repentance and separation.
8. We agree that God's gift of sex is to be reserved only for marriage. All forms of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, and pornography are sinful perversions.
9. We agree that human life is a special gift of God. Abortion constitutes the inexcusable taking of unborn human life; thus, it is murder. This includes termination of pregnancies due to rape, incest, birth defects, gender selection, birth or population control, or the mental well-being of the mother. Infanticide and euthanasia, including assisted suicide, are also to be recognized as murder.
10. We agree to prioritize the command of Christ to make disciples in all nations, and to establish churches for membership in the Alliance across North America and beyond.

To assist Alliance congregations in the formation of Biblical positions and policies, the following works are recommended:

1. Separated Unto God by J. C. Wenger
2. Introduction to Theology by J. C. Wenger
3. Doctrines of the Bible by Daniel Kauffman

**Adopted by ministers of BMA 6/5/1998;
updated 2/4/1999, 2/2/2000, 7/24/2009**

BIBLICAL MENNONITE ALLIANCE

Five-Year Assessment of Unity

The purpose of this form is to affirm your salvation and commitment to the brotherhood and to measure the level of unity and commitment to the standards **as outlined in the Position and Policy statement** of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance. It is also used to identify compatibility of prospective members and to prevent drift within the organization.

1. I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, God as my Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit as my guide. I accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and base my faith, life, and practice on its written message." NO YES

Comments: _____

2. With God's aid, I am growing in my love for the Lord and for others. It is my desire to be united in faith and practice within the local body of believers. NO YES

Comments: _____

Please indicate your position on each of the statements using the scale from 1 to 3. Explanations are encouraged.

<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Mostly agree and am willing to support the positions of BMA</u>	<u>Agree</u>
1	2	3

1. My belief is in harmony with the articles of faith as described in the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith* as adopted by the Biblical Mennonite Alliance. _____

2. Through the guidance of its leaders, the church has authority for direction and discipline. _____

3. God's gift of sex is to be reserved only for marriage. All forms of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, and pornography are sinful perversions.
- _____

4. The Bible is clear on the permanence of the marriage bond between one man and one woman. Therefore initiating divorce or re-marrying after divorce (while a former spouse is still living) is considered to be outside the will of God and thus unacceptable.
- _____

5. Human life is a special gift of God and is not to be pre-meditatively extinguished under any circumstance whether it is by abortion, assisted suicide, murder, infanticide, or euthanasia. _____
6. The personal appearance of the true Christian believer must present a clear witness to Biblical teachings of separation from the world's influence in such matters as modest apparel, gender distinction, simplicity, and avoiding sensuality. Any apparel that draws attention to the body (tight-fitting clothing, shorts, etc.) has a tendency to cause impure thoughts and therefore must be avoided. _____
7. All decorative jewelry, the wedding band, and any make-up that alters the natural appearance should not be a part of our practice. _____
8. The Bible teaches man's unveiled head and short hair and woman's veiled head and natural length hair. The best application of the headship ordinance is for the sisters to wear their veiling as a part of their regular attire. While a uniform style is not required across the Alliance, a veiling of substantial size is required. Both men and women are expected to take seriously their commitments to the application of these Bible teachings.

9. The proper application of the leadership order is for the Christian man to take seriously the Biblical commandment to be a Christ-like leader in the home and congregation and for the woman to complement him as his helper. _____
10. Television and the Internet have the potential to influence us and our children in a negative way – emotionally and spiritually. Each member shall exercise Spirit-directed caution in the use of all media. Whenever the use of any media promotes an ungodly worldview or desensitization to sin, such use must be avoided. _____
11. Fathers are responsible for whatever form of media they allow in their home along with the influence it has on their family and family life. Therefore congregations should hold fathers accountable for the media used in their homes. _____
12. Jesus teaches in Matthew 18 that we are accountable to each other. He offers clear instructions for approaching one another. Members are expected to participate in these steps of resolution when offenses arise.

Name (please print)

Date _____

Congregation

revised Nov, 2017

The Danvers Statement

On Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

The "Danvers Statement" summarizes the need for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and serves as an overview of our core beliefs. This statement was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, MA, in December of 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, IL in November, 1988.

Rationale

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

- 1 The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
- 2 the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
- 3 the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
- 4 the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
- 5 the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;
- 6 the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
- 7 the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
- 8 the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
- 9 the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
- 10 and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

Affirmations

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).

3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - a. In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - b. In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - a. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
 - b. In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission--domestic, religious, or civil--ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).
8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

Adopted by Biblical Mennonite Alliance, July 22, 2011

Statement on LGBT* Issues

Biblical Mennonite Alliance

In response to an increasing acceptance of homosexuality in society and in the broader church, the Biblical Mennonite Alliance expresses its position in the following points:

1. God's Word is ultimate truth and goodness; therefore we have no right or desire to deviate from its authority. Without being harsh or unkind, we believe questions of ethics and morality must be answered by the revelation, authority, and faithful interpretation of the Scriptures.
2. Human sexuality is good, as created by God, but can be perverted and corrupted in human attitude and behavior. Homosexuality and gender confusion are ultimately a rejection of the way God created mankind and of His plan for the unique roles of men and women.
3. Whatever the causes of homosexuality, it is a condition outside of God's creational intent when He created them male and female (Genesis 1:27).
4. Homosexual behavior is clearly classified as sin in Scripture (I Cor. 6:9). Romans 1:26, 27 (NKJV) refers to homosexual behavior in terms of those who “exchanged the natural use for what is against nature” and “committing what is shameful.”
5. Homosexual orientation is deviant from God's plan for human sexuality, and should not be considered as a gift of God. (Romans 1:26, 27)
6. Response to homosexual orientation should recognize the condition as falling short of the plan of God and should seek reorientation through God's transforming power.
7. Persons with homosexual orientation desiring transformation can respond by:
 - a. Refusing to entertain the orientation as satisfactory or as a gift from God,
 - b. Repenting of ways in which the individual may have enhanced the orientation,
 - c. Renouncing the identity and control of the orientation and any notion of having been created to be homosexual,

- d. Working toward reorientation by God's grace and the help of fellow-believers,
 - e. Seeking release from the bondage of factors which may have caused the orientation,
 - f. Committing the problem of homosexual orientation to the Lordship of Jesus for growth in the experiential reality of being a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17).
8. The church is responsible to minister compassionately and redemptively to the homosexual
- a. by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are not believers,
 - b. by renouncing homosexual behavior as sin and recognizing homosexual orientation as abnormal (not a gift of God),
 - c. by leading the homosexual to God's grace for deliverance,
 - d. through ministries such as counseling or support groups in the body of Christ. These ministries include a call to holiness, sympathetic understanding of those involuntarily caught in homosexual orientation, renouncing homosexual behavior, and providing ministry (specialized or within the church) for reorientation.
9. We believe that homosexual unions are clearly contrary to God's revealed will and must be forsaken.
10. The Holy Spirit through the gospel is powerful to transform the repentant homosexual from the bondage of the sinful nature by prayer, God's grace, and forgiveness; “and such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11 NKJV).
11. A person who does not accept the truths outlined herein may not be received or retained in the membership of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance (Romans 1:32).

*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
*Adapted from the Conservative Mennonite Conference “Statement on
 Homosexuality”*

Approved in BMA Business Session, July 25, 2014, January 31, 2015

Policy on Ministerial Sexual Immorality

Recognizing the high standard required of spiritual leaders (I Timothy 3), a licensed or ordained Alliance member who commits sexual immorality will automatically forfeit his ministerial credentials and membership with the Alliance. An accountability structure will be established with the goal of achieving brokenness and repentance, so the brother may be restored in all of his relationships. This brother may be disqualified from ever serving again in a leadership capacity. However, in certain cases, providing he serves as a faithful layman after a significant period of time (5 years minimum) and the congregation and Alliance place enough trust in him to call him to a position of licensed or ordained ministry, his restoration to leadership could be considered.

BMA Policy approved on July 26, 2013

SHARING FINANCIAL NEEDS WITHIN BMA

Financial needs may arise within BMA calling for alliance-wide support and assistance. In such situations the following guidelines will be followed:

- a. The local congregational leaders work with the family or individual to provide guidance, support, and financial counsel and help as they are able.
- b. The local congregational leaders work with the family to seek reduction of the bills by the hospital and medical professionals and will seek help from the extended family.
- c. The local congregation establishes a fund for the need, administered by the church.
- d. The congregational leaders submit the need through their overseer to the Board of Executors to decide if the need will be published to BMA.
- e. The Board of Executors (BoE) reviews the request considering factors such as the following: availability and affordability of insurance, the ability of the local congregation to provide support, and the additional support that is needed in the situation. The BoE shall decide whether or not to publish the need.
- f. Upon approval of the BoE, the need will be published by a letter to all ordained pastors and deacons and/or by a notice in the BMA Newsletter. In the event of a financial need of a pastor or deacon, the need would be published first to the BMA pastors to elicit care and support within the BMA ministerial membership. Such a letter/notice will provide information on the situation, will present the need for financial help, and will invite prayerful consideration for individual and/or congregational responses. Publishing such a letter does not commit BMA to meeting that need.
- g. Funds contributed may be sent to a congregational leader (deacon, chairman of support committee, etc.) or to the administrator of the fund in part “c” above, not directly to the individual or family.
- h. In due time the congregational leaders shall report back to the BoE how the need has been met and how any excess funds will be disbursed.

Presented July 23, 2014, as BMA in-house policy

The following two documents reflect a working understanding of position in BMA, although they have not been officially adopted as policy statements.

What Constitutes a Church?

From the Council of Overseers minutes of August 3, 2005

Unless a group would meet the following criteria, the group would be considered an emerging church. To be considered a church, the following criteria should be met:

1. Have in place a Covenant of Membership and common goal(s) (mission statement).
2. Have an organizational leadership structure in place (minister, elders, deacons, advisory board, etc.)
3. Have an association with an existing organization (some type of objective accountability, overseer, etc.)
4. Be self-supporting/self-governing.
5. Conduct regular meetings.
6. Have legal recognition established as a non-profit (Fed. I.D. number).
7. Have a minimum of four families and/or eight adult men (18 years of age+).

BIBLICAL MENNONITE ALLIANCE

Present-Day Concerns

Presented by the Council of Overseers, July, 2011

As Christian pilgrims in an alien society, we find ourselves under constant pressure to compromise our principles and standards. In order to strengthen and safeguard the beliefs and practices of the Alliance, we urge careful attention to the following issues:

1. Spiritual life. In our post-Christian world it is all too easy to slip into a pattern of neglect in personal spirituality. We encourage daily commitment to the Lordship of Christ and regular attendance at church services.
2. Lifestyle. In an age of affluence, the follower of Jesus will be careful with his purchases and possessions so that they reflect the simple lifestyle as modeled by the Lord Jesus. That will enable him to give sacrificially to the needs of others and to the extension of the gospel.
3. Personal appearance. Jesus and the Scriptures call us to a simple, modest, unadorned lifestyle, and a separation from the world and its fads, fashions, and ornamentation. Jesus' followers will avoid immodest and form-revealing clothing.

If sisters choose to wear culottes for social activities or work that would increase her ability to remain modest while doing those activities, they should be of "sufficient length" to cover the knees when sitting, have "sufficient material" to avoid a tightness on the legs that would give the appearance of "shorts," and should only be worn with the approval of her husband or father.

Because wearing shorts borders on immodesty, can leave a poor testimony, and may cause offense, we strongly encourage men to wear full length trousers for all public life. Exceptions could include the wearing of shorts below the knee for non-public activities such as water sports, etc.

Since the tie serves no practical purpose other than ornamentation, and out of respect for the convictions of others, we appeal to our brethren to abstain from wearing a tie at any conjoint BMA-related activity.

4. Sports. Our society is enamored with sports. The follower of Jesus will avoid over-involvement, either as participants or spectators.

5. Media. Society's media is controlled by those with less-than-Christian standards. We call on our constituency to beware of the dangers of our present-day media, whether in the use of computers, Internet, DVD, VCR, TV, books, magazines, or other media.

Recognizing the tremendous impact of television and other forms of mass media, we strongly recommend that all "spiritually detrimental programming" be removed from the home. Media that is acceptable can also be detrimental if not used thoughtfully and deliberately. We must allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in controlling their impact on our lives, and refrain from practices that would grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder our witness for Christ.

We ask our constituency to respect the views of other brothers regarding media use. When one is in the presence of others who are offended by our use of any form of media, we should abstain for our brother's conscience sake.

6. Headship veiling. It is with deep concern that we see a diminishing of veiling size on the part of some sisters. We strongly encourage a covering or a hanging veil of sufficient size to cover a substantial part of the head. We urge pastors, husbands, and fathers to be diligent in maintaining a consistent Biblical pattern for the veiling, free from fashion and decorative appearance. We also urge our sisters to be submissive and cooperative.

“Miscellaneous Procedural Policies”

[Purpose of this section is to provide a place for additional miscellaneous policies, such as releasing ministerial members, providing sabbaticals, handling resignations, etc.]

Withdrawal of a Congregation from BMA

If a congregation chooses to withdraw from BMA, the request shall be processed by the overseers who will announce it in a semi-annual business meeting to be acted upon in the following business meeting. This six-month waiting period is intended to allow time so that any situation or issues that may arise may be appropriately resolved, promoting accountability and connectedness. The overseers could make exceptions in the case of transfer to another group or for other reasons.

Approved January 27, 2018

Ministerial Withdrawal and/or Resignations

Before a ministerial withdrawal and/or resignation may be accepted or recognized, it must first be reviewed by a representation from the overseers for counsel and then be processed locally for release by the congregation. Any withdrawals and/or resignations from BMA will be announced in a semi-annual business meeting for recognition and acceptance/approval to be acted upon in the following business meeting. This six-month waiting period is intended to allow time so that any situation or issues that may arise may be appropriately resolved, promoting accountability and connectedness. If a minister resigns from a congregation without this process, his BMA credentials may be discontinued. (This does not apply to cases of ministerial discipline, such as “The Policy on Ministerial Sexual Immorality.”)

Approved January 27, 2018

Part 2

Minister's Manual

for

Church Services,

Ceremonies,

and

Ordinances

INTRODUCTION

The traditional Minister's Manual has as its purpose the setting forth of formulas intended to be used in worship services, the administration of ordinances, and various commissionings which are the responsibility of the church. It also gives instructions to pastors for the proper use of these formulas and the preparation of those who are participants.

In this manual the language used lies between the two extremes of formal, heavy theological language and of informal verbalization of religious ceremonies. The goal is to preserve the sanctity of the church and yet allow the participants to feel at ease and properly involved.

In the Mennonite brotherhood a Minister's Manual has been regarded, not as a sacred book, but as a guide to the proper expression and administration of religious rites and ordinances. Four focuses should be observed in the formulation and verbalization of formulas:

- A. A focus on the Lord God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is the author of salvation, the dispenser of providence, and the one with whom the worshiper enters into covenant, worships, and serves.
- B. A focus on the church—the commissioned representative of Christ on earth, to proclaim salvation and to nurture believers. The language of her ceremonies should reinforce the dignity and authority of the church and the identification of her worshiper with the visible community of faith.
- C. A focus on the participant—the church and its ceremonies should never be an end in themselves. The language of the religious formula should convey to the participant ownership in the event.
- D. A focus on the covenant community—those who witness the event should feel included in participation and responsibility.

The formulas in this manual are intended to be suggestive for and helpful in worship. They may be used as they appear or may simply furnish the framework upon which the servant of Christ builds such formulas as may be appropriate to the time and circumstance.

BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP RECEPTIONS

The reception of members into the congregation should be one of the most important, regular, and joyful occasions of congregational life. The usual methods of receiving members are by baptism, on confession of faith, and by letter. New believers are expected to follow their profession of faith with baptism.

The initial decision to become a follower of Christ may occur in any number of situations: during private meditation or reading of Scripture, in the home at family worship, at some youth meeting or retreat, as a response to an invitation, as a result of personal evangelism or deciding to join a pastor's class for new believers.

Whatever the time and place of decision, the pastor, in dealing with new believers, should make certain that they have experienced genuine repentance, have truly believed in Jesus Christ, have received assurance of salvation, and sincerely intend to continue in the Christian life.

New believers are normally given a period of instruction. During these sessions the plan of salvation is more fully explained; the requirements and rewards of the Christian life are taught, the doctrines of the Scripture as understood and practiced by BMA and the congregation with which they wish to identify are explained, and helps toward living the happy and victorious Christian life are presented.

It should be made clear that the new relationship with Jesus Christ is the result of one's own personal decision to accept God's offer of salvation and of His response to the believer's honest confession and plea for forgiveness. The Scripture assures the security of the believer in Christ, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). The believer always has need of growth and maturity in the Christian life; one may need to deal with mistakes and the sins of weakness or ignorance. The new believer should be assured, however, that God does not cut off anyone so long as they sincerely desire and intend to continue in a relationship with Him.

It should also be clear that the baptismal vows constitute a public confession of Christ as Saviour and Lord, fulfilling the requirements of Mt. 10:32, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” The initial experience of believing in Christ, coupled with the confession made at baptism, answers to Rom. 10: 10, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” While baptism and church membership are clearly two distinct aspects of the salvation experience, it should be understood that asking for baptism also implies the desire to be identified with the people of God and that church membership follows baptism as a matter of course.

BAPTISM

As a part of the baptismal service, the minister will read appropriate Scriptures and explain the meaning and purpose of baptism. The candidate[s] for baptism may be introduced and their preparation for the occasion noted. They may also be given opportunity to share their testimonies with the congregation. The minister will request the candidates to stand before the congregation while they make their vows by responding to the following questions:

1. Do you believe in one true, eternal, and almighty God, who is the creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible?

Answer: I do.

2. Do you believe in Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, that He is the only Saviour of mankind, that He died upon the cross, that He gave Himself a ransom for our sins, so that through Him we might have eternal life?

Answer: I do.

3. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son; that He is an abiding comforter, sanctifies the hearts of men, and guides them into all truth?

Answer: I do.

4. Have you personally received Christ as personal Savior and Lord and are you truly sorry for your past sins, and are you willing to renounce Satan, the world, and all the works of darkness, and your own carnal will and sinful desires?

Answer: I will.

5. Do you promise by the grace of God, and the aid of His Holy Spirit, to submit yourself to Christ and His Word, and faithfully to abide in the same until death?

Answer: I do.

Or this formula involving the congregation may be used:

To applicants:

1. Do you believe in one true God who is known to us as God the Father, the creator of all things visible and invisible; as Jesus Christ the only begotten Son, who by His death on the cross made atonement for our sin and by His resurrection brought us into eternal life; and as the Holy Spirit who is to us an abiding comforter and our guide into all truth?

Answer: I do.

2. Have you personally received Christ as personal Savior and Lord and are you now sorry for your past sin and rebellion? Are you willing to lay aside all known evil from your life, and to submit yourself in obedience to Christ and His Word?

Answer: I do.

3. Is it your own personal decision and desire to be counted a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, to become a member of His church and to fellowship with this congregation?

Answer: It is.

4. Do you promise by the grace of God that you will be a submissive and loyal member of this congregation and share as a true brother or sister the fortunes or misfortunes of the people of God and dedicate the talents which God has given you to the service of Christ and His church?

Answer: I will.

To congregation:

5. You have heard the confessions and the promises of these applicants. Are you willing to receive them into the fellowship of this congregation, and do you promise by the grace of God to receive them in love, to encourage them in the Christian life, to give them faithful counsel, and to be true to them in prayer?

Answer: By standing.

BAPTISM BY POURING

Following the answering of these questions, the minister may have the congregation stand while the candidates for baptism kneel for a prayer of dedication. At the conclusion of the prayer, the congregation is seated; the candidates remain kneeling for baptism. The deacon or some other assistant brings a vessel of water. The minister in turn places his hands upon the head of each applicant and says: Upon this confession of your faith which you have made before God and these witnesses, I baptize you with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When the minister says "I baptize" water is applied to the head of applicant. In some congregations the assistant may have the water in a pitcher or basin.

When the baptisms are completed, the minister returns to the one baptized first, gives a hand to each in turn, and helping them arise says:

"In the name of Christ and His church I bid you arise: Like as Christ was raised up by the glory of the Father, so you also shall walk in newness of life. As long as you are faithful and abide in the doctrine of His Word, you are His disciple indeed, and shall be acknowledged a member of the body of Christ and a beloved brother (or sister) in the Mennonite Church."

The minister traditionally gives each one a word of blessing as: "The Lord bless you and keep you;" or "The Lord make you a faithful servant of the church."

Traditionally also the kiss of love is used as a part of the blessing in connection with the baptismal service, which means that for a mixed group someone other than the minister is designated before hand to greet and give the blessing to those of the opposite sex.

When the class is large it may be preferable to receive the entire class as a group rather than giving the welcome and blessing to each individual. In such cases the kiss of love may or may not be used. Some ministers prefer to call the candidates one at a time before the congregation for baptism. Then in a less formal way they receive the candidate's confession and vows, have the candidates kneel for baptism, and either before or after the baptism lay hands on them for a prayer of dedication, and receive them into fellowship.

BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

When immersion is chosen, the candidate's confession and vows will often be received prior to entering the water. Clothing should be worn that is opaque when wet.

The candidate is assisted down into the baptistery or body of water by the minister. Explain to the candidate what is about to happen, and instruct him to fold his arms with one hand grasping his other wrist near his upper chest. Some candidates may wish to hold their free hand over their nose. Alternatively, if backward immersion is used, the candidate may put both hands on the minister's wrist. The minister then says, "Upon the confession of your faith which you have made before God and these witnesses, I baptize you with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

One of two methods can be used:

- 1) Standing, leaning backward into the water. This requires deeper water, and an assistant is helpful, especially for larger candidates. The minister should place one hand on the candidate's clasped hands and use the other to firmly support the candidate's back. A variation for a candidate who needs to keep his spine straight is to bend the knees until lowered beneath the water's surface.

2) Kneeling or sitting, leaning forward into the water. This method will work in more shallow water such as a creek or stream, or if the baptistery accommodates sitting. The minister should put one hand on the candidate's forehead, and the other at the back of the head or shoulders.

When the candidate is ready, support him appropriately and guide him into the water until momentarily completely immersed. Upon raising the candidate, the minister assists in clearing the water from the eyes. In the case of triune baptism, pause and immerse following the naming of each person of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The minister will guide the candidate out of the water where he is met by an assistant who throws a blanket or shawl around him as he exits to an appropriate dressing room.

RECEIVING MEMBERS ON CONFESSION OF FAITH

When persons from another denomination indicate a desire to place their church membership with one of our Mennonite congregations they should be examined as to the integrity of their Christian experience. They should be instructed in the understanding and practice of biblical teachings as accepted by the Mennonite Church. If the previous baptism was received as an infant, rebaptism should be required. If there was a previous believer's baptism the matter is optional. Rebaptism would not be indicated unless the previous baptism was unsatisfactory to the individual or was entered into without understanding.

If rebaptism is indicated, the procedure given earlier is substantially followed. Otherwise, the individual may be received by a public confession of faith.

When the minister has introduced those to be received they are asked to stand and to respond to the following questions:

1. Do you have the witness of God in your heart that you have been made partaker of salvation in Jesus Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit by repentance and faith?

Answer: I do.

2. Are you able to confess that you are one with us in doctrine and practice as the Word of God is interpreted by the Mennonite church? Do you promise by the grace of God that you will be a submissive and loyal member of this congregation and share as a true brother or sister the fortunes or misfortunes of the people of God and dedicate the talents which God has given you to the service of Christ and His church?

Answer: I will.

The minister may then offer the hand of fellowship saying:

"In the name of Christ and this church I give you the right hand of fellowship and welcome you to the worship, fellowship and witness of the _____ congregation."

A prayer of praise and dedication is an appropriate conclusion of the ceremony.

RECEIVING MEMBERS BY LETTER

When a member of a Mennonite congregation needs or desires to transfer membership to another Mennonite congregation, it is customary to ask from the first congregation a letter of commendation. Such letters should certify membership and good standing. The letter is then presented to the second congregation as a basis of reception into membership.

These letters are often treated very casually, simply being read at a public service, and the congregation asked to stand indicating their willingness to receive the new members.

Simple Christian brotherhood would seem to indicate something more warm and encouraging. The pastor should have a personal interview with persons bringing their church letters, in order to learn of their spiritual pilgrimage and the expectations and attitudes they bring to their new congregational home.

Some ministers may choose a more formal reception. For convenience, individuals whose letters are to be presented may be seated at the front of

the auditorium. When the letter is presented the individual may be requested to stand and the minister asks:

1. Do you acknowledge that this is your letter and that it is your desire to be identified with the _____ congregation?

Answer: I do.

2. Are you able to confess that you are one with us in doctrine and practice as the Word of God is interpreted by this Fellowship? Do you promise by the grace of God that you will be a submissive and loyal member of this congregation and share as a true brother or sister the fortunes or misfortunes of the people of God and dedicate the talents which God has given you to the service of Christ and His church?

Answer: I will.

The congregation may be asked to give a standing vote of acceptance and welcome to the new member(s).

The minister may then give the hand of fellowship with words similar to those used for receiving members on confession of faith and may conclude with a prayer of praise and dedication.

FORM FOR LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Letterhead
Congregation

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

_____, a member of our congregation, has expressed the desire to unite with you.

We hereby certify current membership in good and regular standing. This brother/sister has been faithful in attendance and support. To our knowledge all personal relationships are clear.

We commend him/her to your care and fellowship.

Upon notification that you have officially received him/her into your brotherhood, we will remove brother/sister _____ from our membership role.

On behalf of the congregation,

THE COMMUNION SERVICE

COUNSEL BEFORE COMMUNION

The Mennonite Church has a long tradition, formerly held by some other denominations as well, of requiring some self-examination before the time of communion. ‘The understanding behind the practice is that by the witness one gives in sharing the Lord’s Supper the participant declares himself to be in a saving and obedient relation to Christ and in a relation of peace and harmony with the brothers and sisters with whom one shares. To come to the table of the Lord with unacknowledged sin or disobedience, or with enmity towards one’s brother or sister is to bring reproach upon the name of Christ and condemnation upon one’s self. The self-examination is not designed to exclude anyone from the communion table, but to offer opportunity for repentance and peacemaking. Scriptures cited to support this practice are I Co. 11:28, “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup,” or II Cor. 13:5a, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.” In some groups the partaking of the Lord’s Supper is thought to involve only the vertical relationship between the worshiper and God. In our own setting, it is understood to involve not only the vertical, but the horizontal (toward our brothers and sisters) as well. Where this concept is held and where there is the desire to maintain church discipline and a sense of caring for one’s fellow believers, it is appropriate that this answer of a good conscience should be given openly.

Some possible forms of examination are as follows:

1. The congregational leaders retire to a private room and the congregation enters one, two or three at a time to answer the questions as put to them,
2. Use of a questionnaire which members can answer more at leisure and return,
3. The minister gives a discourse on the meaning of communion and the qualifications for participation. After the sermon the minister may stand at some convenient location and those who come to shake his hand are understood as giving their answer of peace and affirming their desire to commune, or

4. Members are given the opportunity to stand in the presence of the congregation and to verbalize their own expression of obedience and peace toward God and love toward their fellows.

The examination should focus on three points: the individual's relation to God, the agreement with the interpretation and practice of Scripture as understood by the group, and the relationship with fellow believers. The following examples may be used verbally or as a written questionnaire.

1. Do you have the witness in your heart that your relation toward God is one of obedience and peace?
2. Are you at peace with your fellowmen as far as you have knowledge? (or insofar as it lies within your power?)
3. Are you in harmony with the doctrines of the Bible as interpreted by this congregation?
4. Do you have the desire to participate in the communion service?

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Mennonites have always taken the communion service seriously. In addition to the counsel experience, or perhaps combined with it, many congregations had a preparatory service in which the importance of self-examination and of preparing one's heart by reverent prayer and meditation were again stressed. Anyone whose manner of life was visibly not in agreement with the prescribed church order or who was known to have unresolved contentions with another party were dealt with in the interval between the counsel and communion. If unresponsive, they were excluded from participating. Because it was often made a time of discipline, the approach of communion was sometimes looked upon with dread rather than joyful anticipation.

In more recent years these preparations have been combined or abbreviated. An atmosphere of quiet joy has been cultivated. The bread (preferably unleavened) and the cup, symbols of our Lord's broken body and shed blood, while looked upon as solemn reminders of the price of our redemption, are seen also as symbols of the joyful fulfillment of all God's redemption promises.

The occasion of the communion service requires some special preparation. Before the service begins, the deacon or some other assigned person places the bread and the cup on the altar or on a table provided for that purpose at the front of the sanctuary. The deacon(s) or elders will also assist in serving these emblems at the proper time. If a foot washing service is planned, as is the case in most Mennonite congregations, the deacon(s) will also have made such preparations as can be quickly and quietly expedited at the proper time.

A worship service of singing, prayer and a sermon or meditation usually precedes the sharing of the Lord's Supper. Before the time for the sharing of the bread and cup, the minister reads Mt. 26:26-29, Lu. 22:14-20, or another appropriate passage. A prayer of thanksgiving (usually with the congregation standing) is offered, and then each participant is served with a small portion of the bread. The same procedure is repeated for the cup. Depending upon the manner of serving, one prayer may be offered for both. The minister while serving the bread will say to participants individually or to the group as a whole, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me," and for the cup, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you," or select another appropriate Scripture text.

There are many acceptable patterns by which the bread and cup may be shared. The objective is to guide the attention and thinking of the participants toward an understanding of the experience, reverence for God, and a sense of identification with the group in this experience of worship. It may be good in any given congregation to change the pattern of serving occasionally so that the experience does not tend to become meaningless through its sameness. Some patterns which have been observed:

1. Those serving pass along the aisles reaching as far as is necessary or convenient, serving persons who indicate their desire to participate by standing. This is done first with the bread, then the cup.
2. Pass a tray containing the bread or the cup along each pew, allowing participants to serve themselves.
3. Have the congregation come forward pew by pew in single file past the table where the bread and cup are placed to be served by the minister. In some cases this procedure is repeated, first for

the bread, then for the cup. In others two persons may be serving and the congregation files by only once, receiving the bread at one station, the cup at another.

4. Have the congregation come forward in small groups forming a semi-circle near the communion table. The entire group is served and then eat or drink together.
5. Have the congregation come to the table two by two, and let them serve each other. The deacon or some other person should stand by the table to see that the emblems are available and in order.

THE FOOT-WASHING SERVICE

Mennonites have long accepted Jesus' words in Jn. 13:17, "Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them," as a basis for practicing foot washing in a literal way. This is usually done in connection with the communion, although in a few areas communion and foot washing are observed in separate services. In some congregations the foot washing may not be observed on every communion occasion, perhaps at alternate services.

In the usual pattern, after the Lord's Supper has been observed, the minister reads and explains Jn. 13:1-17. Meanwhile the deacons and their helpers prepare a place provided with vessels of water and towels. The brothers and sisters then retire separately in order to the prepared place where two by two they wash one another's feet and dry them with the towel. They then embrace one another, give to each other the kiss of love, and speak to each other some word of blessing or encouragement.

By the act of foot washing, believers acknowledge their continual need of cleansing, identify themselves with the Master in the servant role, and pledge love and care for their fellow believers.

In some congregations, in order to conserve time, those who have been first served the communion emblems go immediately to the foot washing. In this procedure the reading of Scripture will need to be arranged accordingly.

ANOINTING WITH OIL

In keeping with Mk. 6:12-13 and James 5:13-16, anointing with oil for the healing of the sick has long been considered a proper ministry of the church to its members. These scriptures contain the assurance that God is interested in both the physical and spiritual well-being of His children. The ministry of anointing with oil has often been misunderstood and neglected.

This ordinance should not be confused with the Catholic Extreme Unction, administered in anticipation of death, neither should it be considered a magic formula which guarantees the restoration of physical health. It is not a last resort to be used when the doctor says he can do no more. There is no contradiction in being anointed and at the same time taking advantage of all the services which medical science has to offer. For the Christian all healing from whatever seeming source, comes from the Lord. Properly understood, the use of this ordinance places the whole circumstance into the hands of God in simple childlike trust.

It should be noted that the passage in James 5 has a three-fold emphasis: the prayer of faith, the cleansing of sin, and the healing of the body. These should all be kept in mind in the explanation and use of this ordinance.

Circumstances surrounding the anointing may vary. Occasionally the one calling for anointing may be in the hospital. This usually presents no problem; however, the minister should be careful to inform the proper hospital personnel about the plans and solicit their cooperation. Most anointings will be in the home. This offers the opportunity for a small group of selected friends to participate in an intimate way. Whenever possible the anointing should be done in a specially arranged public service affording to the entire congregation opportunities to share in a meaningful way.

When anointing is to be used, the minister should read the biblical passages upon which it is based. The purpose, use and limitations of this provision should be explained, and the subject of the anointing be given opportunity to express his/her own reason for calling for its use. It is proper for the subject of the anointing and those who will share intimately to give expression to their readiness for participation.

The minister may say to the entire group:

"Do you believe that this is a provision of God for his people, which He honors as it is used in faith and obedience?"

Give opportunity for response...

"As you search your own life, do you find anything which would hinder the Lord from answering our prayers for you (for this brother/sister)?"

Give opportunity for response...

These matters having been cleared the minister may say to the one requesting the anointing:

"Upon your request and on the good profession of faith which you have made, I anoint you with oil, in the name of the Lord (a few drops of oil are placed on the forehead).

- for the strengthening of your faith,
- for the cleansing of your conscience,
- for the healing of your body.

The Lord honor and bless this act of faith and obedience."

In the use of oil, a vessel from which a few drops may be carefully squeezed upon the forehead of the subject is very convenient; or the minister may pour a small quantity of oil into the palm of the left hand, then dip the finger tips of the right hand into the oil and rub it gently on the forehead of the subject.

The minister and other who may conveniently do so will lay their hands upon the subject for a period of believing prayer.

The service may be closed with a benediction and perhaps a song as may be appropriate.

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

No decision other than a person's choice of accepting or rejecting Jesus Christ is likely to have such great bearing on his/her present and eternal happiness as the choice about marriage and a marriage partner. Extensive premarital counseling shall be arranged covering such topics as divine guidance, parental blessing, compatibility, financial stability, intimacy, raising children, harmony, and sacrificial Christian service.

From the beginning God ordained monogamous marriage for the well-being and happiness of the human race. Jesus accepted, blessed and sanctified the marriage of one man and one woman as the right pattern for His church. All polygamy, divorce, remarriage and other deviations from the sanctity of marriage are less than the will of God.

It is vital that the church and every Christian minister seek diligently to teach and to preserve the sanctity of marriage. Among Mennonites it is considered a Christian ordinance. The invitation to administer the rites of marriage should be accepted by the pastor with a sense of seriousness and responsibility.

In the American culture weddings have become the occasion of much social and material extravagance and sometimes of hilarity and pranks. The Christian pastor will tactfully do everything possible to make the wedding occasion a happy and satisfying experience of worship and of family solidarity.

Marriage is not a concern of the church alone but of the larger community as well. The state has established its own laws governing marriage and family life. Before the pastor ventures into the arena of the marriage ceremony, he should be sure that he is acquainted with the laws of the state in which he resides as they pertain to the administration of marriage.

Some states require that a person authorized to perform marriages must be certified by the court. In others the fact that one is a recognized minister of a religious denomination is sufficient. Particularly on occasions of being invited to perform a marriage outside of one's home state, the minister should make sure that all legal requirements are fulfilled.

The state, usually through a county office, issues the license permitting two individuals to marry. The minister should not perform a marriage ceremony until this license is in hand and its validity verified. The minister is responsible to keep it safe, fill in the required information accurately, and return it promptly after the ceremony to the office of issue.

When a couple approaches the minister to arrange for a wedding, the minister should take the initiative in planning appropriate premarital counseling for the couple. This is important. This manual makes no attempt to describe the extent or the content of such counseling but it should be sufficient to determine the couple's readiness for entering upon the responsibilities of marriage, their understanding of the meaning of Christian marriage and their emotional readiness to cope with the many unexpected details of adjustment in the new phase of living.

As for the wedding ceremony itself, there is not a set formula which needs to be followed. Local custom, religious tradition and the personal tastes of the families involved will help determine the exact nature of the ceremony.

Many young couples like to plan their own wedding ceremony and write their own vows. Serious minded Christian couples usually plan something good and inspirational. Occasionally their ideas may be too starry-eyed. The pastor is there to guide them gently through these plans and to help in keeping everything in good taste and consistent with Christian practice. If there is extended reciting of vows by the bride and groom the pastor should have a copy of what is to be said so he can prompt them if necessary. The excitement and stress of the wedding day is not conducive to perfect memory retention.

The wedding usually involves enough people and enough ceremony that a rehearsal is advisable. The presiding minister should be present for this rehearsal and be sure that all the expected procedures and details are written down or well placed in mind so that the pastor is not taken by surprise at any point during the ceremony. The pastor might even be fortified with the possibility that one of the wedding party may faint in the middle of the ceremony. It has happened!

Since most weddings today are celebrated in the church, the description which follows will assume that setting. For the occasional home or outdoor wedding the proper adjustments may be made.

The ceremony usually begins with music such as singing by a soloist or small ensemble. This is followed by the processional. The groom and his attendants enter from some convenient place at the front of the sanctuary. Then, preceded by her attendants, the bride enters by the main aisle of the sanctuary, usually accompanied by her father or other close relative or friend. As the parties come together the minister says, "Who gives this woman in marriage?" or ". . . to be married to this man?" The father or other sponsor will make the appropriate or agreed upon response.

In some circles the minister will address the contracting parties with the question, "Will you have this woman/man to be your lawfully wedded wife/husband, etc?" before asking for the bride to be given in marriage.

Formerly it was a common practice for the minister to ask the contracting parties, "Can you declare that you are free from all other marriages and engagements, etc.?" and to address the assembled guests, "can any of you show any reason why these two should not be united in marriage, etc.?" Since these matters should have been examined in the sessions of premarital counseling they need not be included in the Christian marriage ceremony unless the bride and groom desire such formalities.

STANDARD CHURCH CEREMONY

Processional

Minister: "Christian friends, we are gathered here in a worship service to celebrate the ordinance of Christian marriage which was established of God in Eden and was sanctified and blessed by our Lord Jesus while on earth. Today we keep this ordinance at the request of this young couple here in our presence."

Minister: "Who gives this woman in marriage"?"

Father: "I, her father, (or her mother and I) with free consent and the blessing of the Lord, give her in marriage."

Meditation and prayer.

Minister: "On this day _____ and _____ have presented themselves before this assembly to fulfill the ordinance of Christian marriage and to take upon themselves the responsibilities of the wedded state. I have in my possession the official paper by which the state of _____ gives permission and sanction for this marriage. This couple has also declared the same intention among their relatives and friends. _____ and _____, will you now answer the questions which I shall give you in fulfillment of your wedding vows."

Minister to both: "Do you believe that marriage is an ordinance instituted by God, and confirmed and sanctioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you must therefore enter upon it in the fear of God"?"

Each in turn answers: "I do."

Minister to bridegroom: " _____, will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be your wedded wife, and forsaking all others live with her as becomes a Christian husband as long as you both shall live"?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister to bride: " _____, Will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be your wedded husband, and forsaking all others live with him as becomes a Christian wife as long as you both shall live"?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: "You may now join right hands and pledge your vows to one another."

Bridegroom: "I, _____ take thee, _____ to be my wedded wife; and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live."

Bride: "And I, _____, take thee, _____ to be my wedded husband; and I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving, faithful and submissive wife, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live."

Minister, taking the clasped hands of the bridal pair: "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you and bless this union abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord. What God has joined together let not man put asunder. Go forth as husband and wife, live in peace, fear God and keep His commandments. Amen."

Congregation will stand while bridal pair will kneel with minister for prayer of consecration.

When they arise the congregation will remain standing for the benediction:

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen."

Minister to the congregation: "I present to you _____ and _____, husband and wife. Receive them in their new relationship and give them your blessing."

Recessional

SECOND CHURCH CEREMONY

Minister: "Dear Friends, we are met in the presence of the Lord to witness the joining of _____ and _____ in the bonds of holy matrimony. Jesus said, "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall be one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder." (KJV, free quotation) What we are about to witness is an act approved of God. It is God who joins husband and wife. We enter into this moment reverently and prayerfully in awareness of the presence of God."

Minister to both: "Do you _____ and _____ believe that marriage is an ordinance instituted by God and confirmed and sanctioned by Jesus Christ and that you must therefore enter upon it in the fear of God?"

Both: "I do."

Minister: (Optional) "Do you both confess and declare that you are unmarried and free from all marriage relations and engagements whatsoever?"

Both: "I do."

Minister: "And now in token that your hearts are knit together in true love you may join your right hands."

Minister to groom: "_____, she whose hand you hold is to be your wedded wife. Your character and conduct will greatly determine her happiness in life. She has given you one of the most precious things under heaven--a woman's love. It will be the continued exercise of the love and courtesy which you have shown her in courtship that will keep her won to your heart."

"_____ will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be you wedded wife? Will you love and cherish her, provide and care for her in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity; exercise patience, kindness and forbearance toward her, and live in peace as becomes a faithful husband? Will you forsake all others and keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister to bride: " _____ he whose hand you clasp is to be your wedded husband. In your love and life lie his inspiration and help. He will look to you for encouragement, cheerfulness, and confidence. May your life be the inspiration and your love the protection that he needs as a Christian man in today's world."

" _____, will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be your wedded husband? Will you love and cherish him in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity; share with him the joys and sorrows of life, exercise patience, kindness, and forbearance toward him, and live in peace as becomes a faithful and submissive Christian wife? Will you forsake all others and keep yourself only unto him as long as you both shall live?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: "Since you have exchanged these solemn vows before God and these witnesses; I therefore, as a minister of the Gospel, pronounce you husband and wife."

"May the love of Christ, which never fails, bind you constantly to each other. And what God has joined together let no man put asunder. May God be with you and bless this union through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Prayer

Minister: "Will you now make this dedication together?"

"As you now recall your personal commitment to Christ at the time of your baptism, and your consecration to His church, will you now renew this pledge and endeavor by the grace of God to establish a Christian home? A home in which Christ's love is practiced, and Christian ideals cherished and exemplified? Will you pledge to the church your support in prayer, counsel, and gifts, and in your witness to the Gospel of Christ?"

"If you are willing to assume this responsibility, then answer with one heart and mind."

Bride and Groom: "We will walk with Christ together."

Benediction

Presentation (Face Audience)

A BRIEF UNREHEARSED CEREMONY

The minister, having been satisfied that the couple requesting the ceremony is qualified and fit subjects for Christian marriage, will make such introductory remarks as are appropriate to the assembled group. The couple is then addressed:

To both: “Do you believe that matrimony is an ordinance instituted of God and confirmed and sanctioned by Jesus Christ, and that you must therefore enter upon it in the fear of God?”

Each answers: “I do.”

To the bridegroom: “_____ _____, will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ _____, the woman by your side, to be your wedded wife; will you love and cherish her, provide and care for her in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity, exercise patience, kindness, and forbearance toward her, live with her in peace as becomes a faithful, Christian husband; and, forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her as long as you both shall live?”

Answer: “I will.”

To the bride: “_____ _____ will you, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take _____ _____, the man by your side to be your wedded husband; will you love and cherish him in health and in sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, share with him the joys and sorrows of life, exercise patience, kindness and forbearance toward him, and live with him in peace as becomes a faithful, submissive Christian wife; and, forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto him as long as you both shall live?”

Answer: “I will.”

The minister then says:

“You will now take each other by the right hand.”

The pastor then takes their joined hands and says:

“The Lord has heard your vows. I now pronounce you husband and wife. “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you, and bless you abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Lord. What God has joined together let not man put asunder. Go forth as husband and wife, live in peace, fear God, and keep His commandments. Amen.”

The services are now closed with **prayer and benediction.**

LONG CEREMONY – BLESSING AND ADMONITION

Songs

Processional

Giving of the Bride in marriage

Minister: "We are assembled here in the presence of God to join this man and this woman in holy marriage; a union instituted of God, regulated by his commandments, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be held in honor among all people. Let us therefore reverently remember that God has established and sanctified marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Today we keep this ordinance at the request of this couple here in our presence, namely ____ ____ and ____ ____."

Message and Prayer.

Minister: " ____ and ____, I charge you both as you stand here in the presence of God, to remember that faith, love, and loyalty are the foundation of a happy and enduring home. If the solemn vows which you are about to make are kept and if steadfastly you seek to do the will of your heavenly Father, you will find joy and peace, and the home which you are establishing will be fortified against every storm and trial. You will discover, however, that you are very human and that to live together as husband and wife requires the exercise of patience and forbearance. Do not let a day pass with any misunderstanding between you. Be sincerely honest and courteously frank with each other. Read your Bible together. Establish at once your family altar. Look to your Heavenly Father for strength and guidance. In living for each other, do not forget to live for Christ and your fellowmen. If it is your intention to enter into such marriage relation, will you answer these betrothal vows?"

Minister: " ____ ____, will you have this woman to be your wife, and will you pledge your troth to her, in all love and honor, in all duty and service, all faith and tenderness, to live with her and cherish her, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bond of marriage?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: " ____ ____, will you have this man to be your husband, and will you pledge your troth to him, in all love and honor, in all

duty and service, in all faith and tenderness, to live with him and cherish him, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bond of marriage?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: "And now, in token that your hearts are knit together in true love, will you join your right hands and pledge yourselves in the sacred vows of marriage."

Minister: "_____, she whom you hold by the right hand is to be your wedded wife. In your character and conduct lie her happiness in life. She is giving you a woman's life and a woman's love. She can bring you nothing more. You may bring to her great happiness or cause her tragic sorrow. It is not what you bring in a material way that will give her enduring happiness. It will be the continued exercise of love and courtesy which you have shown to her in courtship that will keep her won to your heart. Will you in the presence of God and these witnesses pledge your troth?"

Groom: "I, _____, take thee, _____, to be my wedded wife and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful husband in plenty and in want, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish you till death do us part."

Minister: "_____, he whose hand you clasp is to be your wedded husband. In your love and life should be his inspiration and help. He will look to you for encouragement, cheerfulness and confidence. No matter what the world may say or do, it may forget him or even turn its back on him, but you cannot. Make your life the inspiration and your love the protection that he needs. Will you in the presence of God and these witnesses pledge your troth?"

Bride: "I, _____, take thee, _____, to be my wedded husband and I so promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving, faithful and submissive wife in plenty and in want, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and health, and to love and to cherish you till death do us part."

Minister: "Forasmuch as you, _____ and you _____ have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and have thereto given and pledged your faith, each to the other and have declared the same by joining right hands, I, by the authority of the state of _____, and in the name

of the church of Jesus Christ, pronounce that you are husband and wife, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Amen."

Kneel for Blessing and Prayer of Consecration.

Minister: " _____ and _____, this day marks a new era in your lives. From henceforth you travel life's pathway not alone, but together. Let love be forever enthroned in your united hearts. As members of the church of Jesus Christ, we earnestly commend you to our Heavenly Father, asking Him that according to His abundant grace, He may bestow upon you both the Spirit of Grace, enabling you to establish a Christian home."

"May your experience together be like the experience of the two disciples who journeyed together from Jerusalem to Emmaus, of whom we read that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. And may Heaven's constant benediction crown your union with the ever increasing joy and blessedness and true affection of a happy marriage."

Prayer: "O God, our heavenly Father, thou alone art the source and author of all life. Thou art the protector and guide on life's pathway. Thou alone are the builder and maker of homes. Now grant we pray thee, the blessings of Your promises and the aid of Your Holy Spirit to these dear ones, enabling them to honor You, and to be ever true to the pledges made to each other. May your grace, in abundant measure be theirs, helping them to walk in your truth, to abide in your fellowship, and to live in perfect peace and love with each other until their earthly life shall end in your glorious presence. This we ask in the blessed name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen."

Benediction: "And now, may the Lord bless thee and keep thee, may the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen."

Presentation: "I present to you _____ and _____, husband and wife, receive them in their new relationship and give them your blessing."

Recessional

PRIVATE CEREMONY FOR OLDER OR SECOND MARRIAGE

Minister: "In the beginning of creation God said: "It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him."

"Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

"The Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit said: "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."

"We have come together today in the presence of God, and in the intimacy of these Christian families to celebrate the ordinance of Christian marriage by which _____ and _____ will be joined in the bonds of holy wedlock."

"_____ and _____, I charge you both to remember that the vows you are about to take are most solemn and holy. You take them in the presence of God and these witnesses. Marriage in its true intention is of the Lord. Love between man and woman that is true and pure is also of God. In the Christian home we have a gracious provision for the most satisfying and enduring happiness of man and woman and for the well-being of mankind. Therefore, see to it that nothing enters the lives of either of you to despoil this holy relationship. Give yourselves completely to each other in love. Be faithful in every good work to serve the Heavenly Father. So may His blessing be upon you through all the years which He may give."

"Since it is your intention to enter thus into this relationship, you will answer these questions in fulfillment of your marriage vows."

"Do you believe and confess that marriage is an ordinance instituted of God, and confirmed and sanctioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, and

that you must therefore enter upon it in the fear of God and keep it in all holiness?"

Each answers: "I do."

Minister to groom: " _____, will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be your wedded wife, and forsaking all others live with her, whether in plenty or in want, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness or in health, as becomes a Christian husband as long as you both shall live?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister to bride: " _____ will you in the presence of God and these witnesses take _____ to be your wedded husband, and forsaking all others live with him, whether in plenty or in want, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness or in health, as becomes a submissive Christian wife as long as you both shall live?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: "Will you please join right hands?"

Minister: (with hand on clasped hands of couple): "Forasmuch as you _____ and _____ have covenanted together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and have thereto given and pledged your faith, each to the other and have signified the same by joining right hands, therefore by the authority vested in me by the state of _____ and in the name of the church of Jesus Christ, I pronounce that you are husband and wife, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let nothing discourage you. Amen."

Prayer of Dedication.

Benediction

*Scriptures in this ceremony are from the KJV.

CEREMONY WITH LITANY

Processional

Introductory – **Minister:** "We are assembled here in the presence of God to be witnesses of the solemn vows which these our loved ones are about to make. We are gathered to worship God for His goodness in this provision for mankind's happiness. We desire to praise God for His providential leading in bringing this man and woman together. We intend to focus our intercessory prayers upon them as they make their vows imploring God that divine grace may be their portion now and every day of their life together."

"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

Father: "Her mother and I."

Wedding Meditation

Minister: "____ and _____, I charge you both to remember that the vows which you are about to take are most solemn and holy. You take them in the presence of God and these witnesses. Marriage should be the most enduring, the most responsible and most rewarding of all human contracts. In the sight of God nothing but death can dissolve the marriage bond. See to it that nothing enters the lives of either of you to despoil this holy relationship."

Minister: "As a token of the love you have to each other, and of the bond you are about to enter, you may now take each other by your right hands."

Minister: "Do you believe that marriage is a sacred ordinance, ordained of God confirmed by Jesus Christ, to be solemnized by the Church, and to be entered into by each of you only in the fear of God?"

Answer: "We believe."

To the groom: "____, this woman, whose right hand you now hold, is to become your wife. In you lies her future happiness and welfare. As she vows to be true to you until death, she has given you all that a woman can give. She can give you nothing more. Will you now, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take _____, the woman by your side, to be your wedded wife?"

Answer: "I will."

To the bride: "_____, this man whose hand you now clasp, is to become your husband. In you, in your love, submission and devotion, will lie a large measure of his success. He brings to you all that he has, his strength, his love, his devotion. Will you, in the presence of God and these witnesses, take _____, the man by your side, to be your wedded husband?"

Answer: "I will."

Minister: "You may recite your vows."

***A Litany of Gratitude for Love
(By the bridal pair)***

Groom: "God is love, and the love we feel for one another has come from Him."

Bride: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."

Groom: "Let us be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as Christ forgives."

Bride: "There is no fear in love."

Groom: "Yes, my beloved, perfect love casts out fear."

Bride: "My love for you shall not envy."

Groom: "My love shall suffer long and stay kind."

Bride: "My love shall think no evil."

Groom: My love shall bear, believe, hope, and endure all things.

Bride: "My love for you shall never fail."

Groom: "My love shall be felt in deep listening to your thoughts and feelings."

Bride: "My love shall seek to sense the deep intuitions and longings in your mind."

Groom: "My love shall seek to help you find fulfillment of your noblest dreams."

Bride: "My love will learn to care about many of the things you care about."

Groom: "Our oneness will be a new thing, a new creation under God."

Bride and Groom: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest is love."

Vows to each other – Together:

"Rejoicing in the divine leading which has brought us together, and in love which God has given us, I freely make this vow: I promise to love you, to honor you, to cherish you in sorrow and joy, in poverty and prosperity, in sickness and in health. I will leave all others and be yours alone as long as we both shall live."

Declaration of Marriage (Minister places his hand upon their clasped ones)

"In as much as you, _____ and you, _____, have made these vows before God and these witnesses, I now by the authority vested in me by the Mennonite Church and by the laws of the state of _____, pronounce you husband and wife in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you and bless this union abundantly. And what God has joined together let not man put asunder."

Prayer

Presentation by Minister: "Christian friends, I present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____ . Receive them in love, give them your blessing and your prayers as they establish their new home."

Recessional

BABY DEDICATION

Many congregations practice some type of ceremony where new babies are presented in dedication to the Lord. This can be a very meaningful time for both the parents and the congregation. This experience reminds the parents and the congregation of the mutual and caring responsibility they share to “train up a child in the way he should go.”

Following is a type of format that could be used:

1. A Message
Some Scriptures to draw from: Deut. 6:4-9; I Samuel 1:27,28; Ps. 127; Luke 2:21,22
2. Testimony of father
3. Questions to Parents
 - a. _____ and _____, in the presence of God and these witnesses, do you recognize _____ as a gift entrusted to you by God to love, to cherish and to train in righteousness?
Answer from each: I do.
 - b. Do you pledge yourselves, by the grace of God, to be diligent and patient beyond the call of duty to bring up this child in the fear and admonition of the Lord, through teaching and being a living example of Christian leadership?
Answer from each: I do
 - c. Is it your desire to share your responsibilities with this congregation through inviting their prayers, counsel and encouragement in Christian family growth?
Answer: I do.

Question to the Congregation:

Are you, as a member of this congregation, willing to commit yourself to assisting _____ and _____ to surround this child with grace, love and patient teaching both by word and by deed? Would you indicate your affirmation of such through standing to your feet?

Dedicatory Prayer

Song as appropriate to the occasion.

Ex. “Jesus Loves the Little Children”, “For God So Loved Us”

THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL

When tragedy strikes in the church family – accident, serious illness or death – the pastor should immediately lay aside all other tasks and be available for spiritual ministry to those in need. The pastor will go at once to the home, hospital, or wherever the family or individuals involved may be found.

In the face of stark tragedy even the most experienced pastor feels inadequate and at a loss for words. The most familiar biblical promises and admonitions may seem for the moment somehow trite and meaningless. In such cases the pastor will always choose words with care and kindness. However, what is said is probably not so important as simply the fact of pastoral presence, that the family knows that someone cares and is available.

In the event of death the pastor will go to be with the family as soon as possible to show sympathy and care. It is normal to speak about the one who has died and the circumstances of death. This will usually afford opportunity to speak of Christian faith and hope and the assurance of God's love and providence. There will be an appropriate time or times for prayer with the family. In the privacy of the home the pastor may express personal feelings and emotions, weeping with those who weep if so inclined. However, in conducting the public funeral service the pastor should be careful to control personal emotions, as a support to others and so as to lead the service quietly and with assurance.

The pastor should help the family plan the funeral and/or memorial service, but should not assume personal involvement in the funeral service. In times of crisis, families may make unexpected decisions or there may be a very special friend from an earlier time whom the family wishes to call. Such decisions may or may not be wise ones but the pastor must be prepared to accept them.

As with all other matters, funeral customs differ from community to community and from time to time. The old custom of viewing the body of the deceased by the whole congregation at the close of the public service is rarely observed today. In most communities a time is scheduled for friends to call either at the home or at the funeral home

where they meet the family and offer condolences. It is good if the pastor can be present at that time. In many communities it is expected that there will be opportunity for public viewing at the church before the hour of the service and before the family arrives. The pastor has no responsibility in this part, unless by special request.

The funeral service will include some or all of the following features: an invocation, congregational singing or special music, an obituary, a message of thanks to friends from the family of the deceased, some type of eulogy, Scripture readings and a sermon or meditation. The placement of prayers and benedictions may be determined somewhat by whether the burial was before or will be after the memorial service.

Often, families wish a private time for Scripture and prayer with the minister before they go to the public service. Usually there is a meal to which family and close friends are invited. Since these circumstances will vary, the pastor must be alert to those times when his services are needed and his presence expected.

In the matter of eulogies, it is certainly proper to speak of the good qualities of the one who is deceased, of the responsibilities they have carried or things they have achieved. However, it is well also to observe Christian propriety and reserve in these things. The pastor who becomes carried away with extravagant praise at one time may be embarrassed at another time.

GRAVESIDE AND COMMITTAL SERVICE

As an appropriate passage of Scripture to be read at the beginning of the service or at the grave, the pastor may select Ps. 23; Ps. 116; John 14:1-6; I Cor. 15; II Cor. 5:1-10.

Or the pastor may wish to use a composite reading selected from the following passages:

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.” I Pet. 1:24, 25

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John 11:25, 26

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:" Job 19:25, 26

"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" I Cor. 15:54, 55

"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2, 3

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Rev. 21:4

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Mt 13:43a

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." I Thess. 4:18

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Rev. 14:13

The Scriptures may be followed by an appropriate committal as:

"And now that our Heavenly Father in His wise and loving providence has called home to Himself our brother/sister _____, we commit his/her body to the earth from whence it was taken and his/her spirit to God who gave it. And we who remain, though we sorrow now, yet look in joyful hope and confidence to the day of our

Lord's return and the resurrection of all those who sleep in Him, when our bodies shall be changed and be made like unto His own glorious body. And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Or this alternate committal:

"Forasmuch as the spirit has departed this body, we do commit all that is mortal of our brother/sister to its resting place in the earth. But the spirit of our brother/sister which is the true person, we commit to God who alone knows the secrets of the resurrection and life eternal, knowing that at the second coming of Jesus, the dead in Christ shall rise first and we who are alive and remain will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Let us who are here today be challenged anew to so live that when our summons of death comes, we will be able to meet our Lord in peace."

Some communities/churches may want to express their love and respect for the deceased by participating in the lowering of the body into the grave and the covering of the grave as part of the graveside service. Those performing these services should be appointed beforehand. This variation may also include spontaneous volunteers from the family or congregation, as a final gesture of love.

Prayer and benediction

Some may prefer for the committal to be more general and there may be times when it is more appropriate that it should be so.

"Forasmuch as Almighty God, in His wise providence has taken out of the world the spirit of the departed, we commit the body to the earth from whence it was taken and the soul to God who gave it, looking for the resurrection in the last day and the appearing of the Lord Jesus, at whose second coming, in glorious majesty to judge the world, both earth and sea shall give up their dead, and those who are his shall be changed and made like unto Him and shall be with Him forever."

Prayer and benediction

More and more there are occasions when there are memorial or formal dedication services without a body present. The body may have been donated for medical purposes, or it may have been cremated and there is the dedication of a memorial urn or stone. At such times a committal may seem inappropriate, yet the family may wish some final religious ceremony. For such occasions the pastor may use the following or an adaptation of it.

"And now that God has taken from our visible presence, one of ourselves whom we loved, even our brother/sister/friend, we do confess our confidence in the love and wisdom of our Heavenly Father. In this service of Christian love and faith we give back to God that which was His own, commending the spirit of our departed brother/sister/friend to the God of all righteousness, resting in the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whosoever lives and believes in me will never die."

The committal is then followed by a prayer and benediction or by the benediction alone as custom and circumstances may dictate.

Occasionally the pastor may be called for the funeral of a person who has made no religious profession. At such times the sensitive pastor will desire to be kind and helpful to those who are mourning, and at the same time true to the Word of God in whatever is said. The pastor will seek to share with the living the invitation of God's grace.

For a committal on such occasions the following is suggested:

"And now that God the creator of us all in His own sovereign providence has taken from this earthly life our friend _____ we do commit his/her spirit unto God who created it. And we know that in that final day when all mankind small and great stand before Almighty God the word of Abraham to the Angel of the Lord is our confidence: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

SUGGESTED PASSAGES AND TEXTS

On the Death of a Child

Passages: II Sam. 12:16-23, II Ki. 4:18-29, Mk. 10:13-16

Texts:

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Mt. 18:10 & 14

“Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.” Jer. 31:15

“As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.” Ps. 103:15, 16

“Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Job 1:21

On the Death of a Young Person

Passages: Mk. 5:35-43, Lu. 7:12-15

Texts:

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.” Job 14:1, 2

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, now the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;” Ecc. 12:1

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Ecc. 11:9

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Ps. 90:12

On the Death of a Middle-aged Person

Passages: I Cor. 15:12-26, I Cor. 15:50-58, II Cor. 5:1-10, Rev. 7:14-17, John 14:1-6

Texts:

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” I Thes. 4:13,14

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” II Cor. 5:1

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” Rev. 14:13

“And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Isa. 35:10

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” John 11:25, 26

On the Death of an Aged Christian

Passages: Psalm 90:1-10, Psalm 116:5-16

Texts:

“If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” Job 14:14, 15

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Mt. 13:43

“Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.” Job 5:26

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.” Rom. 14:7, 8

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:” Phil. 1:21-23

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” II Tim. 4:6-8

On the Death of One Not a Christian

“There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” Ecc. 8:8

“Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death, shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?” Psalm 89:47, 48

“Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding. God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted.” Psalm 47:6-9

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” John 5:28, 29

“. . .it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Hebrews 9:27

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” II Cor. 5:10

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Gal. 6:7, 8

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Gen. 18:25b

Excommunication

We have a serious matter to attend to this morning that breaks our heart and is something that a pastor and a congregation hope they never have to do. After months of prayer and appealing to our brother _____ we find it necessary to take the final step in the process given to us by the Lord Jesus in dealing with a wayward member. (Read the Scripture from Matthew 18 and/or 1 Cor. 5).

_____ has fallen away from the Lord and is living in unrepentant sin and is taken up in the things of this world and the lusts of the flesh. We as leaders have met with him on several occasions over the past ___ months and have found him to have little or no interest in spiritual things. We have prayed and reached out to him the best that we know, and yet he remains unresponsive.

Therefore in obedience to the instruction of our Lord in His Word, we as a body are excommunicating _____ this morning. This includes the serious transaction of “delivering such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” To be outside of the church and to be outside of Christ removes from him the spiritual protection that God offers His children. In obedience to Paul’s command we “rebuke him before all that others may fear.” Since _____ has turned his back on Jesus Christ, we no longer consider him a brother or as a member of this church. This will limit the type of interaction our members should have with Him. He is to be considered as a sinner in need of being won to Christ.

It is our fervent desire that _____ be restored to the Lord and the church. Intercede for his soul. Love him with the love of Jesus Christ. Seek him out as a lost sheep to witness to him. And when, not if, he repents, welcome him as a brother in the Lord. I ask that if you are in agreement with this today that you would show this by rising to your feet.

Offer prayer.

ORDINATION

This section deals with policy and procedure in Biblical Mennonite Alliance and member congregations in regard to ministerial call and assignment. It deals with ministerial designations, qualifications, selection, ordination and license, credentials, and transfers as well as pastoral selection and assignment and related points of intersection between the local congregation and the Alliance.

A congregation can decide to use either licensing or ordination when calling a new leader. Ordination is a more permanent arrangement than licensing and has no time limit. Licensing is for a one or two year period for the purpose of proving the calling and gifts of the individual both by the congregation and the individual. After licensing a vote of affirmation is required in order to proceed with ordination or the extending of license. Any objections to the affirmation of call should be submitted in written form so it can be accessed by the leadership.

1. The meaning of ordination and ministerial license

The New Testament provides principles of church leadership and ministry structures, but does not mandate a complete or specific structure. The church needs to determine her leadership structures to meet current needs within New Testament parameters.

The church calls individuals to particular tasks. Some are called to serve in responsibilities of designated leadership (elders, deacons in the NT.) and are commissioned by the laying on of hands. In ordination, the work of the Holy Spirit and the church is recognized in setting apart and assigning qualified men for a certain kind of ministry and the impartation of God's grace for that ministry. Ordination calls for an orientation, preparation, and life style adjusted to particular roles of leadership and ministry as servants of the church. Length of term of ordination (consecration; setting apart) is indefinite, often for life, but subject to continued personal qualification and active ministry of the kind represented by ordination. Ordination represents service, not primarily a profession or occupation.

Christian ministries are not restricted to the ordained and licensed members of the church. All believers engage in ministries according to their gifts and opportunities. But all members are not commissioned to the particular ministries represented by ordination.

Ordination to the office of minister is for the ministry of the Word. This ministry includes the work of preaching, teaching, evangelizing, counseling, and administering the ordinances. It is exercised in various assignments recognized by the church, such as pastor, associate pastor, evangelist, missionary, itinerant preacher, and/or teacher.

Ordination to the office of deacon is for the ministry of “tables” (Acts 6:2). This ministry includes leadership in the church’s provisions for the poor and needy members.

Licensure is for a definite term to meet a temporary need or for the purpose of testing in the process of discernment. A license designates the office of minister or deacon with the same commission as the same office by ordination, but with definite and limited term and without ministerial membership in BMA.

Qualifications for ordination or licensure include character, belief, lifestyle, gender, gifts, and sense of call.

2. Ministerial Offices

BMA recognizes two offices by ordination: Minister and deacon.

3. Ministerial assignments

A minister may serve in a variety of functions or assignments: Serving in an agency or institution compatible with BMA, associate or assistant pastor, chaplain in a setting such as a hospital, nursing home, or prison, ordained deacon, non-pastoring active evangelist/preacher/teacher, missionary, overseer, senior pastor, and regular local preaching ministry but not on the pastoral team.

4. The congregational or organizational call for ordination or license

The call for ordination or license arises out of a need for setting aside for and commissioning to a certain ministry in the context of a

congregation, institution, or agency. Very often, this occurs because of the need for a pastor or associate pastor in a congregation.

In the case of the congregation, the need shall be discerned by the congregation under the leadership of the designated leaders. This includes the overseer and the body responsible for the primary leadership of the congregation, whether a pastoral team or other designated leadership. In the case of a local search committee being formed, it shall include the overseer. If the congregation does not have an overseer, the search committee shall include a BMA minister who meets the qualifications of an overseer.

5. BMA authorization for ordination or license

Ordination or licensure shall be preceded by Council of Overseers' authorization.

Requests for authorization shall be submitted to the Council of Overseers for consideration, preferably at least one month in advance of the January or July Council meetings. Later requests are receivable provided the Council of Overseers has adequate time to review the request in advance of the business meeting.

When a congregation requests authorization, the request should be channeled through the regional overseer to the Council of Overseers. The request for authorization may be submitted either with or subject to congregational approval.

Requests for authorization should include these elements:

- a. Name of the individual (if selection already has been made)
- b. Name of congregation or agency of anticipated ministry
- c. Office of ordination or license: Minister or deacon
- d. Name(s) of minister or ministers submitting the request
- e. Purpose of the ordination or licensure, e.g. to serve as pastor, associate pastor, church planting, prison work, missionary, Bible teacher
- f. Statement of status of ordination or license as having been approved or subject to approval by the congregation.
- g. Name of minister designated to officiate
- h. Method of selection

6. The selection of ministerial candidates

Calling someone to the ordained or licensed ministry in the congregation involves both the congregation and its leadership. The congregation shall be prepared for the task through a time of prayer, fasting, and a series of messages with teaching on the work of the ministry and the New Testament qualifications of the minister. This should be seen as preparation for a step in the process of determining the Lord's guidance. This process shall be led by a BMA minister with the qualifications of an overseer. The involvement of both leaders and congregation, with final congregational approval before implementation, is important in the process of choosing candidates for ordination or license, whatever the method of selection.

In cases of ordination or licensure for ministry in a congregation, two possible methods of selection are identifiable:

- (1) Selection through the leadership of a search committee
- (2) Selection through an initial primary vote.

These two methods are referred to in this document as the search committee method and the primary vote method. In the use of the primary vote method, selection is initiated through the voice of the congregation and further processed and concluded under the leadership of the officiating minister(s). Where the primary vote results in more than one qualified candidate, the lot may be used. The search committee method involves an initial search and investigation of possible candidates by a search committee with further processing and conclusion involving the congregation with the officiating minister as a part of the search committee.

Where the lot is used, opportunity is given to the entire brotherhood to submit as candidates for the office, names of those whom they consider qualified for the position. It should be emphasized that the naming of candidates be done with great care, after much prayer and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

In this procedure the congregation feels they have had opportunity to share in the selection of leadership. Where more than one candidate is named the lot is used in the belief and confidence that God Himself sufficiently makes the final choice of the one best fitted and able to assume the present responsibility. If only one candidate is named the lot is not needed.

In the use of the lot the usual method is to secure identical books equal in number to the number of candidates. Inside one book a slip of paper is inserted indicating that the one who receives it is called to the task at hand. The placing of the lot and handling of the books is done in such a way that by the time they are placed before the candidates no one in the assembly knows the location of the lot.

After each candidate has selected one of the books the minister in charge examines the books one by one until the lot is found. The brother in whose book the lot is found is then ordained to the office in question.

7. Approval of ministerial and pastoral candidates

When a candidate for an initial ministerial license has been chosen by the search committee method, approval of the candidate shall be received from the overseer before issuing the license. This provision is in addition to the Council of Overseers authorization described in item 5 above and may occur before or after the Council of Overseers' authorization.

When an ordained candidate with credentials with another denomination or conference is considered for pastoral ministry in a BMA congregation, the examination of qualifications shall be the same as for ordination by search committee selection. The examination shall be effected before the candidate begins official duty and before application for ministerial membership and credentials in BMA. Procedure for approving a candidate from another denomination or conference is outlined elsewhere in this document.

8. Ministerial Qualifications

The qualifications of the candidate for the ministry shall be considered in the light of New Testament teachings as understood by the local congregation and by BMA. The officiating minister is responsible to work within the expectations of both entities.

The qualifications given in the New Testament for ministers and deacons, including passages in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1, provide the basis for understanding and teaching the qualifications of the minister. As an official BMA application of the New Testament, an interpretation

is followed which limits ordination and licensure to men and which disqualifies cases of divorce and remarriage of either spouse with a former spouse still living.

Ministerial belief and practice in regard to the Christian woman's veiling should be based on I Cor. 11:1-16. A minister shall acknowledge the Bible as final authority and uphold the wearing of the veiling. If a minister's wife does not wear a veiling of substantial size as a part of her regular attire, he shall be disqualified from the BMA ministry.

The officiating minister is responsible to see that the qualifications of the candidate have been satisfactorily determined by a process which includes the use of a BMA approved questionnaire and response to Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963). The officiating minister is expected to involve other assisting ministers in the examination process. A copy of the candidate's completed questionnaire shall be submitted to the chairman of BMA Council of Overseers.

9. Officiation of ordination or license

The officiating minister (officiant) should be designated early in the process. He is the minister who gives the ordination charge or issues the license. The officiating minister shall be a ministerial member of BMA and shall be an overseer or senior pastor. In the case of a senior pastor who is not an overseer, he shall be an ordained minister with considerable experience. Designating the congregation's overseer to serve as officiant is encouraged, especially in view of follow-up effectiveness.

The officiating minister is responsible for:

- (1) The preparation of the congregation for the ordination or licensure.
- (2) The process of selecting the candidate, either in leading the process or in being satisfied of its adequacy.
- (3) The examination of the candidate to determine qualifications in terms of character, life style, gifts, and beliefs.
- (4) The arrangements, in collaboration with local leadership, of programming and details relating to the ordination or licensing event.
- (5) Giving the ordination charge or issuing the license.
- (6) Follow-up with the newly ordained or licensed minister.

Follow-up with the newly ordained or licensed minister includes a minimum of semi-annual contacts with the new minister and the congregational leadership during the two years following the ordination or licensure. The purpose of these contacts is to counsel with the newly ordained or licensed minister for the purpose of establishing him in his new role, informing him of BMA polity, to encourage attendance at BMA events, and to share and clarify principles of interpersonal relationships, ministerial teamwork, and congregational administration.

10. Assisting in ordination or licensure

The officiating minister is encouraged to arrange, in consultation with the congregational leadership, for one or two ordained minister(s) to assist in ordination. Assisting includes (1) participating in the selection and determination of qualifications of the candidate, (2) standing by the officiating minister in the administration of the vows and the pronouncement of the charge, and (3) laying on hands along with the officiating minister. Assisting ministers may also participate in a prayer of invocation and commission.

Freedom may be exercised in ministerial and non-ministerial participants joining in expressions of prayer, greetings, and encouragement in behalf of both the ordained and the spouse. But only ordained ministers (overseers, ministers, and deacons) will be included in the report to the BMA business meeting as having assisted.

11. The service and ceremony

The order of the ordination service and ceremony are arranged by the officiating minister in consultation with local leadership. An ordination ceremony is provided in this manual. The ceremony should include these features:

- (1) Questions to and responses (vows) by the candidate.
- (2) Questions to and responses by the candidate's wife.
- (3) Laying on of hands and the ordination charge.
- (4) Prayer.

The inclusion of the spouse in the ceremony should be arranged to represent spousal complementarity and support in the work of the

ministry without portraying spousal ordination and ministerial responsibility.

Provision should be made for expressions of prayer, greetings, and encouragement in behalf of both the ordained and the spouse after the ceremony.

ORDINATION FOR MINISTER

At the appropriate time the person in charge should call the candidate to stand before the congregation. The following formula or some adapted version of it may be used for ordination of a minister.

Ordination Formula:

"Dear _____: The Lord through his church has called you to be a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are ready to ordain and commission you for this great work. Your answer to the following questions will constitute your vows to the Lord and to the church in acceptance of this call and your pledge of faithful service."

1. Are you willing to accept the call to this service, and by the grace of God and the aid of His Holy Spirit to give yourself diligently to the work of the Lord as a faithful minister in His church?

Answer: "I am."

2. "Do you promise to study the Word of God faithfully, to give heed to its teachings, making them the guide of your own life, teaching them diligently to all who may come under your care and witnessing faithfully as you have opportunity?"

Answer: "I do."

3. "Are you willing to conduct the congregation, or perform other work to which you may be assigned, in accordance with the teachings of Scripture as interpreted and practiced by the Biblical Mennonite Alliance, seeking at all times and in all things to show yourself an approved servant in the vineyard of the Lord?"

Answer: "I am."

To the Spouse of Candidate:

"The work of the minister of the Gospel may be greatly helped or hindered by the attitude and support of the spouse. In order that you may share in the dedication to your partner's calling will you answer these questions?"

1. "Do you concur with your spouse the sense of call to this ministry and, do you likewise dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to this service as a call from the Lord?"

Answer: "I do."

2. "Are you willing to make the necessary sacrifices of your own time and convenience that the work of the Lord may be given first place? Are you ready to be a true partner and helper with your spouse in the promotion of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus?"

Answer: "I am."

Alternate Formula:

1. "Are you willing to accept this charge and to give yourself to the work of the Lord by the grace of God and the aid of His Holy Spirit as a faithful minister in His church?"

Answer: "I am."

2. "Do you promise to give heed to all the teachings of the Word of God, to accept them as the rule and guide of your life, and to preach and teach them together with the beliefs and understandings of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance?"

Answer: "I do."

3. "Are you willing to fulfill your ministerial responsibilities in accordance with the instructions and teachings of the Gospel, the directions of the alliance and the counsels of the church and in all things to show yourself an approved servant in the household of the Lord?"

Answer: "I am."

Questions for Spouse:

1. "Do you accept this call to be a partner in ministry as a responsibility to be fulfilled under the Lordship of Christ who is the head of the church?"

Answer: "I do."

2. "Are you willing to be supportive of your partner's role and give of your own gifts and time in a ministry to the church?"

Answer: "I am."

Ordination Charge: Candidate and spouse should kneel.

"Upon this confession and these promises which you have now made before God and these witnesses, we herewith charge and ordain you as a minister of the Gospel. Preach the Word in its purity; warn the sinners, admonish the unconverted to repent; teach, instruct, comfort, encourage the believers; visit the sick and afflicted. Be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine; do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of thy ministry. Likewise give heed unto thyself, walk circumspectly, read the Word; meditate upon its precious precepts; pray without ceasing, and in all these things seek to be a faithful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Continue in these things for in so doing thou shalt save both thyself and those that hear thee."

Prayer

ORDINATION FOR DEACON

"Brother _____: The Lord through His church has called you to fulfill the office of deacon among His people. If you are willing to accept this call, you will answer the following questions as your vows of submission and faithfulness."

1. "Are you willing to accept this service, and do you promise by the grace of God and the aid of His Holy Spirit to give yourself to the work which this office requires of you, as a faithful laborer in the church of Christ?"

Answer: "I am."

2. "Do you promise to give heed to all the teachings of the Word of God to accept them as the rule and guide of your life and seek to teach them, together with the doctrines, teachings and forms of worship of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance, as far as the duties of the office of deacon shall require of you, and faithfully to abide in them as long as you live?"

Answer: "I do."

3. "Are you willing to assist in conducting the church or congregation in which you are called to labor in accordance with the instructions and teachings of the Gospel, the directions of the Biblical Mennonite Alliance, and the counsel of the church, and in all things to show yourself an approved servant in the vineyard of the Lord?"

Answer: "I am."

The candidate is asked to kneel to receive the charge of this office, while the presiding overseer and those assisting lay their hands upon the candidate. The overseer will say:

"Upon this confession and these promises which you have made before God and these witnesses; we herewith charge and commission you as a Deacon. Serve the Lord and the Church faithfully, by teaching and example. Serve the practical needs of those whom you are called to serve, both in the church and without."

"Likewise give heed unto thyself, walk circumspectly, read the Word; meditate upon its precious precepts; pray without ceasing, and in all these things seek to be a faithful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Continue in these things for in so doing thou shalt save both thyself and those you serve. May God who has called you to this high and holy calling fill you with the Holy Ghost, give you grace, and wisdom and bless you in all things through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen."

Prayer

INSTALLATION OF SENIOR PASTOR

It has pleased God, through the leading of His Holy Spirit through the church, to call _____ to serve the _____ congregation/church as senior pastor.

This means that he will serve as leader and participant in the pastoral ministries of the church. He shall preach the Word, do the work of an evangelist, and provide leadership in shepherding the flock.

The Question

[Candidate and wife stand and remain standing till after prayer]

1. "Brother _____, do you believe that God has called you through the church to serve as senior pastor of this congregation?"

Answer: "I do."

2. "Are you willing to accept this assignment and to serve, by God's grace, according to the Scriptures, faithful to the congregation and Biblical Mennonite Alliance?"

Answer: "I am."

"Sister _____, do you believe that God has called your husband through the church to serve as senior pastor of this congregation and are you willing to support him in that call and work?"

Answer: "I do."

Congregational Response

"As a congregation, you have called Brother _____, to serve as your senior pastor. Are you willing to support him in prayer, to be open to receive and give counsel, and walk together in brotherly love in behalf of the church and for God's glory? You may express your affirmative response by standing."

[After expressing support by standing, the congregation is seated.]

The Charge

"Brother _____, in recognition of the congregation's call to you and your acceptance of the call, we hereby charge you with the responsibilities of senior pastor of _____. May the Lord grant you grace, wisdom, and love to faithfully discharge your responsibilities and to serve effectively for the welfare of the congregation."

Prayer

[With congregation standing]

[Prayer led by _____]

[Congregation is seated]

Greeting

[The newly installed senior pastor and his wife are greeted at this point by predesignated persons, including others of the pastoral team and the Overseer. The congregation is encouraged to move forward to greet the candidate and his wife after a closing song and a closing prayer.]

INSTALLATION OF ASSOCIATE PASTOR

"It has pleased God, through the leading of His Holy Spirit through the church, to call _____ to serve the _____ congregation/church as associate pastor. This means that he will do the work of the ministry as a member of the pastoral team. He shall preach the Word, do the work of an evangelist, and participate in shepherding the flock."

The Question

[Candidate and wife stand and remain standing till after prayer]

1. "Brother _____, do you believe that God has called you through the church to serve as associate pastor of this congregation?"

Answer: "I do."

2. "Are you willing to accept this assignment and to serve, by God's grace, according to the Scriptures, faithful to the congregation and Biblical Mennonite Alliance?"

Answer: "I am."

"Sister _____, do you believe that God has called your husband through the church to serve as associate pastor of this congregation and are you willing to support him in that call and work?"

Answer: "I do."

Congregational Response

"As a congregation, you have called Brother _____, to serve as your associate pastor. Are you willing to support him in prayer, to be open to receive and give counsel, and walk together in brotherly love in behalf of the church and for God's glory? You may express your affirmative response by standing."

[After expressing support by standing, the congregation is seated.]

The Charge

"Brother _____, in recognition of the congregation's call to you and your acceptance of the call, we hereby

charge you with the responsibilities of associate pastor of _____ . May the Lord grant you grace, wisdom, and love to faithfully discharge your responsibilities and to serve effectively for the welfare of the congregation."

Prayer

[With congregation standing]

[Prayer led by _____]

[Congregation is seated]

Greeting

[The newly installed associate pastor and his wife are greeted at this point by predesignated persons, including others of the pastoral team and the Overseer. The congregation is encouraged to move forward to greet the candidate and his wife after a closing song and a closing prayer.]

MINISTERIAL LICENSES

A ministerial license is issued by the officiating minister. It should include a written document with the date of issue, term of license, and signature of officiating minister. The setting of issuing the license may vary in form and degree of ritual, but is generally less ceremonial than ordination. The officiating minister is responsible to arrange for the procedures and setting for licensure.

POLICIES ON MINISTERIAL MEMBERSHIP IN BMA

Reporting ordination and licensure

The officiating minister is responsible to see that a report of the ordination or licensure is promptly sent to the Chairman of the Council of Overseers for appropriate processing, preferably by use of a form provided by the BMA office and included in this manual for possible photocopying. The report includes information such as name, address, phone number, spouse, and birth date of ordained or licensee; ministerial office and status (license or ordination); indication of use of the BMA approved questionnaire; place and date of ceremony; place and assignment/function of ministry; officiating and assisting ministers.

BMA affiliation and credentials

After the report at the BMA business meeting, the ordinand is presented to be received as a ministerial member of Biblical Mennonite Alliance with recognition of ministerial credentials. The licensee is recognized, but not received into ministerial membership. The officiating minister should advise the ordained or licensed brother of this provision of the upcoming business meeting in February or August with encouragement to be in attendance. The ministerial membership of BMA consists of those ordained to the office of minister, bishop, or deacon and officially recognized as members and recorded in the minutes of the business meetings. Ministerial membership in BMA involves an accountability which is primary to any other conference, denominational, or organizational affiliation or membership which the minister may hold. Ministerial ordination credentials are included in, validated by, and contingent on ministerial membership in BMA.

Upon receiving a report of ordination or license at the BMA office, a billfold card certificate of ministerial status is issued. In the case of ordination, a larger certificate is issued also after the ordination has been reported and the ministerial membership and credentials have been recognized by the business meeting. Both certificates remain the property of Biblical Mennonite Alliance and are subject to recall in the event of discontinuation of status.

Conditions for continued ministerial membership in BMA and procedures in the event of inactivity in regard to ministry represented by ordination are detailed in “Maintaining Ministerial Membership” below.

Procedure of transfer of credentials to BMA

For transfer of ministerial credentials from a non-BMA church body or organization to Biblical Mennonite Alliance, the applicant is requested to submit to the BMA office for processing by the Council of Overseers a letter requesting that transfer, a completed BMA Ministerial Questionnaire, and a BMA Personal Fact Sheet or other bio fact sheet. These materials can be requested from the BMA office and should be submitted preferably at least a month in advance of the semi-annual business meetings.

Transfer of ministerial credentials and membership includes the following features:

- a. The applicant is requested to be informed of and to affirm the doctrine and policies of BMA.
- b. The applicant submits a completed BMA Ministerial Questionnaire to the BMA office.
- c. The file of the applicant is subject to approval of the Council of Overseers and is open to the Board of Executors.
- d. The Council of Overseers, when satisfied with the applicant's qualifications, recommends to the BMA business meeting that the applicant be received as a ministerial member with recognition of credentials.

Congregational selection of pastors without current BMA ministerial membership includes the following features:

When a congregation's search committee or leadership moves toward calling to its pastorate (senior or associate) an ordained man who does not hold credentials with BMA, the Ministerial Questionnaire shall be submitted and BMA Council of Overseers approval should be received before presenting the name to the congregation.

Initiation to BMA

In this section, new ministers refers to newly ordained, newly licensed, and newly transferred-in ministers, but does not refer to renewal of license. Provision is made for the new ministers to be introduced to and recognized by BMA. These initiatory provisions include the semi-annual ministers' business meetings in February and July, the consecration service at the annual Convention in July, and orientation input offered annually in February. The officiating minister

should inform the new minister of these provisions and encourage attendance.

The semi-annual business meeting includes in its regular agenda reports of ordinations, new licenses, and transfers. The reports are followed by recognition of the ministers in each category and, in the case of ordination and transfer-in, action to receive the minister as a ministerial member of BMA.

The consecration service for new ministers is a regular part of the program of the annual convention. Newly ordained, newly licensed, and newly transferred-in ministers are invited to the platform with their wives for introduction, recognition, and a prayer of consecration to the work of the ministry. The ministers and wives involved in this service are asked to meet in advance at an announced time on the preceding evening for getting acquainted and receiving instructions related to the consecration service.

The orientation for new ministers is offered in conjunction with the annual BMA Ministerial Enrichment Week. Provision for input is arranged by the BMA Council of Overseers. The purpose of the orientation is for the new ministers to become acquainted with the purposes, goals, organizations, policy, and programs of BMA. New ministers are encouraged to be in attendance at the annual events of the Alliance. The specific initiating provisions are open to the new minister up to two years after his ordination, transfer, or initial license.

Periodic doctrinal evaluation

Biblical Mennonite Alliance provides for ministerial members of BMA to be evaluated every five years in regard to doctrinal positions. Ordained ministers (ministers, overseers, and deacons) are requested to respond to the Mennonite Confession of Faith (1963) and BMA Position and Policy Statements every five years. The response is due by February 28 of the year of evaluation. The responses are received and evaluated by the Council of Overseers. Responses regarded as questionable are referred to the BMA Board of Executors. This periodic evaluation is specified for all BMA ministerial members who are less than seventy years of age as of December 31 of the year of evaluation.

Suspension or revocation of credentials

Removal from membership may occur by voluntary request of a member, by action of the BMA business meeting, or by death. Causes for removal by action of the business meeting may include inactivity, incompetency, heresy, and moral violation as discerned by the BMA under the leadership of the Council of Overseers and according to approved procedures. The Council of Overseers and/or the Board of Executors may require a minister to temporarily suspend ministerial activity if he is found to be disqualified in the judgment of either committee. Revocation of ministerial membership and credentials occurs only with action of the BMA business meeting.

Reinstatement of previously discontinued credentials

When a minister returns to ministerial activity after his credentials had been discontinued because of inactivity, his credentials can be reinstated without ordination ceremony. This refers to return to active ministry represented by ordination. Reinstatement requires action by the BMA business meeting upon recommendation of the Council of Overseers.

In cases of credentials having been discontinued because of heresy or moral violation, a return to the ministry with recognized credentials requires the regular procedure of ordination.

Selection and Release of Pastors

The selection of a minister to serve in the pastorate of a congregation should involve a congregational process and decision. The process should be led by the local leadership team under the leadership of the overseer or a BMA minister who meets the qualifications of an overseer. In many situations, the leadership of a BMA minister from outside the congregation is advisable for this process.

Pastors, associate pastors, and ordained deacons serving in BMA churches shall be ministerial members of BMA.

In the case of a pastor or associate pastor sensing a need to discontinue in his role, he should seek counsel from fellow leaders and the overseer before announcing unavailability to serve as pastor. If a definite decision to discontinue is reached, fellow leaders should be informed before public announcement. The approach of requesting release from the

assignment and responsibilities, rather than resigning unilaterally, is encouraged in most situations.

Maintaining Ministerial Membership

New and continued ministerial membership in Biblical Mennonite Alliance requires a desire for continued membership, holding to a position of theology and doctrine compatible with BMA position, demonstrating a life-style compatible with BMA position, and at least one of the following involvements:

1. Serving as a pastor, associate/assistant pastor, overseer, or deacon in a BMA church.
2. Serving an agency, institution, board, or committee of BMA.
3. Being of retirement age and having retired from a BMA church institution, or agency with continued interest in BMA.
4. Serving in an active evangelistic or teaching ministry of the Word compatible with BMA.
5. Attending BMA functions, such as the annual conference and the Ministers' Fellowship, regularly or frequently.

Ministers who are not involved beyond a temporary transition in a ministry represented by ordination in a BMA context may ask for release from ministerial membership and credentials in BMA. After a five-year period of apparent non-involvement of a minister, the following procedure applies:

1. The BMA office sends to the minister a questionnaire designed to clarify the involvement or non-involvement of the minister.
2. The Council of Overseers processes the questionnaire and may present a recommendation to the BMA business meeting.
3. In the event of the minister failing to respond to the questionnaire or other inquiry, the Council of Overseers may proceed with a recommendation in the absence of a response.
4. Action may be taken by the BMA business meeting to discontinue the ministerial membership and credentials of a minister in response to the recommendation of the Council of Overseers or after other careful and prayerful consideration.

It is generally expected that a five-year period of a non-involvement constitutes cause for release from ministerial membership and credentials.

TRANSITION OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

The transfer of pastoral responsibilities can be a traumatic experience in the life of a congregation and of the leaders involved. The purpose of this document is to identify points of question and detail which should be clarified in times of transition and to present guidelines for consideration by the retiring pastor, associated leaders, and the congregation.

“Retirement” is used in this document to refer primarily to retirement because of age. It is strongly recommended that pastors should retire between the age of 65 and 70. However, many of the provisions in this section are applicable to other settings of termination. Though slanted for pastors with indefinite length of term, this generally is applicable to cases of definite term also. The application of this document includes pastors, associate pastors, and deacons. The term “minister” is used inclusively to include the various roles.

Procedures and arrangements for transition of pastoral leadership vary a great deal from denomination to denomination, from conference to conference, and from congregation to congregation. In some cases, the pastor is not responsible to give leadership in selecting replacement, while in other cases he is.

This document assumes that in many cases the retiring pastor will continue to be a part of the community and congregation in which he pastored. Where this is not the case, some points in the document do not apply.

This document is concerned with procedure and detail. But the importance of prayer and the need to seek God’s will must not be forgotten.

Preparing for transition

Anticipation and preparation for transition of pastoral leadership in a congregation involves the following considerations:

1. Recognition of the reality of aging
2. Development and discipling of younger potential leadership.
3. Sensitivity to the congregational situation and effectiveness of current leadership.

4. Awareness of the availability of assistance from outside the congregation in the process of choosing new leadership. Examples of such resources are experienced BMA ministers of other congregations and the BMA Council of Overseers.
5. Anticipation and planning for a time of retirement a few years in advance.
6. Establishing a definite point of retirement at least one year in advance.
7. Sharing information on plans and process with the congregational leadership and the congregation.
8. Identification of responsibility in finding and selecting a successor.

The approach of the pastor being responsible to give leadership to the selection of his successor seems most consistent. However, it is also appropriate for an overseer who is not the senior pastor to give leadership in the matter.

Details of transition

Care should be exercised in dealing with each of the following points. Confusion of these points tends to cause unnecessary conflict.

1. Memo of Understanding

A memo of understanding should be developed which states in writing the responsibilities of the retiring minister and his successor. If the retiring minister does not carry any pastoral responsibilities in the congregation, the memo should say so. The memo of understanding should clarify the various points mentioned in this document. The involvement of a third party in the writing of the memo of understanding may be helpful.

2. Status of the retiring minister

Questions like these should be answered: Is the retiring senior pastor a member of the pastoral team, perhaps an associate pastor, after his successor has been installed? Is he expected to attend congregational and area ministers' meetings regularly, by invitation only, or not at all?

3. Pulpit Ministry

Is the retiring pastor expected to preach by a regular schedule or only upon request of his successor? If by schedule, what is that schedule initially and how are the changes in that schedule to be determined?

4. Counseling Ministry

It is generally considered appropriate that the retiring pastor be free to engage in counseling church members. He should exercise care, however, in referring members to the pastor when questions of church administration and discipline are involved.

5. Officiating or assisting in weddings and funerals.

How should the retired minister respond to requests for participation in a wedding or funeral service? Is he free to accept, or should he refer his request to his successor?

6. Official Records

The official records of the congregation should be handed over to the successor. Exception to this guideline include personal papers such as sermon notes, personal notations related to church activities, and materials which cannot be passed on with integrity because of violation of confidentiality.

7. Temporary absence

The retiring pastor should consider absenting himself from the church and community temporarily immediately after the point of transition. This could be a time of service elsewhere or of vacation and could include absence from church services and other congregational meetings in the weeks immediately following the transition in order to encourage bonding between the new leader and the congregation.

After transition

If the retiring minister resides in the geographical area of the congregation he had pastored, his presence in the congregation should be a source of encouragement to his successor. He should avoid damaging criticism and should take great care in handling criticism of his successor which others may offer.

The successor in the transition

The retiring pastor's successor contributes to the success of the transition. He should assume active leadership as called and assigned while also respecting the precedents of values and practices lodged in the congregation, thus avoiding unnecessary stress in the church's life.

The new minister should relate to his predecessor with sensitivity to possible trauma in the experience of transition and should avail himself of his counsel. If the predecessor is local and available, he should be

included in the ministries of the church as may be appropriate according to the arrangements of the transition, the expectations of the congregation, and his readiness to participate.

Pastoral Transition Checklist

This checklist is intended to bring to the attention of those responsible for leadership in arranging pastoral transition to speak to points of vital consideration in the transition.

1. Consideration of the congregational situation and effectiveness of current leadership.
2. Establishing a definite point of retirement.
3. A plan for sharing information with other congregational leadership and with the congregation.
4. Identification of responsibility for the search of the successor.
5. A plan for drafting, discussing, and ratifying a memo of understanding.
6. Defining the status of the retiring minister in terms of:
 - a. Member of the pastoral team
 - b. Associate pastor
 - c. At meetings of the ministers/pastoral team
 - d. Pulpit ministry
 - e. Counseling ministry among members
7. Procedure in regard to officiating in or participating in weddings and Funerals.
8. Handing over official records (what is official and what is personal?)
9. Temporary absence immediately after transition.
10. Understanding on handling criticism heard by retiree against successor and vice versa.

GUIDE FOR PASTORAL MENTORING

The following outline is presented as a guide for more experienced pastors to use in mentoring men who more recently have been called to the ministry. The order in which topics are reviewed may vary as determined by the mentor or mentoree.

I. PERSONAL LIFE.

- A. Spiritual inventory (assurance of salvation; current commitment; openness to the will of God; clear conscience—ask forgiveness, restitution, granting forgiveness)
- B. Reading, study, intercession, meditation (reading habits—Bible and otherwise; meditation—what it is, personalizing Scripture; Anabaptist vision and theology—what is unique about it) *The Anabaptist Story* by Estep; *The Anabaptist Vision* by Bender; *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* by Verduin
- C. Accountability/Responsibility (with another minister or brother in the church at least monthly)
- D. Relationships (marital, family, church, community)
- E. Christian graces and character (what are your besetting sins and weaknesses)
- F. Spiritual gifts and abilities (assist in discerning and developing them)
- G. Dealing with stress
- H. Handling criticism
- I. Finances (personal)

II. SERMON PREPARATION.

- A. Praying for specific sermon burdens (reviewing the needs of the congregation)
- B. Preaching out of life (from heart and mind)
- C. Developing effective communication skills reading/building a helpful library; study and meditation; seminars on preaching; learning by example--observe and critique, recruit help from wife and other pastoral team members
Stephen Olford preaching seminars

III. PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATIVE/MINISTRY SKILLS.

- A. Dynamics of plural ministry (commitment to unity, harmony, trust)
- B. Leadership as servanthood
- C. Leading congregational decision-making
- D. Leading public worship
- E. Leading small groups
- F. Visitation (sick, elderly; admonition and encouragement)
- G. Officiating at events
 1. Weddings (premarital counseling)
 2. Funerals (planning with the family)
 3. Baptisms (instruction, examination)
 4. Communion
 5. Baby dedications
 6. Church discipline (forgiveness, excommunication)
 7. Receiving new members (by transfer, by confession of faith)
 8. House dedications

- H. Counseling (helpful books, seminars)
Resources by Adams, Crabb, Regier
- I. Evangelism (local, distant, supporting members who go into missions)
- J. Finances (church)
- K. Liberation (discernment of strongholds and demonic presences)

Suggestions for additional topics/issues to address:

Suggestions for additional resources:

Mentoring, by Bob Biehl

Connecting, by Paul Stanley and J. Robert Clinton

Biblical Eldership, and Study Guide, by Alexander Strauch

A Compendium of Pastoral Theology, by SEAN International, a 6 volume study of the Life of Christ.

How To Preach, by SEAN International, a three month practical study.

Part 3

FORMS

AND

RECORDS

THE LICENSE

This ministerial license commissions _____
to serve as a minister of the Gospel. This license is authorized by the
_____ (church or agency) to
serve as a minister of the Gospel during the term of the license. The term
of this license extends from _____
to _____.
Given this _____ of _____.

Officiating Minister: _____

Assisting Ministers: _____

After signing, the officiating minister presents this license to the licensee and submits the Personal Data Report to the Chairman of the Council of Overseers and Administrative Secretary.

MINISTERIAL LICENSE EXTENSION

The ministerial license of _____ is hereby renewed for a term extending from _____, 20____ to _____, 20__.

This license is an extension of the previous license or licenses which held effective dates of:

Initial license: _____ to _____

Second license: _____ to _____

This extension is issued by me as officiating minister with authorization of the Council of Overseers of Biblical Mennonite Alliance.

Given this _____ of _____

Officiating Minister: _____

Assisting Ministers: _____

Notes:

The officiating minister presents this license extension to the licensee. He also submits the Personal Data Report to the Chairman of the Council of Overseers and the Administrative Secretary.

Overseer, following each ordination or licensure
please complete this form.
For a new "contact person" complete only the top half.

Personal Data Report for BMA Records

Name _____ Wife's Name _____

Role (*circle one*): Senior Pastor, Associate pastor, Deacon, Contact Person

Congregation _____

Address (street, city, state, postal code):

_____,
_____, _____, _____

Phone Number: _____ - _____ - _____

Cell Phone Number: _____ - _____ - _____

Email address: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Ordained or Licensed (*circle one*) Date _____

If licensed, term length of the license: _____

Place of ceremony: _____

Was the BMA-approved Ministerial Questionnaire used in the
examination of the candidate? YES NO

Officiating Minister: _____

Ordained ministers who assisted: _____

Signature of Officiating Minister _____

This form is available electronically. Complete and Return this form to:

BMA Administrative Secretary
John Ivan Byler
688 Dale Enterprise Rd,
Dayton, VA 22821 or
Email to jibyler@hotmail.com.)

Chairman of Council of Overseers
Jay Laughman
128 Royer Rd.,
Ephrata, PA 17522 or
Email to jaylaughman@gmail.com

