

# Lancaster Conference Credentialing Commission

## Credentialing Procedure

### Foundational Understandings

We affirm that God bestows ministry gifts to the community of faith and calls people to leadership ministries without regard to ethnic background, gender or social standing. All believers are called and gifted for ministry. Some are called to leadership ministries such as pastoral or oversight ministries. Through a process of discernment, it is the responsibility of the church, with assistance of district oversight, to discern and identify people for leadership ministries and guide them through a credentialing process.

Article 15 of Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective as well as Section I of A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership give guidance to the credentialing process of Lancaster Conference. A statement from A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership is as follows:

*“Clearly, Jesus’ way of ministry and leadership was to be powerful yet not domineering, authoritative but not authoritarian, life-giving and liberating, and loving even unto death. Likewise, Jesus sought to equip those whom he sent out with similar characteristics (Mk. 3:14-15). He taught his followers that “the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” (Lk. 22:26, RSV). He also taught them to go in the name of Christ (Mt. 28:19-20) and in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8) to minister with authority (Mt. 18:15-20). From such studies come the convictions that:*

- 1. Christian ministry is given to the gathered people of God (laos).*
- 2. Jesus’ life and ministry directs our lives and ministries in a special and particular way.*
- 3. Christian ministry is the living Christ doing God’s work through a faithful people empowered by the Holy Spirit.*
- 4. The forms of Christian ministry are richly varied and diverse, yet are related in that they derive from the same Spirit and are interdependent because the church is essentially the one body of Christ.*

These understandings from the teachings of Jesus guide our understandings of how to practice credentialing in Lancaster Conference. The teachings of Paul in Ephesians chapters two and four also inform our writings about providing credentials for the work of ministry.

A quote from the Mennonite Encyclopedia is as follows:

*“Ordination is an act by which the church, after appropriate personal and corporate discernment, calls and appoints a person to leadership ministry in the life and mission of the church. The service of ordination normally includes the laying on of hands, prayer, and other appropriate rituals of commitment and celebration. The church ordains with a sense that it has been so led by God’s Spirit and is acting to express God’s leading to confirm this gifted person for a particular public and representative ministry in the church.”*

As a conference we desire to find a way to have some basic principles in place to guide the process while allowing for some differences as it relates to how persons are called (*the lot, discernment*) or to issues related to cultural diversity and urban concerns. Credentials are given to persons who serve in a specific ministry (pastor, deacon, chaplain, etc.).

In Lancaster Conference when the lot is used to call leaders, the basic credential of ordination is used for the office of deacon, minister, and bishop. Each office required an ordination. Today, our conference continues to ordain for the three offices, although few congregations call and ordain deacons. The conference also uses the three credentials outlined in A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership (ordination, license toward ordination and license for specific ministry) so that currently a significant number of persons have a license credential.

The conference and Credentialing Commission recognize that there may be two different understandings and practices related to ordination. One understanding is that ordination is practiced for pastoral ministry as well as ordination for the office of bishop. A second understanding is that a person is ordained to ministry in the church and that ordination is accepted for pastoral ministry or bishop/oversight ministry. There will be a service of installation for both of the ordination practices.

## **PART I**

### **Introduction**

1. The congregation informs the district bishop of a credentialing need. The bishop helps set up a search committee in cases where the lot is not being used. The bishop should be a member of the search committee.
2. The search committee proceeds with their work, following the guidelines in the *Ministry Transitions Resource Packet* distributed by Lancaster Mennonite Conference.
3. The bishop gives all potential candidates the Ministry Transitions packet.
4. When the search committee, along with the bishop, has chosen a candidate, the candidate shall fill out the background check forms, and submit them to his/her state, and send the results to their bishop. The bishop will send these documents, along with all other pertinent information, to the conference administrative assistant. The information should include a filled out Credentialing Leadership Information (CLI) form and will include the Personal Statement of Christian Faith and Doctrine form of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. The form for Spouse will also be filled out and included with the submitted forms. The bishop will also contact the conference administrative assistant to arrange a time for an interview with the Credentialing Commission.
5. The conference administrative assistant will make sure the background check results are in, make copies of all information received from the bishop and distribute it to the commission members.
6. The Credentialing Commission will review all the materials sent in preparation for the interview. The commission will interview the candidate and possibly the spouse and will take time after the interview to process the interview. In some cases, the commission may need additional time to reach an agreement. The commission will attempt to come to a unanimous agreement or reach a consensus. The commission will keep all persons informed of the process. If the candidate is approved by the Credentialing Commission, the bishop who is presenting the candidate is free to inform the congregation or search committee so that the candidate can be processed with the congregation. At the end of the interviewing process, the commission will recommend the type of credential best suited for the person, the congregation and the role being considered.
7. After the interview, the commission chair or the conference minister, along with the bishop will fill out the Credentialing Activities Form. Office staff will use this information to create the credential certificate.
8. If the person is transferring a credential from another conference, the conference minister will contact the conference minister of the sending conference to request the transfer.
9. When background information is completed, a certificate and ministry card will be created and given to the bishop to present at the service of installation. Office staff will create a file for each newly credentialed person and will add all information to the LMC data base.
10. An orientation is scheduled annually for all persons with new or transferred credentials in LMC. The conference minister assists the director of leadership development to plan and coordinate the orientation process.

## PART II

### 1. Guidelines for the Commission

- A. The Credentialing Commission serves under the Bishop Board and will work with district bishops on all credentialing matters. The Credentialing Commission will be entrusted by the Conference and Bishop Board to determine who should be credentialed as a leader in Lancaster Conference. The primary role of the commission is to work at credentialing agenda, but may include other responsibilities. Given the great diversity in our conference, this is a major responsibility which will provide for more clarity and uniformity in the procedures used.
- B. *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (1996) will be used as an expression of the leadership credentialing understandings for Lancaster Conference.
- C. All persons who are called to serve and be credentialed in Lancaster Conference congregations or programs (agencies) will need to be interviewed and approved for credentialing by the Credentialing Commission (*this includes those transferring from another conference or denominational body*). The denominational paper in the Credentialing Packet on how to conduct interviews and questions to ask can assist in this interviewing process.
- D. Persons whose ministerial credential changes from license to ordination will be interviewed and processed by the commission. Persons whose assignment changes from deacon to minister or bishop will also be interviewed and processed by the Credentialing Commission.
- E. The Credentialing Commission will work closely with a congregation through the district bishop. The (credentialing) interview will focus on: (1) the candidate's sense of call, (2) affirmation of that call, (3) ethical and theological issues, (4) the candidate's understanding of the culture and theological understandings of LMC. The Credentialing Commission will make available to the candidate the primary questions that will be asked prior to the interview.
- F. The commission will spend time in prayer and discernment about each candidate. It is important that both the candidate and the congregation are respected and cared for.
- G. The bishop of the congregation where the candidate will minister or relate will be invited to be present when the candidate is being interviewed. If applicable, the spouse will be expected to attend the interview sessions and respond with a statement of his or her support.
- H. The Credentialing Commission will consult with the Bishop Board if counsel is desired.
- I. The Credentialing Commission will not require precise definitions for all theological and ethical matters. However, they will have some (prescribed) (clear) understandings that will apply to all candidates.
- J. If the candidate is new to Lancaster Conference, in addition to interviewing the candidate and reviewing the CLI (MLI) form, the Credentialing Commission may consult with persons from other organizations with which the candidate has been involved (i.e. seminaries, denominational offices, etc.).

- K. The Credentialing Commission will review the following areas during the interview session, or make sure that the congregational search committee and the district bishop have covered the eleven following areas. The Credentialing Commission should spend time reviewing ten and eleven. The Congregational Search Committee is accountable primarily to the congregation and district bishop. The Conference and Bishop Board are responsible for providing a credential.
1. Personal faith journey
  2. How the spiritual disciplines are practiced. Use of a spiritual director or spiritual retreats.
  3. How the person demonstrates the expected and desired competencies for ministry. Discussion on strengths as well as areas which may need to be strengthened.
  4. Discuss financial issues such as personal spending plans, debts, and long term financial concerns.
  5. Adaptability to a new cultural setting
  6. Inquire if the candidate is a member of a secret society.
  7. Personal integrity and lifestyle issues including pornography.
  8. Personal ability to relate to others. Personality profile may be recommended.
  9. Personal and community of faith's call to the ministry.
  10. Theological areas, including a discussion of and support of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* or another Mennonite Confession of Faith.
  11. Willingness to support Lancaster Conference.
- L. Persons who have a credential in Lancaster Conference shall hold membership in a Lancaster Conference congregation.

## **2: Organization of the Credentialing Commission**

- A. The commission will consist of six members: three bishops of which one will be the presenting bishop, two pastors and one lay minister. All commission members must be members of LMC. The commission shall include both men and women. Staff persons may be asked to assist, including the conference minister who will be the primary staff person for the commission. When the bishop who is presenting the candidate is already a member of the commission, the bishop shall request a substitute bishop to represent him on the commission for the interview. A bishop shall serve as chair of the commission.
- B. The five (5) members will be appointed by Bishop Board and serve for staggered three-year terms. The third bishop represented on the commission will be the presenting bishop.
- C. A chairperson will be appointed to lead the discernment meetings as well as interviews. It is recommended that at least four members of the Credentialing Commission be present for the discernment meetings and interviews. The chairperson should attend all meetings, however other commission members will not be required to attend all discernment meetings or interviews. All commission members will receive and shall review all materials for each candidate. Members who can not be present for an interview may give any pertinent feedback to the commission chairperson prior to the interview.
- D. A conference minister or a conference staff person will assist the chair in communication with other members of the Credentialing Commission, prepare agendas, arrange the interviews, record and distribute minutes. The chairperson may delegate responsibilities to the conference minister or staff person as approved by the commission.
- E. The Credentialing Commission is accountable to the Bishop Board and acts on its behalf. It will provide a monthly report to Bishop Board of its activities.

- F. The Credentialing Commission will consult with the director of Leadership Development, (*STEP program*), for clarity around educational expectations and requirements. Clear understandings regarding educational requirements will be needed between the Bishop Board and the Credentialing Commission.
- G. The Credentialing Commission is encouraged to travel to on-site locations for interviews. This will require adequate communication between the district bishop and the commission. An agreement related to travel expenses of the Credentialing Commission will be established by the Conference Office.
- H. The Credentialing Commission may ask one member to work with an existing council (e.g., representing a specific language group) to conduct an interview in another language, following the Credentialing Commission guidelines. The Credentialing Commission will act after receiving a report and recommendation from the Credentialing Commission member and the existing council or district group. The Credentialing Commission has the right to accept/reject requests for special credentialing procedures from other districts or groups.
- I. All candidates for credentialing will be expected to be members of a Lancaster Mennonite Conference congregation by the time of the installation service.

### 3: Procedures for the Credentialing Commission

- A. There are normally three occasions when Lancaster Conference and the Credentialing Commission will interview a person and take action related to credentials:
  1. **New Candidate**: a first time pastoral candidate being considered for a ministerial license (*license for specific ministry or license toward ordination*). Candidates will complete all conference required forms (*CLI and/or other conference forms*).
  2. **Change of Credential**: a pastor's credential changes from one license to another, from license to ordination or a change in leadership role. The person will need to complete all agreed upon forms. The Credentialing Commission must have all original or updated forms. The commission will determine the need for an interview.
  3. **Transfer of Credential**: a person transfers a ministerial credential into Lancaster Conference from another conference body. Appropriate letters of reference will be required and area conference ministers must be involved in the process.

The Credentialing Commission will not interview retired person who move into the conference area. However, the credentials of the retired persons are to reside in the conference where the person is living or the congregation they are attending.
- B. The congregation in a discernment process will submit the name of the candidate to the Credentialing Commission through the district bishop. It is expected that the district bishop will inform the district leadership group of a credentialing request. Throughout the credentialing process, the Credentialing Commission will report directly to Bishop Board. The district bishop will report the discernment and actions to the district, congregation, and individual involved.
- C. The candidate interview with an approval of the Credentialing Commission will be required before the congregation takes action for approval of the candidate.

- D. In those congregations where the lot is used as the final discernment procedure, the Credentialing Commission will work with the district bishop to interview those persons nominated by the congregation in a process designed by the district bishop. The local bishop and the commission will work together on *whom* to interview as well as *when* the interview(s) should be conducted.
- E. To request the license toward ordination credential, the following items will be provided to the Credentialing Commission by the district bishop:
1. A letter of request for a credential for a specific person from a congregation and statement of current process,
  2. A copy of the Lancaster Conference CLI form,
  3. Appropriate theological statements as requested.
- F. To request a credential for ordination or transfer of ordination credential, the following items will be provided to the Credentialing Commission by the district bishop:
1. A letter of request from the candidate's congregation,
  2. A report on the process,
  3. A conference form including either new or updated theological statements as requested,
  4. Recommendations from the bishop, or if a transfer into the conference, statements from the conference minister.
- G. To request a license for specific ministry credential the following items will be provided to the Credentialing Commission by the district bishop:
1. A letter of request from the candidate's congregation,
  2. The conference and/or denominational forms,
  3. Theological statements as requested.
- H. A license for specific ministry or license toward ordination cannot be transferred from one conference to another. The Credentialing Commission is responsible to determine when and how either license credential can be internally transferred.
- I. A service of installation should be planned near the beginning of the assignment after approval of the candidate by the Credentialing Commission. The service should be led by the district bishop with other assistance as may be requested. Because the conference is involved in the credentialing process with the congregation, the Credentialing Commission or a conference staff person should be invited to be present at the installation service.
- J. Because the conference holds all credentials, the conference Credentialing Commission will have the responsibility through, its staff persons, to keep all records up to date.
- K. The Credentialing Commission, through Conference staff, will see that all persons, through the area bishop, receive all personal ID cards and certificates.
- L. Ordination will be expected for persons who serve in a lead pastor role although a license will be acceptable. The license for specific ministry might be used primarily for associates in ministry roles as well as for those persons who serve in the office of the laity. An associate pastor may be ordained if they and the congregation requesting the credential feel the call to ministry is long-term and all qualifications are met. A person shall be ordained prior to being considered for ministry in an oversight role.
- M. After interviewing a candidate, the Credentialing Commission may approve a candidate but make some requirements (*continuing education, develop a mentor relationship with an approved mentor,*

*C.P.E., etc.*). If an appeal is desired, the presenting bishop may request a meeting with the Bishop Board Executive Committee.

- N. The Credentialing Commission will provide a written report to the district bishop after the interview noting all actions and any requirements for the candidate.
- O. A person from outside Lancaster Conference who is being considered for an interim pastoral assignment will need to be interviewed by the Credentialing Commission. However, the transfer of an interim pastor's credential is not required.

### **PART III**

#### **Exit Interview**

Exit interviews are expected and should include the following:

1. The Credentialing Commission is not expected to be involved in the exit interview process unless special circumstances would indicate otherwise.
  2. The bishop will contact the conference minister to arrange a time for an exit interview. The conference minister will conduct the exit interview. Persons such as the bishop, spouse, conference moderator and other persons who have related to the person may be invited to attend.
  3. After the interview, the conference minister along with the bishop will fill out a Credentialing Activities Form, stating the ending date and status of the person's credential, to be given to the office staff for record keeping.
  4. If the person is transferring to another conference, the conference minister will be responsible to send a letter of recommendation to the conference minister of the receiving conference.
- A retired credential is available to persons of at least fifty-five years of age.

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