

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## About this document

The Governance Manual serves to guide the Church Leadership in the proper functioning of the organization. It is founded on our Constitution but expands upon that legal document. The Constitution may be considered a legal requirement for the establishment and maintaining of a charitable society in Alberta, Canada. The Constitution is unalterable except as delineated in Article 5 of the Constitution.

The Governance Manual is not a legal document; it provides the framework for how the Church will be structured and governed. It can be adjusted as necessary to ensure the proper and well-functioning of the Church body. However, any substantial changes to the structure and governance need to be approved by the membership.

In order to distinguish between the sections of this document that are constitutional (and therefore unalterable), the items taken directly from the Constitution are in ***bold italics*** with the section of the Constitution referenced in ***[square brackets]***.

(See Appendix 1 for the prologue and definitions contained in the Constitution.)

# Who We Are

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## Our History

- In January 1953, J.A. Froese and family came to Calgary as city missionaries on behalf of the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Conference.
- On May 24, 1953, a group of 30 worshippers led by J.A. Froese began to meet at the Legion Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW. This became the group's home for the next 5 years.
- The group grew and was organized as a new Mennonite Brethren church on May 6, 1956 with 46 members. This was the official birth of what became the Highland Mennonite Brethren Church.
- Sod-turning ceremony took place on August 18, 1957 at the corner of 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Centre B Street NW with an enthusiastic membership in attendance.
- The first service was held in the basement sanctuary on March 30, 1958.
- The basement sanctuary was dedicated to the Glory of God on May 25, 1958.
- On January 21, 1962, the sanctuary was dedicated to the Glory of God.
- The Education Wing was dedicated on December 15, 1968.
- The morning service on December 10, 1978, featured a mortgage-burning ceremony. The last payment had been made on December 1, 1978.
- The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary was celebrated on May 30-31, 1981. Over five hundred people attended the various festive activities. In its appraisal of the event, the Church Council captioned it as an 'Oasis on a Journey of Grace'.
- On May 16, 1982, the Highland congregation held an 'Arise & Build' banquet. A decision was made to divide the Highland Church into two entities. A new church would be built with the congregation dividing on a voluntary basis. This process resulted in a nearly fifty-fifty distribution giving assurance that the Lord was guiding this new venture of faith.
- Sunday, January 1, 1984, the two churches, Highland and Dalhousie Community, each met for separate services for the first time.
- April 1992, '165 Drive' had provided sufficient funds to pay off Highland's mortgage incurred as its share of the Dalhousie church construction cost.
- Also, in April 1992 a building renovations program was accepted by the membership. Highland Project 35, Phase 1 remodeled the entrance, the foyer and installed an elevator. The project was paid off on November 21, 1993 with a collection and celebration concert.
- Phase 2 'Project Jericho' targeted the basement with the acquisition of a new commercial dishwasher, new chairs, round tables, and flex-screen dividers.
- In 2003-2004, Highland began two new ministries with Sudanese and East-African groups meeting at the church.
- In June 2006, the Highland Church celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary from its first service in 1956.

*(See Appendix 6 for history and values of Mennonite Brethren)*

## Our Core Values

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

We desire to be a Church family that actively loves God and others and thereby glorifies God the Father through Jesus Christ our Lord by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This desire is expressed in our core values. Hence, we value:

## 1. **UNRESERVED DEVOTION TO GOD**

Description: Our primary focus is on God and our relationship with Him.  
Focus: reaching UP  
Ministries: Sunday morning worship services, prayer gatherings  
Scriptures: Mark 12:30

## 2. **HUMBLE SUBMISSION TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**

Description: Our primary allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. We humbly follow Him knowing that He is leading us deeper into life abundant and eternal.  
Focus: reaching UP, OUT, DEEP  
Ministries: Sunday school and worship, mission projects, discipleship  
Scriptures: Luke 9:23

## 3. **FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD**

Description: Our primary knowledge of God and His work is from His Word to us. We study and seek to understand and apply the Bible in community and individually.  
Focus: reaching DEEP, UP, OUT  
Ministries: Preaching, Sunday school, Bible studies  
Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:15-17

## 4. **AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS**

Description: God calls us into Church community of which Jesus is the head and where the Holy Spirit is active. This community is built and strengthened through our love for one another expressed in our attitudes and actions toward everyone. We value unity; where divisions occur we work toward reconciliation.  
Focus: reaching IN, DEEP, OUT  
Ministries: Care groups, counselling, mentoring, reconciliation, healing  
Scriptures: Philippians 2:1-5

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## 5. **CARING SERVICE TO OTHERS**

Description: The Holy Spirit gifts every Christian with spiritual abilities designed for the building up of the Church body “so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph. 4:16). We lovingly serve one another according to our giftedness for the well-being of everyone.

Focus: reaching IN, DEEP, OUT

Ministries: Spiritual gift analysis, deployment into ministry, training

Scriptures: Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5:13-14

## 6. **INTENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH NEIGHBOURS (both near and far)**

Description: We desire to bless others outside our Church community by testifying in word and deed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We desire to see our “neighbours” – whether *near* the Church building or congregants, or *far* from us requiring that we go to them – be reconciled with God and join Christ’s Church community.

Focus: reaching OUT

Ministries: Local and global missions, service projects, personal evangelism

Scriptures: Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 12:1-3

## 7. **INCREMENTAL DISCIPLING OF CONGREGANTS**

Description: We desire to see congregants of all ages continue to mature spiritually so that they are ever better able to faithfully follow Jesus Christ. As they are equipped we release them into gifted ministry for the benefit of all.

Focus: reaching DEEP, IN

Ministries: Discipleship, Sunday School, Training events

Scriptures: Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:27-28

## 8. **FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH**

Description: Spiritually gifted, mature, and trained men and women who lead with humility and care for the sake of the well-being and growth of the whole Church community and in accordance with our vision and mission. The congregation supports and encourages the leadership “so that their work will be a joy, not a burden” (Heb. 13:17).

Focus: reaching IN, DEEP

Ministries: Leadership Team, core ministry coordinators, ministry leaders

Scriptures: Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-12

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Our Vision for what might be

We see a growing group of surrendered, authentic, and transformed people who love God and others. We are captivated by the idea that this life is not about us, but all about Jesus. We are in awe of His story and His Word. We are an intergenerational congregation of joyful worshippers, grace-givers, and sowers of hope. We link arms with others who tell the true story of Jesus. We pray. We testify of Jesus-Christ to our neighbours both far and near. We strengthen the weak, embrace the broken and seek the lost. We engage with our communities and start new small groups so that all may be reached and equipped for ministry and service. Our city and world are being transformed because God has sent us to intentionally engage the people right around us!

Imagine some of the possibilities ...

- Personal and small group evangelism through existing relationships
- A clearinghouse rather than a warehouse where people who come in find Christ, discover their gifts and are developed and mobilized to share His love with others in practical meaningful ways.
- Restored marriages, families and relationships through a ministry of reconciliation and counselling
- People breaking free from their addictions
- People in other nations coming to Christ because we went and served them
- A safe place where God's hand is at the centre of everything

## Our Mission

Our mission is to follow Jesus Christ,  
and help others know, love, and serve Him!

## Our Mission Field

**Our “JERUSALEM” – People we are currently reaching (coming to faith in Christ and/or coming to HMBC because they are already Christ-followers) – generally church members like ourselves:**

- Church families
- People who are our family and friends (Christian and non-Christian)
- Neighbours in our community (who know that we are Christians)
- Church members new to Calgary
- Our grown-up children
- Extended family
- Ethnic congregations
- Prince of Peace Community (seniors)
- People who don't like big churches

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

**Our “JUDEA” – People we could reach if we became intentional – generally those whom we know or have a connection with who don’t know Jesus:**

- Neighbours we’ve never talked to
- People in recovery (who use the facility; AA)
- Fresh Start community (recovery centre for men)
- People in need (who come to our door)
- Highland Park residents
- ESL (new Canadians/immigrants)
- People we’re in contact with but not necessarily in relationship
- People who may know we’re Christians but we’ve never shared Christ with them
- Contacts, neighbours, casual friends, bus drivers, school/sports mates
- Co-workers and employers
- People our kids hang out with
- Back Pack recipients and their families
- Elementary school nearby

**Our “SAMARIA” – People we will not find it easy to reach since they are culturally or geographically removed:**

- People from the drop-in centre
- The homeless
- People downtown
- Students (university or high-school) we have no contact with
- People of different religious backgrounds (Muslims, Sikhs, etc.)
- People who have a different lifestyle (e.g. homosexuals)
- The very wealthy

## The Church’s Ministry

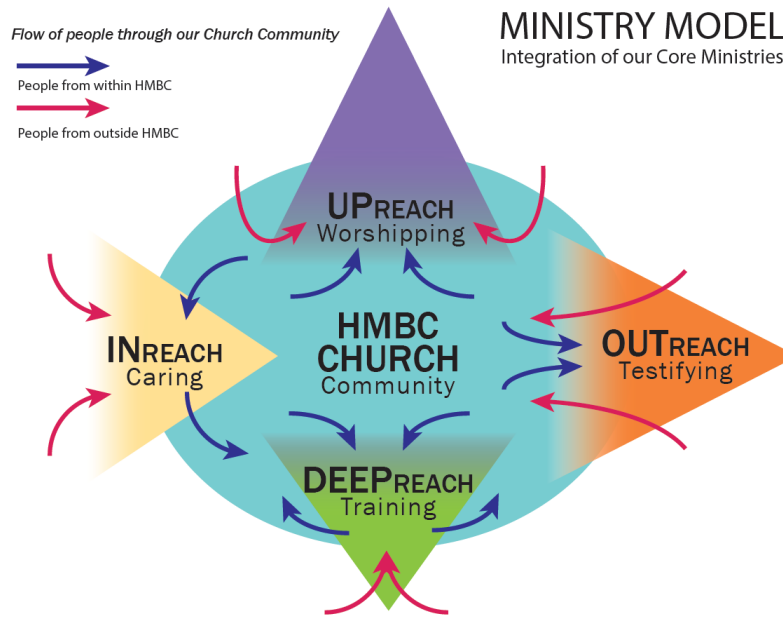
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### Our Ministry Model

A Ministry Model depicts how people flow through the life of our Church and how the ministries of our Church integrate into a holistic system. We developed a ministry model that intentionally honoured our values (who we are and how we minister) and positioned us to reach the people of our mission focus and realize our vision.

Our Ministry Model (see diagram below) suggests we will have the mindset that life and ministry will be done in the context of community. Jesus called us to love our neighbours. We value people and are committed to loving others as Jesus did. Our witness is incarnational. We will think of people and our witness before programs.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL



Our Church has a ministry core that permeates everything we do – whether corporate worship, peer group gatherings, ministry teams, or smaller affinity groups.

Our ministry core has four components:

1. **UPREACH – Worship:** Each entity supports and strengthens our relationship with God

*(Definition of **Worship**: (1) n. expression of reverence and adoration for God; (2) v. Show reverence and adoration for God)*

2. **DEEPREACH – Train:** Each entity is intentional in learning from God’s Word and in equipping and supporting each other for service.

*(Definition of **Train**: (1) to form by or to undergo instruction, discipline, or drill; (2) to teach so as to make fit, qualified, or proficient)*

3. **INREACH – Care:** Each entity cares for each other and practices the “one anothers” of scripture (love one another, encourage one another, serve one another, pray for one another, etc).

*(Definition of **Care**: (1) painstaking or watchful attention; (2) regard coming from esteem)*

4. **OUTREACH – Testify:** Each entity looks beyond itself to those outside the group and the Church community testifying (through word and deed) of God’s gracious love in Jesus.

*(Definition of **Testify**: (1) to make a statement based on personal knowledge or belief; to express a personal conviction; (2) to serve as evidence or proof; to bear witness to)*



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

**Worship, Train, Care, and Testify** permeate the corporate gathering of the Church on Sunday mornings. The services are uplifting and relevant, geared for believers yet understandable to the unbeliever who may attend. We welcome people in to our Church community intentionally connecting with them. These core components also mark the gatherings of people throughout the week in smaller groups or ministry teams. The amount of time and effort given to each of the components determines the kind of entity it is. For example ...



Worship Team  
Choir



Bible Studies  
Sunday School



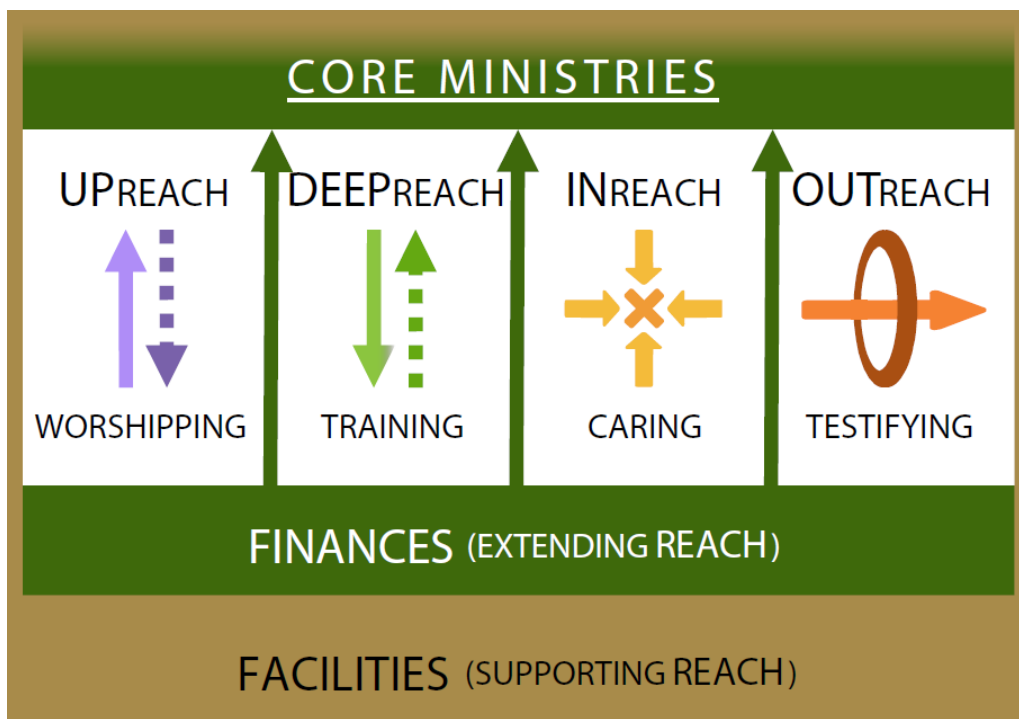
Care Group  
Recovery



Evangelism Class  
Alpha

## Our Core Ministries

The four components of our ministry become our “Core Ministries”. The four core ministries plus the two supportive ministries of finances and facilities comprise the core ministry structure of our Church (see diagram below). These are the areas where we will focus our people, financial, and material resources.





# The Governance Structure

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## Governance Structure: Membership

### Establishing Membership in the Church [Constitution 2.1]

1. *Individuals may become Members of HMBC in one of three ways:*
  - a. *Through water baptism in the Church upon confession of their faith (in accordance with the Confession of Faith);*
  - b. *Through transfer from another Mennonite Brethren Church which testifies that the individual holds membership in good standing;*
  - c. *Through public testimony to the Church of (1) their faith in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord and (2) their prior baptism upon a personal confession of faith.*
2. *Application for baptism and/or membership in the Church:*
  - a. *Application shall be made by submitting a signed Covenant of Commitment to the Leadership Team. This Covenant shall indicate:*
    - i. *their desire to be baptized (if not already baptized upon confession of personal faith in Jesus Christ),*
    - ii. *their desire to become a participating Member of the Church, and*
    - iii. *that they have read and affirm the Confession of Faith.*
  - b. *All baptism and/or membership candidates will be examined by at least three members of the Leadership Team to ascertain their personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and their desire to faithfully follow Jesus as a participating Member of HMBC.*
  - c. *The Leadership Team (or its Executive) shall decide whether or not baptism and/or membership candidates will be received into Membership.*

### Restriction and/or Termination of Membership [Constitution 2.2]

1. *The rights and privileges of Membership are restricted when a Member becomes a 'Member not in good standing' for conduct or beliefs which are not consistent with the Church's Confession of Faith or are detrimental to the Objects of the Church (that is, our purpose/mission/values/vision and/or well-being of the Church) or harm the testimony of the Church in the community.*

*This change in Membership status requires at least a 75 percent majority of votes cast by Members in good standing at a duly called meeting. A 'Member not in good standing' is restricted in these areas:*

- a. *cannot participate in Membership meetings;*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- b. *cannot make or vote on any motion of the Church;*
- c. *cannot serve in any capacity in the ministry of the Church.*

## 2. *Termination and Restoration of Membership*

### a. *Membership terminates upon occurrence of any of the following:*

- i. *a Member's written statement withdrawing membership received and accepted by the Leadership Team;*
- ii. *a Member becoming a member of another church;*
- iii. *death of the Member;*
- iv. *after six months of a Member becoming a 'Member not in good standing';*
  - 1. *the Membership may decide to extend the time-period or restore the status to 'Member in good standing' if the 'Member not in good standing' substantially resolves the issue(s) which caused the Membership to place the Member in that status;*
  - 2. *Any change of time-period or restoration to 'Member in good standing' requires at least a 75 percent majority of votes cast by Members in good standing at a duly called meeting.*

### b. *Restoration of Membership*

- i. *The individual whose membership is terminated may apply for restoration of membership to the Leadership Team after six months.*
- ii. *If the Leadership Team is satisfied that the individual is deserving of restoration of membership then they may make recommendation of restoration to the membership at a duly called meeting.*
- iii. *Restoration of membership will be granted if passed by at least a 75 percent majority of votes cast by Members in good standing present at a duly called business meeting.*
- iv. *If the percentage of votes is insufficient for restoration then an appeal may be made after six months*

## 3. *A Member who leaves the Church but desires to retain his/her membership may request the retention of membership in writing to the Leadership Team; if the request is granted the Member shall:*

- a. *continue to receive congregational care within reasonable limits;*
- b. *be encouraged to transfer membership to another Church if the absence extends beyond twelve months;*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- c. *be released from membership if the absence extends beyond eighteen months and there is no reasonable expectation of the Member returning to the Church as a fully participating Member;*
  - i. *those released from membership due to absence will be considered "Friends of Highland" but will have no rights or privileges extended to Members of the Church;*
  - ii. *this change of status shall be communicated in writing to the released Member when it happens.*

## **Governance Structure: Basic delineation of responsibilities**

We have a congregational type governance structure. The membership has final say on most things but gives authority to the Leadership Team for the oversight of the ministry of the Church and the everyday decisions. The responsibilities of membership and Leadership Team are delineated below.

### **Membership responsibilities:**

1. Hire permanent pastoral staff (i.e., more than 50% of full-time **and** greater than one year term)
2. Set annual budget (also approve expenditures beyond or not included in budget); appoint auditors to review financial accounting
3. Receive new members
4. Discipline members
5. Release members due to discipline
6. Purchase or sell real property
7. Approve revisions to constitution
8. Approve revisions to governance structure
9. Determine mission/values/vision
10. Appoint Leadership Team (Executive and Core Ministry Coordinators)
11. Appoint and affirm Discernment Team – this can be done either at the Annual General Meeting or at a Membership meeting in the fall (see below for details and the composition and functioning of this team)

### **Leadership Team responsibilities** (see below for more details):

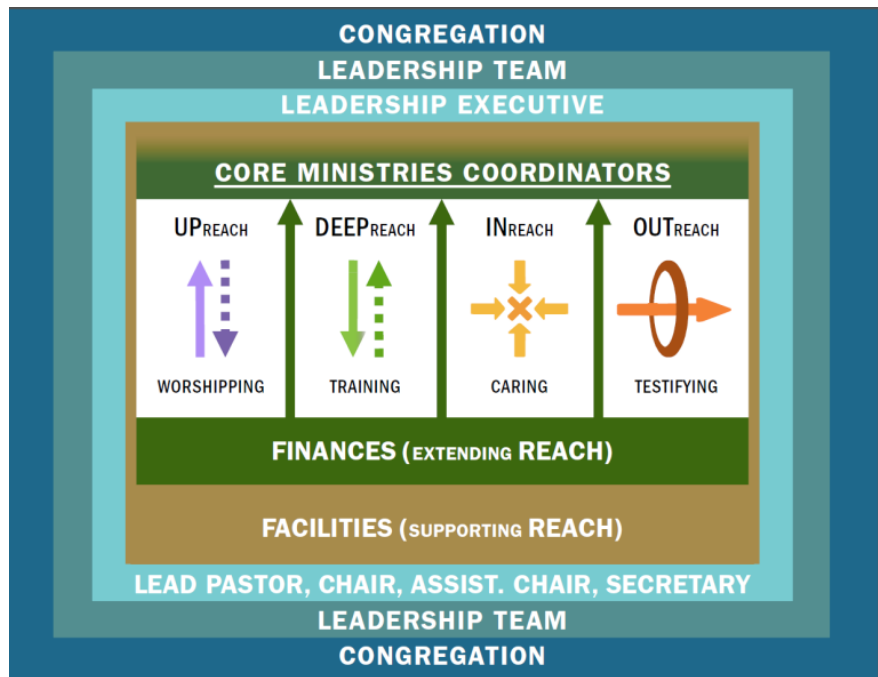
1. Find and hire part-time (50% or less) and/or temporary (one year or less) pastoral staff
2. Search for and present pastoral candidates (except for #1 above) to membership for hiring
3. Hire office and facility staff

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

4. Conduct annual reviews of pastoral and church staff
5. Establish and enforce Church policies
6. Prepare budget for membership consideration, revision, and approval
7. Appoint Leadership Team representatives for other ministry teams (e.g., Discernment Team)
8. Appoint volunteer ministry personnel
9. When needed, form ministry teams and appoint members (e.g., Aesthetics Team, Constitution Review Team) except when the responsibility of Membership (e.g., Discernment Team)
10. Annually review the overall Church ministry to ensure the Church remains on mission and true to the Confession of Faith and core values
11. Examine potential baptism and/or membership candidates to determine eligibility for same

## Governance Structure: Leadership Team Members

The core ministries of the Church comprise the central aspect of our governance structure (see diagram). A coordinator is appointed by the membership for each core ministry. In authority over the Core Ministry Coordinators is the Leadership Team Executive (Lead Pastor, Chair, Assistant Chair, and Secretary). The Executive and Core Ministry Coordinators together comprise the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team as a whole is responsible for the core ministries of the Church ensuring that all ministries are effectively contributing to the Church's mission in accordance with our core values. In authority over the whole Leadership Team is the membership. The Leadership Team members are appointed by the membership and may be removed by them. Any decisions of the Team may be overturned by the membership for good cause. In authority over the membership and adherents is Jesus Christ our Lord.



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **The Leadership Team is comprised of the following members:**

1. ***The Executive [These are stipulated in Constitution 3.2]***
  - a. ***Lead Pastor***
  - b. ***Leadership Team Chair***
  - c. ***Leadership Team Assistant Chair (Church Moderator)***
  - d. ***Leadership Team Secretary***
2. ***The Core Ministries Coordinators [These are not constitutionally designated; the positions are determined by the membership; thus they may change as needed; Constitution 3.2.1.2]***
  - a. UPREACH (Worship) Coordinator
  - b. DEEPREACH (Training/Equipping) Coordinator
  - c. INREACH (Congregational Care) Coordinator
  - d. OUTREACH (Global and Local Missions) Coordinator
  - e. FINANCES Coordinator
  - f. FACILITIES Coordinator

## **Qualifications of Leadership Team members [Constitution 3.3]:**

1. ***At least eighteen years of age***
2. ***Church Member in good standing (defined as “a participating Member of the Church who has the rights and privileges of Members; i.e., has not been restricted for any reason from full participation in the activities of the Membership)***
3. ***Spiritual Qualifications - Leadership Team Members shall demonstrate faithfulness in:***
  - a. ***Following Jesus***
  - b. ***Marriage/singleness and family***
  - c. ***Serving the Church***
  - d. ***Testimony to the world***
4. ***Fully support the mission/vision/values/governance of the Church***
5. ***Affirm our Confession of Faith***
6. ***Cannot be an undischarged bankrupt (i.e., be still under bankruptcy protection)***
7. ***Cannot have been convicted of an offense in connection with the promotion, formation, or management of a corporation within five (5) years of being a Leadership Team Member***
8. ***Cannot have been convicted of an offense involving fraud within five (5) years of being a Leadership Team Member***
9. ***Women may serve in any capacity except Lead Pastor***

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Appointment of Leadership Team members [Constitution 3.4]:

1. *The Discernment Team is responsible for finding suitable candidates to serve specific positions on the Leadership Team.*
2. *The Discernment Team shall present candidates for affirmation or vote (if more than one candidate per position) to the membership at a duly called business meeting.*
3. *Candidates must receive at least 75 percent affirmative vote of the Members in good standing present to join the Leadership Team.*

## Length of Term and Renewal:

*Leadership Team members are appointed for two year terms up to a total of three consecutive times. A Leadership Team member may be considered for additional terms after being off the Team for one year.*

## **Governance Structure: Leadership Team Accountability**

### [Constitution 3.5]

1. The Lead Pastor and associate/assistant pastors are accountable to the Leadership Team, Executive, and membership.
2. *All Leadership Team members shall be accountable to the whole Leadership Team for conduct and decisions*; this mutual accountability is meant to ensure everyone is functioning well within their areas of responsibility and that any problems or conflicts are resolved quickly.
3. *The whole Leadership Team shall be accountable to the Membership for conduct and decisions of the whole Team and individual members of the Team*; this accountability is meant to ensure the Leadership Team does not function independently of or without due regard for the membership and congregation as a whole; also, problems or conflicts that cannot readily be resolved within the Leadership Team need to be brought to membership for discernment and action.
4. Any serious and/or ongoing conflict between members of the Executive (including especially Lead Pastor) must be brought to the attention of the whole Leadership Team as soon as possible; if quick resolution cannot be made then the Leadership Team must report the conflict to the membership for discernment and action (*see Appendix 3: Conflict Resolution Guidelines for more help*).
5. *A Leadership Team member may be removed from office if his/her behaviour or beliefs run counter to the Confession of Faith, Act, Constitution, Bylaws, policies, and practices of the Church. Removal from office requires at least a 75 percent majority of votes cast by Members in good standing present at a duly called meeting.*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Another way to consider the question of who has authority over whom is to ask, “Who can rightfully say ‘no’ to whom?” So then, who has the authority to say ‘no’ to:

1. **Ministry volunteers?** (1) Their immediate supervisors; (2) the Core Ministry Coordinator of their area of ministry; (3) the Leadership Team and Membership also have the authority but they would typically exercise that authority through the Coordinator.
2. **Ministry supervisors** (e.g., Sunday School liaison)? (1) The Core Ministry Coordinator of their area of ministry; (2) the Leadership Team and Membership also have the authority but they would typically exercise that authority through the Coordinator.
3. **Core Ministry Coordinator?** (1) The Leadership Team; (2) Membership also have the authority but they would typically exercise that authority through the Leadership Team.
4. **Leadership Team?** (1) Mutual accountability within the Team; (2) Membership (typically communicated through the Executive).
5. **Leadership Team Executive?** (1) Mutual accountability within Executive; (2) mutual accountability within the Leadership Team; (2) Membership.
6. **Membership?** (1) Mutual accountability within the Membership; (2) our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Governance Structure: Leadership Team general and specific responsibilities**

1. **Whole Team** (but led by the Executive) are responsible for:
  - a. Participate in and contribute to the deliberations, decisions, and actions of the Leadership Team
  - b. Regularly communicating actions and decisions to the congregation through written summaries of meetings, congregational sessions, pulpit announcements, newsletter articles, etc.
  - c. Seeking input from congregation on issues deemed significant for whole congregation
  - d. Appoint Leadership Team representatives for other ministry teams (e.g., Discernment Team)
  - e. When needed, form ministry teams and appoint members (e.g., Aesthetics Team, Constitution Review Team), except when the responsibility of Membership (e.g., Discernment Team)
  - f. Establishing and enforcing Church policies (input from membership should be sought for policies that affect the whole congregation)
  - g. Searching for and presenting candidates for pastoral positions to membership (may do this through a Pastoral Search Team with representatives from Leadership Team and congregation)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- h. Annually reviewing the ministry of pastors (See current Employment Manual for details)
- i. Annually evaluating the overall ministry, governance structure, and supporting documents of the Church to ensure we are effectively accomplishing our mission in accordance with our core values (this should be done with input from membership and final report communicated to congregation)
- j. Preparing annual Church budget (for approval by Members)
- k. Finding and hiring of part-time (50% or less) and/or temporary (one year or less) pastoral staff
- l. Hiring of office and facility staff (e.g., administrative assistant, custodian)
- m. Examining of baptism and membership candidates
  - i. All baptism and/or membership candidates should be examined by at least three members of the Leadership Team including (when possible) the Lead Pastor to determine their personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and their desire to faithfully follow Jesus as a participating Member of HMBC.
  - ii. Additionally, if they are already baptized, then ensure they were baptized upon the confession of their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (i.e., not as infants or as a formality)
  - iii. Anyone baptized by HMBC automatically becomes a member of HMBC
  - iv. Leadership Team may require candidates to attend orientation session(s) to learn more about the Church and the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith and history.
  - v. See current Constitution and Bylaws for other particulars about becoming a member of HMBC
- n. Reviewing membership list (See current Constitution and Bylaws for specifics on membership)

## 2. The **Executive** responsibilities include:

- a. Setting the agenda for the Leadership Team (including advance planning)
- b. Ensuring proper minutes are taken, approved, and filed
- c. Making all decisions not under the direct authority of the Members and/or impacting the ministry being overseen by one of the Core Ministries Coordinators
- d. Handling all aspects of Church life and ministry not handled by the Members or Core Ministry Coordinators
- e. Oversee (typically through the Lead Pastor) all Church staff including other pastoral staff



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- f. Administering (typically through the Lead Pastor and Administrative Assistant) the Compassionate Fund
  - g. Report to whole Leadership Team on activities and decisions
3. The **Executive members** specific responsibilities include:
- a. **Chair**
    - i. Ensure the Executive team members are properly fulfilling their responsibilities
    - ii. Call all meetings of the Executive or whole Leadership Team (the Assistant Chair may do this in their absence)
    - iii. Set the agenda for the Executive (usually in consultation with other Executive members especially the Lead Pastor)
    - iv. Set the agenda for the Leadership Team together with the Executive
    - v. Lead the Executive team and Leadership Team meetings
    - vi. Report to Leadership Team on Executive activities and decisions
    - vii. Moderate congregation/membership meetings in the absence of the Assistant Chair
    - viii. Ensure regular communication to the congregation of actions and decisions of the Executive and Leadership Team through written summaries of meetings, congregational sessions, etc
    - ix. Prepare and submit an annual report for the Annual General Meeting
  - b. **Assistant Chair**
    - i. Lead the Executive and Leadership Team meetings in the absence of the Chair
    - ii. Set the agenda (usually together with the Executive) for all congregation/membership meetings
    - iii. Moderate congregation/membership meetings
      - 1. Ensure a quorum for meeting
      - 2. Present past minutes for review and approval
      - 3. assign ballot counters who are members
      - 4. ensure a parliamentarian is present
  - c. **Secretary**
    - i. Take minutes of the Executive, Leadership Team, and congregation/membership meetings to be distributed within one week of the meeting
    - ii. Find someone to take minutes in their absence
    - iii. Ensure past minutes are reviewed and approved at each meeting
    - iv. Ensure official minutes are stored in Church office
- (See Appendix 2 for guidelines regarding minutes and the Policy Manual for guidelines on taking minutes)*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## 4. The **Core Ministries Coordinators** responsibilities include:

### a. Common to all coordinators (within respective areas of coordination):

- i. Ensure the appointment of volunteer ministry personnel
- ii. Form ministry teams when needed
- iii. Make budget requests for annual Church budget
- iv. Freedom as to how the approved budget is allocated
- v. Ensure their respective Core Ministries are advancing the Church's mission in accordance with our core values
- vi. Annually evaluate (with input from ministry personnel) all areas of their respective core ministries to ensure the ministries and personnel are effectively contributing to the Church's mission
- vii. Report to whole Leadership Team on activities and decisions
- viii. Seek input from Leadership Team for significant decisions/issues/situations and/or when it falls within another coordinator's responsibility (e.g., painting involves the facilities coordinator)
- ix. Prepare and submit an annual report for the Annual General Meeting

### b. **UPREACH Coordinator** responsibilities include:

- i. Together with the Lead Pastor, ensure our Sunday worship services reflect our faith, diversity, and mission
- ii. Coordinate themes with Lead Pastor
- iii. Schedule worship teams
- iv. Oversee the technical/media teams
- v. Oversee those serving during the worship services (e.g., ushers, greeters, communion servers, announcements, nursery, prelude, postlude, Highland Impact Puppets)

### c. **DEEPREACH Coordinator** responsibilities include:

- i. Oversee the Sunday School ministry for all ages
- ii. Oversee the Small Group ministry
- iii. Oversee the Seniors', Women's, Men's, Youth ministries
- iv. Oversee the acquiring of educational/training resources
- v. Guide the discipleship/training ministry (when implemented)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- d. **INREACH Coordinator** responsibilities include:
  - i. Oversee the Prayer ministries
  - ii. Oversee the Church Library ministry
  - iii. Facilitate Congregational Care (sick, hospitalized, shut-ins, etc)
  - iv. Coordinate Newcomer Assimilation (incl. ESL Bible Class)
  - v. Oversee hospitality ministry (fellowship events)
- e. **OUTREACH Coordinator** responsibilities include:
  - i. Help the Church determine key mission foci (both local and global)
  - ii. Find ways for the Church to get involved in missions
  - iii. Maintain contact with Church-supported missionaries including inviting them to report to the congregation (if invitation is for a worship service then must first be approved by Lead Pastor and UPREACH coordinator)
  - iv. Ensure the congregation keeps informed of outside agencies we support (e.g., MB Missions, MCC)
  - v. Facilitate the Church's outreach efforts
- f. **FINANCES Coordinator** responsibilities include:
  - i. Facilitate preparation of annual budget
  - ii. Ensure bills are paid
  - iii. Coordinate offering counters, deposits, income tax receipts, etc.
  - iv. Ensure CCMBC is informed of salary payments and adjustments
  - v. Make monthly reports to Leadership Team and regular reports to the congregation on revenue and expenses
  - vi. Oversee all financial aspects of Church
- g. **FACILITIES Coordinator** responsibilities include:
  - i. Ensure the facilities are well-maintained
  - ii. Oversee the Aesthetics Team
  - iii. Ensure the custodial work is being done properly
  - iv. Oversee landscaping
  - v. Supervise Kitchen Coordinator
  - vi. Coordinate hosting/billeting

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Governance Structure: Leadership Team Remuneration and Indemnity**

### **Remuneration [From Constitution 3.6]**

*Except for Pastoral staff, no Leadership Team member shall receive any stated salary for his or her service on the Leadership Team. However, each Leadership Team member shall be entitled to receive from the Church reimbursement of the expenses incurred by attending any regular or special meeting of the Leadership Team or of any committee. All such reimbursement and compensation shall be paid even if a meeting is adjourned because of the absence of a quorum. Nothing herein contained shall be construed to preclude any Leadership Team member from serving the Church in any other capacity and receiving related compensation.*

### **Indemnification and Insurance [From Constitution 3.8]**

*Every Leadership Team member and/or Officer, past or present, and any other person who has undertaken or is about to undertake any duty, obligation, or liability on behalf of the Church, and their respective heirs, legal representatives and estates, shall at all times be indemnified and saved harmless out of the funds of the Church from and against all costs, charges, and expenses, including an amount paid to settle an action or satisfy a judgement, reasonably incurred by him or her in respect of any civil or administrative action or proceeding to which he or she is made a party by reason of being or having been a Leadership Team member or Officer or other person authorized to act on behalf of the Church, except such costs, charges or expenses as are occasioned by his or her gross negligence or criminal conduct.*

## **Governance Structure: Pastoral Staff**

### **[Constitution Article 4]**

#### **1. Qualifications:**

- a. *The Pastor(s) of the Church shall be, or be willing and able to be, credentialed by the ABMB Conference and licensed by the Province of Alberta.*
- b. *The Pastor(s) shall affirm the Confession of Faith.*
- c. *The Pastor(s) shall meet the qualifications for Leadership Team Members.*

#### **2. Calling of a Pastor**

- a. *The Leadership Team shall be responsible to guide the Church in calling a pastor;*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- i. *the Leadership Team may serve as the Pastoral Search Team or may appoint a team with at least one representative from the Leadership Team;*
  - ii. *the Leadership Team shall encourage the congregation to be in prayer throughout the search process and may arrange particular times of corporate prayer.*
- b. *Selection and calling of a pastor*
  - i. *The Leadership Team shall present one candidate for consideration by the congregation.*
  - ii. *A majority of at least 75 percent of ballots cast by Members in good standing at a duly constituted meeting is required to call a pastor.*
- c. *The Leadership Team shall have the authority to hire temporary or part-time (half-time or less) ministry staff.*

### 3. *Terms of Employment*

*Terms of employment for pastoral staff shall be guided by the latest Employment Manual approved by the Leadership Team; these terms shall be included in the Employment Contract for each pastor.* The Leadership Team shall be guided by the Employment Manual in all its dealings with paid staff.

### 4. Other considerations *[not in Constitution]*

- a. When the Church hires a pastor (Lead/Associate/Intern), the pastor will typically have responsibility for one or more of the Core Ministries overseeing UPREACH, DEEPREACH, INREACH, or OUTREACH
- b. These paid Core Ministries Coordinators (pastors) would serve on the Leadership Team and have the same responsibilities and accountability structures as volunteer Coordinators
- c. In those situations where a pastor also has some responsibilities within another Core Ministry area, the pastor will report to the Core Ministries Coordinator of that area (e.g., an associate pastor is hired to be the UPREACH Coordinator plus teach youth SS; he/she would report to the DEEPREACH Coordinator regarding his youth work)
- d. Women can serve in all pastoral positions except Lead Pastor.
- e. The Leadership Team shall not exceed 50% pastoral staff.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Governance Structure: Discernment Team**

The Discernment Team functions as a collaborative team between the Membership and Leadership Team to discern qualified, capable, and willing members of the Leadership Team. *[Constitution 3.1]*

### **Composition:**

*The Discernment Team is comprised of the Lead Pastor, Leadership Team representative (appointed by the Leadership Team), and 2-3 members at large (normally appointed by the Membership at the Annual General Meeting).*

### **Accountability, Length of Term and Renewal:**

The Discernment Team is accountable firstly to the Membership and secondly to the Leadership Team. Discernment Team members are appointed for two year terms up to a total of three consecutive times.

### **Function:**

1. ***Primary responsibility shall be leading the Church in discerning individuals for Leadership Team positions.*** In order to do so the Discernment Team:
  - a. shall determine what vacancies will exist on the Leadership Team after the upcoming Annual General Meeting
  - b. for each vacant position, shall invite the Leadership Team and congregation to submit names for consideration
  - c. may remove submitted names from consideration if the Team deems the person would not be qualified (Team should notify person who submitted the name of their action although no explanation is necessary)
  - d. may consider an individual whose name has been submitted for a different position on the Leadership Team
  - e. may discern qualified individuals whose names have not been submitted to the team
  - f. may discern more than one candidate per position (in which case the Membership would vote)
  - g. may consult the Leadership Team about an individual's qualification and/or suitability for a particular Leadership Team position
  - h. shall contact the qualified/suitable candidates to determine whether or not they are willing to serve on the Leadership Team
  - i. shall present a report for inclusion in the annual reports prior to the Annual General Meeting including the proposed names and positions of qualified, willing candidates
2. If asked, the Discernment Team may also assist Core Ministries Coordinators to find volunteer ministry personnel

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Governance Structure: Meetings

### Leadership Team (Executive and whole) [Constitution 3.7]

1. *The Leadership Team Chair or any three (3) Leadership Team members may request a Leadership Team meeting at any time. The Chair or Assistant Chair shall normally convene the meeting.*
2. *A quorum at any Leadership Team meeting shall be a majority of the Leadership Team members but at no time can a quorum consist of fewer than four (4) Leadership Team members.*
3. *Each Leadership Team member (except person serving as chair of the meeting) shall be entitled to one vote at any meeting; the chair may vote in the event of a tie vote.*
4. *A Leadership Team member may not vote by proxy.* This means that another person may not vote on behalf of a Leadership Team member. This does not refer to those times when discussion and votes are done via email.
5. *All Leadership Team members including Pastor(s) must be notified of and have the right to attend all meetings.* Non-Executive members of the Leadership Team may attend Executive meetings and the Executive is expected to attend the meetings of the whole Leadership Team.
6. *All Leadership Team members including Pastor(s) shall have the right to speak to and vote on any issue except when there is a personal conflict of interest.*
7. The Leadership Team should seek consensus on decisions rather than simple majority vote

### Membership Meetings [Constitution 2.3 - 2.5]

1. *Voting Privileges and Quorum*
  - a. *Only Members in good standing present at a meeting and at least 18 years of age shall have the right to make and vote on motions. Each Member shall be entitled to one vote. Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.* Provision may be made for disabled or shut-in individuals who cannot attend a meeting due to their infirmity. If these individuals are able to make an informed decision regarding the motion then, at the discretion of the moderator, these individuals may submit a vote via phone (so identity can be confirmed).
  - b. *A quorum for any meeting of the Church shall be obtained when the Members in good standing present at the meeting represent at least 20 percent of the Members in good standing in the Church.*
  - c. *A majority of 60 percent of the votes cast by the Members in good standing present shall determine the questions and motions for the meetings. The only exception to this is where the vote or consent of a greater number of Members is required by these Bylaws.*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- d. ***Ballot voting shall be conducted at the discretion of the Moderator in charge of the meeting of Members or if requested by a Member at the meeting;*** the Moderator shall not announce the percentage, only whether the motion passed or failed based on the percentage of votes required; spoiled ballots are not counted or included in the total number of ballots

## ***2. Business Meetings (where motions are expected to be made)***

- a. ***An Annual General Meeting of Members shall be held within two months from the end of the fiscal year at a time and place fixed by the Leadership Team.***
- b. ***Other business meetings of Members may be called by the Leadership Team when needed.***

## ***3. Non-business meetings (where no motions are planned)***

- a. ***may be called when needed***
  - i. by the Leadership Team or its Executive;
  - ii. by a minimum of three members by submitting the request to the Leadership Team clearly stating the intended purpose for the meeting;
- b. will be held at a time and place fixed by the Leadership Team or its Executive;
- c. no motions may be presented by the Leadership Team; this prevents the surprise motion and vote; all planned (or even anticipated) motions need to be made at a duly called business meeting
- d. a Church Member may present a motion from the floor; however, a majority of at least 60% of votes cast by members present is required to determine whether or not the motion will be considered at the meeting; any vote requiring a 75% majority will be tabled for a minimum of one week
- e. if the membership does not approve the motion to be heard then a business meeting may be called by the Leadership Team to deal with the motion.

## ***4. Notice of Meetings***

- a. ***Notice of the Annual General Meeting of Members or any planned business meeting of Members of the Church, shall be given at least two weeks (including two Sundays) prior to the date fixed for such a meeting***
- b. The purpose and agenda items should be included in the notice of business meetings whenever possible including recommendations/motions/etc
- c. ***The accidental omission to give notice of a meeting to or the non-receipt of a notice by a Member that is entitled to receive notice does not invalidate proceedings at that meeting***



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- d. *For time critical issues notice may be given at a regularly scheduled gathering of the congregation (e.g., Sunday morning worship service) for a meeting to be held no sooner than one week from then*
- e. *No notice is required for non-business meetings; although notice should be given as soon as reasonably possible*
- f. *A business meeting to consider any proposed purchase or sale of real property shall be called by giving not less than two weeks' notice, including two Sundays, before the date of the meeting. The notice shall:*
  - i. *state the time, place and particular object for which the meeting is called;*
  - ii. *be posted at the meeting place for the congregation of the Church; and*
  - iii. *be read at all intervening services held in the meeting place for the Church.*

## Governance Manual: Supporting Documents and Policies

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### Policy Manual

Whenever the Leadership Team or Executive meets the members should have access to the latest Policies Manual (hard copy kept in the Church office and also accessible online from the Church's website). This manual includes policies concerning administration, employment, finance, leadership, ministries, rentals, safe place, conflict resolution, and more.

All decisions need to be in line with current policies. If no policy exists then a new policy should be drafted if that situation will probably be encountered again in the future. The Leadership Team has the authority to draft, revise, and implement policies. However, when a policy affects the congregation in majority, the policy should be brought before the membership for review and affirmation.

For the sake of simplicity, other documents will be included in the Policy Manual including the Constitution, Ministry Direction Digest, and Pastor Ken's Comprehensive Final Report.

# Governance Manual: Appendices

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## List of Appendices

1. Prologue and definitions from Constitution/Bylaws (p. 27)
2. Meeting minutes (p. 30)
- 3.1 Understanding Robert's Rules of Order (p. 31)
- 3.2 Basics of addressing a motion and ancillary motions (p. 34)
4. Conflict Resolution Guidelines (p. 38)
5. Why E-Communication Heightens Conflict (p. 42)
6. Canadian Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith (Digest Version) (p.44)
7. What does it mean to Mennonite Brethren (an essay by Ken Dueck) (p. 47)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Appendix 1: Prologue and Definitions from Constitution**

### **CONSTITUTION**

#### **Article 1 – Name and Objects**

##### **1.1 Official Name**

- 1.1.1 The name of this religious society shall be “Highland Mennonite Brethren Church” hereinafter called the “Church.” The Church is registered as a religious society pursuant to the Alberta Religious Societies’ Land Act, R.S.A. 2000, Chapter R-15.

##### **1.2 Objects**

- 1.2.1 The objects of the Church shall be:
  - 1.2.1.1 To carry out the ministry programs for the benefit of the congregation and the community;
  - 1.2.1.2 To perform pastoral and missionary work;
  - 1.2.1.3 To provide religious instruction; and
  - 1.2.1.4 To provide a weekly worship experience for the congregation and the community.
- 1.2.2 The activities of the Church shall be carried on without the purpose of financial gain for its members, and any profits or accretions to the Church shall be used in promoting its purposes.

#### **Article 2 – Affiliation**

##### **2.1 Affiliation**

- 2.1.1 The Church shall be a member of the Alberta Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (hereafter referred to as ABMB) and the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (hereafter referred to as CCMBC). It shall give moral and material support to the above-named Conferences. All articles of this Constitution and proposed revisions shall be in accord with the constitutions of the above-named Conferences.

#### **Article 3 – Registered Office**

##### **3.1 Registered Office**

- 3.1.1 The Registered Office of the Church shall be located at 4018 Centre B Street NW, Calgary, Alberta, or at such other address in Alberta as the Church may from time to time, by resolution, direct.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Article 4 – Confession of Faith

### 4.1 Confession of Faith

- 4.1.1 The Confession of Faith of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches shall serve as the Confession of Faith of the Church. The Church shall not pass or accept resolutions or practices, which are in conflict or inconsistent with this Confession of Faith.

## **BYLAWS**

### Article 1 – Definitions and Enforcement

- 1.1 Definitions.** In these Bylaws, unless the context otherwise requires, the following definitions shall apply:

“ABMB” means the Alberta Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches;

“Act” means the *Religious Societies’ Land Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. R-15;

“Business meeting” means any meeting of the Church membership or whole congregation where one or more motions are expected to be presented and put to a vote;

“Bylaw” or “Bylaws” means any Bylaw of the Church from time to time in force and effect;

“CCMBC” means the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches;

“Church” means the religious society registered under the *Religious Societies’ Land Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. R-15, and named “Highland Mennonite Brethren Church”;

“Confession of Faith” means the theological centre of the Church’s core belief as stated in the Confession of Faith of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches attached hereto as Appendix A;

“Constitution” means the Constitution of the Church;

“Leadership Team” means the Board of Leaders of the Church;

“Leadership Team Executive” or “Executive” means the Chair, Assistant Chair, and secretary of the Leadership Team plus the Lead Pastor;

“Leadership Team member” means a person elected by the Membership to the Leadership Team of the Church;

“Member” means a person who has been accepted as a member of the Church. “Members” or “Membership” means collectively all of the members of the Church;

“Member in good standing” means a participating Member of the Church who has the rights and privileges of Members;

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

“Member not in good standing” means a Member of the Church who has temporarily been restricted from full participation in the activities of the Membership;

“Moderator” means the Assistant Chair of the Leadership Team who normally moderates the meetings of the Church;

“Objects” means the objects of the Church as set out in the Constitution;

“Officer” means a person appointed as an officer of the Church;

“Religious Society” means the religious society known as “Highland Mennonite Brethren Church.”

## **1.2 Enforcement**

Specific bylaws may be temporarily waived when deemed necessary by at least a 75 percent majority of votes cast by Members in good standing present at a duly called business meeting.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Appendix 2: Meeting Minutes**

### **Taking Minutes**

Consult the document *Governance Manual – Taking Minutes* for guidelines on minute taking for meetings. This document is available in the Policy Manual binder as well as online on our website. The Secretary should have a printed copy to consult when needed.

### **Distribution of Minutes**

For the sake of better communication, the Executive minutes should be distributed to the whole Leadership Team. One set of official minutes needs to be filed with the Church office.

### **Minutes/Document Binder**

A tabbed binder will be provided for new Team members. It will contain a copy of the Governance Manual and have provision to insert Executive, Leadership Team, and Membership meeting minutes. The binder and all contents remain the property of the Church; when a Team member steps off the Leadership Team, he/she must return the binder and contents to the Church office. Personal copies of minutes are not allowed.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Appendix 3.1: Understanding Robert's Rules of Order

Understanding the Rules of Order helps insure that we can conduct church business in a Christ-like manner. Sometimes the formality of the Rules can seem unnatural and a bit silly. But, they prevent conferences from becoming unruly, and guarantee that each member is treated with courtesy and respect. Finally, strict observance of the Rules helps us remember that a difference of opinion does not represent a personal attack. Please study these Rules carefully.

### The Fundamentals:

- The body may consider only one item of business at a time
- The majority rules- but the minority can not be unfairly suppressed
- All questions, comments, discussion or introduction of motions must be directed to the Moderator
- When the body is prepared to vote - the body votes

### Your Rights As A Member Of The Body:

You have a right to...

- Understand what is going on
- Propose- or second- a motion, resolution or amendment
- Speak for, or against, any matter before the body
- Vote as you please
- Insist upon the enforcement of the rules by raising a "Point of Order"
- "Call" for the question at any time
- Insist the Moderator and the body follows the agenda by a "Call for the Orders of the Day."

### How to Address the Moderator:

- Raise your hand (*A member that speaks first is to be ruled "Out of Order"*)
- The Moderator will recognize you. (*The chair recognizes John Smith*)
- You must address your remarks to the Moderator
  - "Mr. Moderator, I move that....."
  - "Mr. Moderator, I believe that....."
  - "Mr. Moderator, I would like to ask a question....."

### The Definition of a "Motion"

A motion is the formal procedure by which business is introduced to the deliberative body. A motion must call for a specific action to be taken by the body.

### What the Body Can Do With a Motion

- Accept the motion (Unless otherwise noted in the Constitution or by-laws a motion passes with a simple majority vote)
- Reject the motion (Unless otherwise noted in the Constitution or by-laws a motion is defeated with a simple majority vote)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- Refer the motion (Is debatable. A vote to refer indicates the body wants more information before it makes its decision. The referral must send the motion to a specific committee, group or organization. The referral must provide a specific time to report back to the body)
- Lay the motion on the table (Is not debatable. This should only be used if a more pressing item of business is presented to the body)

## How a Motion Is Decided

- 1) The motion is presented to the body
- 2) The Moderator restates the motion.
- 3) The Moderator opens the floor for questions and/or debate.
- 4) Amendments are resolved
- 5) The Moderator restates the motion (As amended if applicable)
- 6) The vote is taken
- 7) The Moderator (a) announces the outcome of the vote, (b) orders the execution of the motion, and (c) proceeds to the next item of business

## FAQ Concerning Motions

**Q.** *"Who can introduce a motion?"*

**A.** Any member of the body.

**Q.** *"What do I need to do if I want to make a motion?"*

**A.** . Raise your hand and be recognized by the Moderator. State your motion. (It is helpful- but not required- to write out your motion.) Do not discuss your motion until the Moderator:

- a) asks if there is a "second", and
- b) recognizes you to "speak to the motion"

**Q.** *"When does a motion need to be 'seconded'?"*

**A.** Seconds are required when a motion comes from an individual member of the body. (A second does not indicate that the person offering a "second" supports the motion- merely that he or she thinks the motion should be considered.)

**Q.** *"Why does a motion coming from a committee, group or organization not require a second?"*

**A.** By definition a committee, group or organization contains more than one person. The second is not required because two or more members of the body believe the motion should be considered.

**Q.** *"When is a motion considered 'out of order'?"*

**A.** Whenever the body is considering another item of business, or when the motion would contradict the church's Constitution or by-laws. (Being ruled "out of order" should not be considered a personal attack, The Moderator is saying that this is not the appropriate time in the conference to bring the matter before the body.)



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

**Q.** *“Why do some motions require more than a simple majority vote to pass?”*

**A.** Because the Constitution or by-laws says so. Generally matters requiring a “super majority” involve issues of fundamental importance to the body. The “super majority” insures that a small group can not change the fundamental nature of the body.

## **The Definition of an Amendment**

An amendment is a class of motion that proposes to make a specific change to an original motion.

## **FAQ About Amendments**

**Q.** *“What happens when an amendment is made and seconded?”*

**A.** Discussion of the original motion is immediately halted so that the amendment can be considered. Any questions or debate must be focused on the amendment only.

**Q.** *“Why do you have to deal with amendments before you decide the original motion?”*

**A.** Because the amendment will change the original motion.

**Q.** *“Can the effect of an amendment be to kill- or radically alter- the original motion?”*

**A.** Yes

**Q.** *“How is an amendment approved?”*

**A.** Unless otherwise noted in the Constitution or by-laws, an amendment is approved on a simple majority vote.

## **The Definition of Debate**

Debate is an essential feature of a deliberative body. It exists to help the body reach a decision.

## **Rules of Debate**

- No person may speak until recognized by the Moderator. Only one person may speak at a time.
- Comments or questions must be directed to the Moderator, and may not be directed towards another member of the body.
- The debate ends when (a) a specified time of debate has expired, (b) the Moderator asks if the body “Are you ready to voter?” or someone ‘calls for the question”
- When someone makes a “call for the question” debate on the motion immediately ceases. Without debate the Moderator “call the question” If 2/3’s of the body vote in the affirmative, a vote on the pending motion is then conducted.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Appendix 3.2: Basics of addressing a motion and ancillary motions

Robert's Rules describe basic protocols for discussing and deciding issues when a large number of people are involved. It usually would not be necessary to use many aspects of it for a meeting of 3 to 12 people, but the "basics" are a useful way to manage any meeting. There is nothing special about Robert's Rules other than that there has to be some protocol that everyone follows, and this protocol has been tested over decades and proven sound. The rules anticipate every possible scenario, and can be quite convoluted for the ordinary course of business. Usually, using the protocol for ordinary motions is enough to get the job done. However in larger groups it is useful to have a more complete protocol.

This appendix provides two summaries:

- 1) The basics of addressing a motion
- 2) Some additional information on ancillary motions (subsidiary, privileged and incidental) which might be needed in larger settings

It is recommended that, if you have a particularly large membership group, or if there are contentious issues being addressed, you become familiar with the more detailed Robert's Rules.

### Basics of Addressing a Motion

- A motion is a course of action recommended by the person putting the motion forward.
- **The Chair controls the flow of the meeting.** In order to put forward a motion, the mover must be recognized by the Chair. In an informal setting, this is generally done with a nod or a gesture. In a more formal members meeting, the mover must stand and wait to be recognized.
- **The group can only consider one motion at a time.** If there is a motion on the table, then a second motion will not be "heard". There are exceptions to this rule; see *Basics of Ancillary Motions* below.
- **The mover states his/her motion**, usually in positive terms (e.g., you would move that the organization pursue such-and-such a course of action, rather than that the organization NOT pursue another.) The motion statement is structured to start with the words "I move that...".
- **A second person, or seconder, declares, "I second the motion"** (meaning, "there are two here who think this is right"). In a friendly environment, the Chair may ask if there is a second to the motion, but is not obliged to do so.
- **If there is no seconder** to the motion, it will not be considered by the group; it is considered "lost".

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- If the motion is seconded, **the Chair declares to the group that “It has been moved and seconded that...”**. The motion must now remain unchanged while it is discussed and debated by the group.
- Formally, **the Chair will ask if the mover wishes to expand on his/her motion**. In a friendly or smaller meeting environment, the mover may be given an opportunity to explain their reasons or rationale to the group before putting the motion forward, but technically, they should not do so until this point. The mover will not be given another opportunity to speak unless the Chair calls upon him/her to answer a question or clarify a statement as a result of a contribution from the floor (the members).
- **The membership is then given an opportunity to express their views** or ask questions about the motion.
- **All comments, starting with the motion and the second and running right through the entire process, should be directed at the Chair.** (That is why in Parliament, you hear MPs talking to Mr. Speaker all the time; the Speaker operates as the Chair of the House of Commons). In this way, the Chair operates as debate or discussion “traffic cop” by recognizing only one person at a time and making sure that everyone plays by the same rules.
- **There is a time limit**, usually set by the Chair at the beginning of the meeting, for how long someone can hold the floor to talk about the motion. This prevents filibustering and helps everyone treat everyone else’s views with respect. Sometimes there is a limit put on the debate of the entire motion rather than on individual contributions to the discussion.
- If no one has any comments or questions on the motion, **it can go immediately to a vote**.
- Otherwise, when there has been a full discussion and no further comments or questions are forthcoming from the floor, the Chair will then ask for a vote. This is called “Calling the Question”. Depending on the circumstances, **votes can take place**:
  - By show of hands — typical in a boardroom setting.
  - By voice (shouting “Aye” or “No” to indicate positive or negative vote). Somewhat more typical in political settings than in corporate settings.
  - By roll call — The Secretary reads the name of each voter who then indicates individually her or his vote. This can be used in any setting but is time-consuming.
  - By division — The members, shareholders or directors literally stand up and go to one side or another of a room or dividing point to indicate their position on the motion. The House of Commons often uses division on important questions.
  - By ballot — where secrecy is important

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

- In addition to these methods, the Chair, if he/she judges there to be a general consensus on the motion, can say, “**There being no objection**, ... the motion is passed”. The pause allows any individual to say that they object. If there are no objectors, then the motion is carried or passed. However, if there is even one objector, the motion must be put to a formal vote.
- **Once a motion is put to a vote, that is the end of that motion one way or the other.** It cannot be reconsidered by the group, whether it was passed or lost, unless there is a new motion to reconsider or rescind it.

## **Basics of Ancillary Motions**

*The motion described above is a “main motion”, although the process is generally the same for all motions. Even though the group can only address one motion at a time, there are sometimes motions related to the motion on the floor that it would make sense to consider at the time they come up. Under Robert’s Rules, some of these motions are debatable and others go directly to a vote.*

## **Subsidiary Motions**

- The purpose of a subsidiary motion is to change how a main motion is handled and voted on. It must therefore be considered before the group can proceed to consider the main motion.
- Subsidiary motions include:
  - Lay on the Table — temporarily suspends further consideration of the main motion while a related motion is considered
  - Take from the Table — resumes consideration of the item laid on the table
  - Previous Question — returns to the motion previously being considered (used in situations where a subsidiary motion or other motion is pending)
  - Limit Debate — limits the discussion of the motion to a specified period of time or for a specified period of time
  - Extend Limits of Debate — extends existing limits of debate for a specified period of time or to a specified period of time
  - Postpone Definitely — postpone the debate to a specific time or for a specific time
  - Refer — used when additional information is considered to be useful for a decision, the question is referred to a committee or some other individual or body to gather this information and sometimes to make a recommendation
  - Amend — to change the wording of the main motion; in a “friendly” amendment, the mover accepts a suggested amendment without the need to vote
  - Postpone indefinitely — essentially removes the motion from consideration indefinitely

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Incidental Motions

- Incidental motions deal with procedural issues relating to other motions and are therefore considered before both subsidiary and main motions. Incidental motions are generally undebatable and should be put to an immediate vote.
- Incidental motions include:
  - Question of Order — to point out an infraction of the rules
  - Suspension of Rules — where it would be advisable for the group to voluntarily suspend some aspect of its own rules
  - Objection to Consideration of a Question — applied only to a main motion, the nature of the objection must be stated
  - Divide a Question — split the question into its component parts to consider each independently
  - Methods of Voting — to change the method of voting

## Privileged Motions

- Privileged motions do not relate to the main motion or the related subsidiary or incidental motions, but rather relate to the general order of business of the group. As these are “meta” questions, they take precedence over both subsidiary and incidental motions. They are not debatable and should be put to an immediate vote.
- Privileged motions include:
  - Fix the time at which to Adjourn — self-explanatory
  - Adjourn — self-explanatory
  - Take a Recess — self-explanatory
  - Raise a Point of Privilege — used to remind members of the group of the need for courtesy or quiet or to make a request which will enable more effective participation, such as asking participants to use a microphone or requesting a translation
  - Call for Orders of the Day — a motion reminding the group to adhere to the agenda

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Appendix 4: Conflict Resolution Guidelines

The following guidelines for resolving conflict in the Church are based on Scriptural teachings. *Note: The plural pronoun is used in place of the singular throughout to avoid gender (e.g., they instead of he/she).*

### 1. Conflict between congregants ...

#### 1.1. When the conflict is based on differences of opinion, mindset, values...

1.1.1. Does the Church have any policies/guidelines regarding this difference?  
If so, then conform to the Church standard. If not then go to next step ...

1.1.2. Seek common ground. On what can you agree? Use those commonly held items as a basis for dialogue about the things on which you disagree? Seek to understand each other's point of view. Maybe views will change or the parties can amicably agree to disagree. If that doesn't resolve the conflict go to next step ...

1.1.3. If conflict remains unresolved between parties then have each party bring in sympathizers to see if a resolution can be reached. If conflict still exists go to next step ...

1.1.4. Parties in conflict present their respective sides to Leadership Team (or representatives from Leadership). The decision of the Leadership will be considered binding.

1.1.5. If conflict continues then the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).

#### 1.2. When conflict is theological or biblical ...

1.2.1. Consult the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference Confession of Faith with commentary (available on their website – [www.mennonitebrethren.ca](http://www.mennonitebrethren.ca)) plus any relevant Conference or Church resolutions. If the issue is addressed in the Confession or other resolution(s) then consider any relevant statement(s) binding; if not, then go to next step ...

1.2.2. Since the particular issue is not addressed in our Confession of Faith, the issue should be considered as secondary in nature; Augustine's axiom should be applied, "In essentials [Confession of Faith], unity; in non-essentials, liberty [allow for disagreement]; in all things, charity [love one another]."

1.2.3. If conflict continues the conflictive behaviour is sin and should be dealt with as such (see 1.3 below).

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

When conflict is moral/sin (follow biblical guidelines)

1.2.4. When someone sins against you (see Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-22): the biblical guidelines focus primarily on the one offended rather than on the offender. The act of asking someone for forgiveness seems to be assumed; the problem is with the forgiver. We need to respond to all offenses against us by others with a forgiving, loving attitude. Even when the same person repeatedly sins against us, we need to repeatedly extend forgiveness. It is reasonable though for the offended party to use the process outlined in Matthew 18 (see 1.3.2 next).

1.2.5. When someone sins (not necessarily against you; see especially Matthew 18:15-20 on which the following is based; also Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20):

1.2.5.1. Go directly to the offender and reveal to them their sin. The person may immediately see their sin; if not they may have to be shown from Scripture or from how they have hurt the Church or others (you?) that they have sinned. The purpose is not to condemn the offender but to convince them to repent of their sin and change their behaviour so that they can be restored to the Church family and/or those they have offended.

1.2.5.2. If the person refuses to listen bring one or two other trustworthy persons into the conversation. Again, the purpose is not to condemn (two-fold or more) but to emphasize the seriousness of their sin and the strong desire to see that person restored and reconciled with those they have offended and the Church family at large.

1.2.5.3. If the person still refuses to listen bring the matter to the Leadership Team. Again, the purpose is to restore the offender and reconcile them to the Church family.

1.2.5.4. If the person still refuses to listen, the Leadership Team should bring the matter to the Church membership at a duly called meeting.

1.2.5.4.1. If the offender refuses to listen to the membership then they should be treated by the membership as a non-Christian (that is, someone who needs to come to faith in Jesus Christ in repentance and dedication for the forgiveness of sins).

1.2.5.4.2. If the offender is a member of the Church then their membership will be placed in abeyance as a “member *not* in good standing.” As such they may not participate in ‘members only’ meetings, make or vote on motions, or serve in any capacity in the

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

ministry of the Church. If there is no satisfactory resolution or reconciliation within six months then they will be released from membership.

2. Conflict between volunteer ministry personnel – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above along the following lines of authority:
  - 2.1. One or both parties involved should take the matter to their direct supervisor;
  - 2.2. If the direct supervisor cannot or does not resolve the matter, one or both parties should appeal to the next higher level of authority;
  - 2.3. The highest level of authority shall be the Leadership Team unless it is necessary to take the matter to the Church membership (see 1.3.2.4 above)
3. Conflict between congregant and congregational leader (i.e., Leadership Team members and pastors) – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:
  - 3.1. Matter should first be addressed by Leadership Team in an effort to find a resolution and reconciliation;
  - 3.2. If Leadership Team is unable or unwilling to resolve matter then it would be brought to the Church membership for discernment and decision
4. Conflict between leaders – the conflict should be handled as outlined in section 1 above in the following order:
  - 4.1. The individuals involved in the conflict should seek resolution/reconciliation between each other
  - 4.2. If no resolution is found then matter should be dealt with by the Leadership Team
  - 4.3. If still no resolution is found then the Leadership Team should bring the matter to the Church membership for discernment and decision
  - 4.4. Any conflict should be addressed as soon as it arises. Members should be informed quickly if there is no immediate resolution.
5. In all matters, those in conflict should act with humility, follow biblical guidelines, adhere to the Church's policies and procedures, and be concerned with their and the Church's public testimony. Their actions and attitudes should reflect 'HMBC's Family Rules' as follows:



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## HMBC's Family Rules

#1 We will LOVE one another unconditionally.

*"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8)*

#2 We will EMPATHIZE with one another.

*"God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Corinthians 12:24-26)*

#3 We will extend and receive FORGIVENESS from one another.

*"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31-32)*

#4 We will PUT one another FIRST.

*"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." (Romans 12:10)*

#5 We will SERVE one another.

*"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." (Galatians 5:13)*

#6 We will PRAY for one another.

*"...pray for each other...." (James 5:16)*

#7 We will ENCOURAGE one another.

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

#8 We will LISTEN to one another before speaking.

*"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (James 1:19)*

#9 We will CHOOSE WORDS CAREFULLY when speaking to one another.

*"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29)*

#10 We will SHARE with one another when in need.

*"Share with the Lord's people who are in need." (Romans 12:13)*

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## Appendix 5: Why E-communication heightens conflict

Electronic communication has unintended consequences. It tends to escalate conflict. Intentional effort is required in email to deescalate tensions. Why is that? According to a study by Raymond Friedman and Steven Curral:

- Email is asynchronous, which means you can read and reply to messages at the time and place of your choosing. The benefit is convenience, but reading in isolation, without the voice inflections, corrective feedback, and clarification we'd get in a telephone or face-to-face exchange, means misunderstandings more easily arise.
- Email is a great equalizer. Everyone is accessible via the same medium, an email page. You don't see a unique face in context. So email exchanges depend less on awareness of context and social ties than on mere words. And because we usually write email in isolation, it's an asocial activity. So for many people, email language tends to be more aggressive and less courteous.

It helps to remember that in face-to-face communication, three elements combine to get the message across: (1) body language, (2) tone of voice, (3) words. The non-verbal elements are particularly important for communicating feelings and attitude, especially in situations where there is tension. If words and body language differ, one tends to believe the body language. In email, we must overcompensate with our words to make up for the lack of the other two elements of communication.

### **E-Communication Guidelines**

When there is tension, **you should use email:**

- If there needs to be a record of the interaction.
- If you are dealing with a conflict where the emotional level is fairly low.
- If you are having an initial conversation to set up a phone call or a face-to-face meeting to address things in more detail.

**Do not use email:**

- If you're in conflict with someone you've never met face-to-face.
- If your emotions are running high.
- If the email exchange has gone back and forth more than three times. This usually means the issue is too complex to deal with using only email. Ask to speak by phone or face to face.

**If you absolutely must deal with conflict by email:**

1. Insert the address last. Too many emails have been sent inadvertently before they were ready.
2. Don't assume why a person didn't respond, or answered your email in a certain manner. Intentions are invisible. Give the person every benefit of the doubt.
3. Include in your message reminders of why your relationship with this person is important to you, and your desire for their best interests.

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

4. Don't parse the other person's word choices. Differences are resolved with relationships more than just logic.
5. Remember that your responses will be interpreted as more aggressive than intended. Don't use "barbed" words that carry emotion beyond their meaning. Be sure to communicate your spirit, not just your position on the issues at hand.
6. Email it to yourself for further review before you send it. Hit send only when you're satisfied that this email will help, not worsen, the conflict.
7. Be careful with "cc's" and the message they send. This may imply that you are ratting a person out to others.

Marshall Shelley (Copyright © 2013 by the author or Christianity Today/Leadership Journal)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Appendix 6: Canadian Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith (Digest Version)**

### **1. God**

We believe in the one true God, the source of all life, who reigns over all things as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and lovingly cares for all creation. God the Father planned the redemption of humanity and sent Jesus Christ the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor and triumphing over sin through his obedient life, death, and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit empowers believers with new life, indwells them, and unites them in one body.

### **2. Revelation of God**

We believe God has made himself known to all people. Beginning with creation and culminating in Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself in the Old and New Testaments. All Scripture is inspired by God and is the authoritative guide for faith and practice. We interpret Scripture in the church community as guided by the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Creation and Humanity**

We believe God created the heavens and the earth, and they were good. Humans, God's crowning act, were created in the image of God. Sin has alienated humanity from the Creator and creation, but God offers redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

### **4. Sin and Evil**

We believe sin is individual and corporate opposition to God's good purposes and leads to physical and spiritual death.

### **5. Salvation**

We believe God saves all people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Through his obedient life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, Christ delivers people from the tyranny of sin and death and redeems them for eternal life in the age to come. All creation eagerly awaits its liberation from bondage into the freedom of the glory of God's children.

### **6. Nature of the Church**

We believe the church is the covenant community called by God through Jesus Christ to live a life of discipleship and witness as empowered by the Holy Spirit. The local church gathers regularly for worship, fellowship, and accountability and to discern, develop, and exercise gifts for ministry.

### **7. Mission of the Church**

We believe the mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations by calling people to repent, be baptized, and love God and neighbour by sharing the good news and performing acts of love and compassion.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **8. Christian Baptism**

We believe baptism by water is a public sign that a person has repented of sin, received forgiveness, died with Christ, and been raised to new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is also a public declaration of a believer's incorporation into the body of Christ as expressed in the local church.

## **9. Lord's Supper**

We believe that in obedience to Christ, the church observes the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of his atoning death and to celebrate forgiveness, new life, and the fellowship and unity of all believers.

## **10. Discipleship**

We believe Jesus calls people who have experienced the new birth to follow him in a costly life of service to God. The power of the Holy Spirit transforms believers from the unrighteous pattern of the present age into a life of joyful obedience with God's people.

## **11. Marriage, Singleness, and Family**

We believe that singleness and marriage are honoured by God and should be blessed by the church. God instituted marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman for the purpose of companionship, encouragement, sexual intimacy, and procreation. Children are gifts from God and should be nurtured by parents in the ways of God.

## **12. Society and State**

We believe that God instituted the state to promote justice and to maintain law and order. Christians' primary allegiance is to Christ's kingdom. Believers are called to witness against injustice, exercise social responsibility, and obey all laws that do not conflict with the Word of God.

## **13. Love and Nonresistance**

We believe that God in Christ reconciles people to himself and to one another, making peace through the cross. We seek to be agents of reconciliation, practice love of enemies, and express Christ's love by alleviating suffering, reducing strife, and promoting justice. Because violence and warfare are contrary to the gospel of Christ, we believe we are called to give alternative service in times of war.

## **14. The Sanctity of Human Life**

We believe that God is Creator and giver of life and highly values each person. Procedures designed to take human life are wrong. We oppose all attitudes that devalue human life, especially the defenceless lives of the unborn, disabled, poor, aging, and dying.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **15. Stewardship**

We believe the universe and everything in it belong to God the Creator and that we have been entrusted by God to manage its resources. All God's gifts, including money, time, abilities, and influence, are to be received with thanksgiving, used responsibly, and shared generously.

## **16. The Lord's Day, Work, and Rest**

We believe God's act of creation provides the model for work and rest. In work, we use our abilities to glorify God and serve others. In rest, we express thanks for God's provision and trust in God's sustaining grace. In worship, we gather to commemorate the resurrection through worship, instruction, fellowship, and service.

## **17. Christianity and Other Faiths**

We believe God's atoning work in Jesus is the only means of reconciling people with God. God has not left any without a witness to the Creator's goodness and power. Christians treat people of other faiths with respect but urgently proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation.

## **18. Christ's Final Triumph**

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will return triumphantly at the end of this age to destroy all evil powers, condemn all who have rejected Christ to eternal punishment, and unite believers with Christ to reign forever with God in glory.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

## **Appendix 7: What does it mean to be Mennonite Brethren? (an essay by Pastor Ken Dueck)**

This essay is included in the Governance Manual because it is important that the leaders and pastors of Highland MB Church realize what the “MB” in our name stands for. It is vital that HMBC not lose its identity as being part of the world-wide, Canadian, and Albertan ‘Mennonite Brethren’ family. Our adherence to our Confession of Faith, support of MB institutions, and participation in MB family gatherings (conventions, conferences, etc.) is significant and needed.

Understanding family contexts is important for life. It gives us a sense of belonging and identity. So what does it mean to be part of the Mennonite Brethren family? It can mean many things but below are five distinctives or core values of Mennonite Brethren. This is not a formal essay; it is based on a five-part sermon series I preached at Highland MB Church in April to May 2013. Through a look at our history and the Scriptures hopefully you will gain a greater understanding and appreciation of our heritage and the value of our presence in the world.



### **“People of the Book”**

Historically Mennonite Brethren have been known as the “people of the book” (i.e., the Bible). Here’s how our Confession of Faith states it,

We believe that the entire Bible was inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit guides the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture. The person, teaching and life of Jesus Christ bring continuity and clarity to both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament bears witness to Christ, and Christ is the One whom the New Testament proclaims. We accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice.

The importance of Scripture and our belief in its authority over us has its roots in the beginning of the larger Protestant and then Anabaptist story.<sup>1</sup> We can begin with Martin Luther. This German priest began studying the New Testament with renewed vigour, especially the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans. As Luther compared the practices of the Church with the Scriptures, he increasingly became concerned. The Church had become rich and powerful, and in the process had lost its spiritual vitality. In his study of Scripture, Luther



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<sup>1</sup> The following historical sketch is largely informed by the book “Family Matters: Discovering the Mennonite Brethren” by Lynn Jost and Connie Faber (Kindred Productions 2002).

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

discovered that salvation was offered by grace through faith not adherence to rituals or payment of money to have sins forgiven. Also, Luther realized, the *Scriptures* were the authority for life and spiritual devotion, not the Pope or Church tradition.

Other reformers were likewise impacted by a fresh reading and understanding of Scripture. Among them was a Swiss named Ulrich Zwingli. Through his visionary ministry Zwingli attracted a group of young activists who desired an even more radical reform of the church. These reformers forged the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement. They rejected the state authority over the church promoted through the baptism of the state's citizens before they could make a personal decision about their faith journey. These radical reformers began teaching that baptism should be based on a personal confession of faith. Consequently, even though they had been baptized as infants, these reformers were baptized again (from which we get the name 'Anabaptist').



The Swiss Anabaptists were zealous missionaries spreading their teachings throughout Europe. The movement made its way to Holland where it eventually germinated in the life and teachings of Menno Simons (from whom we get our name 'Mennonites').



Menno Simons (born in Holland in 1496) became a Catholic priest. Typical of priests in those days, Simons performed the formal religious rituals required of the Catholic Church but otherwise indulged himself as he pleased. However, during his first year as a priest, he began having doubts about the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the actual transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. His struggle with this question led him to a life-changing encounter with the Scriptures. He began a thorough search of the New Testament discovering that the Bible did not support many of the Roman Catholic teachings. Menno Simons was forced to make a choice: would he submit to the authority of the Church or the Bible?

About six years later he became convinced that the Anabaptist teachings were correct regarding three central truths: (1) that the Bible, not Church tradition, was the proper authority in matters of faith; (2) that communion was a memorial commemorating Jesus' redemptive act, not a re-sacrifice of his flesh and blood; and (3) that baptism was an act of discipleship, not a christening event to bring children into salvation and the faith community. Despite this conviction it took another four years before Menno Simons began teaching these truths openly; and an additional year before he publicly renounced the



# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH

## GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Roman Catholic Church. In 1537, Menno Simons submitted to ordination into the Anabaptist faith and became an overseer of Anabaptist churches in Holland and beyond.

Because of his conversion, Menno Simons was hunted by the church and state authorities. While he managed to stay one step ahead of his pursuers, some of his converts were caught and executed. Becoming an Anabaptist was not a decision made lightly. It could, and often did, cost converts their lives.

The continuing and growing persecution of Anabaptists coupled with opportunities for farming land pushed the Mennonites into Poland and later into south Russia (just north of the Black Sea in the area of Ukraine). These Mennonite colonies gained religious freedom and increasing wealth. Unfortunately, by the mid-1800s, the Mennonite faith and practice began to resemble the European state church their forefathers had rejected. Church membership became a prerequisite for civic privileges like land ownership and voting. People were baptised without evidence of personal faith in Jesus. Church elders became the civic authorities and often demonstrated little Christian discipline. Concern for the poor and justice took a back-seat to the pursuit of wealth and power. The Mennonites were in need of spiritual renewal.

And this renewal came about through the same means as during the Reformation—a renewed study and application of the Scriptures. Small groups of “brethren” (as they called themselves although women were also included) began meeting in homes for Bible study and prayer. They weren’t looking to leave the established Mennonite church; they just wanted to experience a deeper spiritual vitality than the church was then offering. Unfortunately, some leaders in the “mother” church officially shunned these renegade revivalists telling them to get out of the church. This led to the formation of new Mennonite church communities.

On January 6, 1860 a small group held a “brotherhood” meeting. They decided to leave the “mother” church and wrote a letter to that effect. This group, representing about 50 people, became the Mennonite Brethren.

Our Church history is marked by a succession of major shifts in church polity and Christian lifestyle from Catholic to Protestant to Anabaptist to Mennonite to Mennonite Brethren, and each renewal was sparked by a return to the Scriptures and a desire to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus. So then, early Mennonite Brethren were concerned to base their teachings on the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. The first members regularly carried a Bible with them, met often for Bible study, and devotedly memorized Scripture passages. When a problem or question arose, the group discussed it with an open Bible before them believing the Holy Spirit would guide them through his Scriptures. “What does

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

the Bible say?” was a common response to questions of faith and practice. That is why the Mennonite Brethren became known as “the people of the book.”

Hebrews 4:12 (NLT) says, *“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.”* Mennonites have known the sharpness of swords designed to kill. They were willing to die for their convictions because they had discovered the sharpness of God’s Word that brought spiritual renewal and life eternal. Historically, we have depended on God’s Word to sustain us in the worst of circumstances and guide us through the most difficult of situations.

We have done this principally in community. Certainly we believe the Bible should be read and applied by individuals. However, we have always believed that no one person has the corner on the truth. While our deep regard for God’s Word has led us to establish Bible colleges and seminaries, and have great respect for those who are well-versed in the Scriptures, we still believe that interpretation of the Bible happens best in community. Therefore, for example, every other year the Canadian conference holds a study symposium where Mennonite Brethren are invited to join together for the study of God’s Word and dialogue around a particular theme.

We believe Jesus is the climax of the story of Scripture. He was in the beginning bringing about God’s good creation and he will be in the end restoring God’s creation to goodness. In Jesus the kingdom of God was inaugurated. In other words, the rule of God gained a foothold in this world long ruled by Satan. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection we have a sure hope that creation – including especially us humans – will be redeemed, restored, made whole and perfect so that, if such were possible, we will be even more perfect and living in a creation even more beautiful than originally in the beginning.

The Old Testament Scriptures anticipate this transformation and the New Testament Scriptures lay the foundation for this ultimate renewal. Jesus stands at the centre as the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and the fulfiller of New Testament promises. Therefore, we read and interpret the Bible always with a view to Jesus Christ. As our Confession states,

The Old Testament reveals God as the one who established a covenant relationship with Israel to make known to all people the eternal plan of salvation. God revealed himself supremely in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.

Consequently we regard some Scriptures as more important than others. We believe all Scripture is inspired but that not every Scripture has the same significance for guiding our faith and practice. For example, though we study the Old Testament for what it reveals to us about God and life under his rule, we don’t practice the Old Testament laws concerning

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

the temple. And though we try to live out the teachings of the New Testament, we consider the teaching of Jesus to be primary. And though the life and teachings of Jesus revealed in the Gospels are significant, we especially value the teachings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

Yet, again, we seek to understand and live out the Sermon on the Mount in ways consistent with the Gospels and with the New Testament and with the Old Testament. In other words, consistent with the overarching story of Scripture in which Jesus is central.

Not only do we have a keen desire to understand the Scriptures, we also seek to faithfully live them out. We believe from the Scriptures that when Jesus inaugurated his kingdom on earth, he called on his followers to live according to kingdom values, and, thereby, bring about God's will on earth as it is in heaven. The call to us is to be faithful in joining our Mennonite Brethren brothers and sisters around the world in the furtherance of this kingdom work! And what informs and motivates our kingdom work is the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work in the world.



## **“Believers Church”**

As noted earlier, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli was a major catalyst in the Anabaptist movement. Unfortunately, in an effort to retain influence in the Zurich city council, Zwingli backtracked on some of his earlier teachings. On January 21, 1525, during the tumultuous beginnings of the Protestant reformation, a group of men, who had recently been Zwingli's disciples, gathered.<sup>2</sup> However, unlike their former teacher, these men continued to press for more radical reforms of the church including (1) the separation of church and state, (2) that the church is comprised exclusively of true believers in Jesus, and, therefore, (3) baptism and admission into the church membership should follow conversion, not precede it.

So on that wintry evening in 1525 these radical reformers met. Just days earlier they had been told by the Zurich city council led by Ulrich Zwingli that they had three options: (1) conform to the state church, (2) get out of the country, or (3) face imprisonment. After a time of prayer, these outcasts strongly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. One of them asked to be baptized upon his confession of faith. Each in turn was baptized by another and they then ordained each other to the ministry of the gospel. Thus, Anabaptism (to baptize again) was born and the 'free church' movement (outside of state control) began.

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<sup>2</sup> Historical summaries informed by Katie Funk Wiebe, Who Are the Mennonite Brethren (Kindred Press 1984), and by Jost and Faber.

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Some of these radical reformers were executed by state and church authorities for their convictions regarding the need for a “believers church” free of state control. Why did they form such a strong conviction? At the core of their newly forged belief was the New Testament vision of new life in Jesus of which baptism is a marker.

The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Romans 6. It is worth considering Paul’s teaching in some depth. The chapter begins, *“Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?”*<sup>3</sup>

Paul has just stated at the end of chapter five, *“But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant.”* Now, he is concerned that his readers will misappropriate the grace available to them in Christ (i.e., sin in abundance so that God’s grace becomes even more abundantly evident).

Mennonites have been susceptible to a related kind of thinking. Because of the strong emphasis traditionally placed on Christian conversion that can be marked on a calendar, many Mennonite youth have embarked on a season of rebellion and general sinfulness so that their conversion experience would be all the more dramatic.

Paul strongly countered such thinking: “God forbid!” “By no means!” “Of course not!” Why not? Because the degree of our sinfulness does not matter. What does matter is that through Jesus’ death and resurrection we have entry into a new way of life that is *not* characterized by sin and rebellion. As Paul continues (vv. 2-4),

*Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*

Jesus’ death and resurrection was the key turning point in God’s redemptive work. In his death, Jesus suffered the end consequence of human rebellion against God—destruction or death. The power of sin is death; and sin had long enslaved humanity and all of God’s creation. In dying, Jesus took upon himself death. In his resurrection, Jesus defeated death and opened the way for humanity and all of creation to enter into a new creation free of sin and death.

However, we don’t have to look too far or scratch too far below the surface of things to realize that the old way of sin and destruction remains very much in evidence. Yet, Paul argues that a decisive and real change occurred in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through

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<sup>3</sup> Scriptures quoted from the New Living Translation.

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

those linked events Jesus brought into being “new creation”. The renewal of creation and especially humans is now not only possible but has already begun in Jesus. Jesus is the “first-fruits” of this new creation.<sup>4</sup> His resurrection assures us that creation will be (and, in fact, already *is being*) restored and renewed to harmonious, sin-free perfection.

Water baptism, Paul argues, is a symbol or graphic picture or sign of all this. Our immersion into the water signifies our burial to the old creation filled with sin, decay, destruction, and conflict. Our coming up out of the water signifies our entering into new creation marked by purity, wholeness, life, and peace. All this is “in Christ.” Meaning that our lives are no longer our own but belong to God through Jesus.

The natural consequence of all this for the baptized believer should be that he or she no longer lives in a way characterized by the old creation but in a manner consistent with the new creation. So Paul continues (vv. 5-11),

*Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*

When we turned in faith to Christ, our old sinful self died. That is why it doesn’t make sense for us to continue sinning. Yet, when we do sin, we can find forgiveness again by reaffirming that we have died to sin and now live by faith in Jesus Christ. Pictorially, when we sin we can return to the grave of our sinful self and remind ourselves that we died to the way of sin, and once again turn away from sin to live in our new life of righteousness in Christ.

Since water baptism is a symbol or graphic picture of this spiritual reality, the Anabaptists argued for baptism upon confession of one’s faith. The Anabaptists (and, later, Mennonites) believed that the sign of baptism could only properly be administered to those who believed in Jesus and were able to live out that belief.

This understanding of Scripture went even further. Anabaptists believed that a person’s turning from sin and toward God in faith publicly declared by water baptism brought the convert not only into the new creation but into the Messianic community, the Body of

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20-24

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Christ, the Church. Consequently, Mennonite Brethren also believe that we need to encourage one another in the faith, and hold one another accountable to keep the faith. On this matter, our Confession of Faith declares in part,

We believe the church is the people called by God through Jesus Christ. People who respond in faith are united with the local congregation by the public confession of baptism. Church members commit themselves to follow Christ in a life of discipleship and witness as empowered by the Holy Spirit. ...

The church is a covenant community in which members are mutually accountable in matters of faith and life. They love, care, and pray for each other, share each other's joys and burdens, and admonish and correct one another. They share material resources as there is need.

Since infants and small children are incapable of personally responding in faith to God's invitation through Jesus Christ or living in a mutually accountable relationship with others, we do not christen infants (i.e., baptize them into the church). We believe the covenantal church is limited to those who are capable of faith and accountability. In other words, we hold to a "believers church".

This, of course, begs the question, "What to do with children of believing, baptized parents? Are they not also part of the church community?" Frankly, Mennonites haven't always handled this well. Thankfully, most churches now demonstrate concern for children through age-appropriate Bible classes, activities, and other involvements in the life of the church community.

This is seen, for example, in the greater openness to allow children to partake of communion. Historically, communion was reserved for church members (i.e., baptized believers). Mennonite Brethren have now become more inclusive allowing "All those who understand its meaning, confess Jesus Christ as Lord in word and life, are accountable to their congregation and are living in right relationship with God and others ... to participate in the Lord's Supper." Even this is often simplified (as Highland does) to allow participation by all who recognize they are on a journey of faith in Jesus and desire to participate in God's redemptive work in Jesus. Even children can demonstrate that level of faith.

A further question needs to be addressed, "What about those who were baptized as infants but now choose to participate in our church community?" Frankly, we are in a different social context now than we were when Anabaptism was born. Back then, the state controlled the church, and a person born to the state by necessity needed to be born to the church by baptism. The Anabaptist argument for a "believers church" was based partly on

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

their understanding of Scripture and partly on the desire to break the bond between church and state.

That tie between church and state is not what it used to be. Many churches in Canada that practice infant baptism (e.g., Presbyterian, United, Dutch Reformed) are no longer state controlled. With the break from the state many of these denominations have reformulated their theology of infant baptism. Consequently, the practice of infant baptism coupled with a later confirmation of personal faith has become very similar to our practice (in reverse order) of child dedication and later baptism upon confession of faith. However, for now the remaining differences and historical emphases keep us apart. We still require baptism following repentance to become a member of a Mennonite Brethren church.

Those who have been baptized upon the confession of our faith and are members of a local church have an awesome responsibility to continue following Jesus in faithful discipleship, and to encourage and admonish one another to continually live as “new creation” people.

For those who have been baptized upon the confession of our faith and are not yet members of the local church, consider taking that step. Covenant with the rest of the congregation as they covenant with the Triune God to live in mutual loving, serving, and supporting relationship.

For those who have been baptized as infants and now live in faithful discipleship to Jesus, consider being baptized upon your confession of faith. Your rebaptism need not be a renouncing of your infant baptism and confirmation, but an affirmation of your faith and a fresh declaration that you have died to your old sin-infused self and have risen with Christ into a new creation life.

For those who have never been baptized but desire to be life-long disciples of Jesus and participants in his body (his church), take that step of obedience. Follow Jesus into the baptismal waters and come out of them into the eternal life of Jesus and the community of his people.



## **“Priesthood of Believers”**

In the early 1500s, John Tetzel, a Dominican monk with the blessing of Pope Leo X, travelled throughout Germany selling release from punishment for sins. For a negotiated amount of money payable to the Church treasury, a person could buy his or her release from any suffering in this life or the next due to sins committed. There was no need for remorse or penance; just a donation of money. Furthermore, people could purchase the

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

release of loved ones from any further punishment in purgatory (the supposed first stop after death where people suffered for their temporal sins until they were worthy of heaven). These purchased releases were called “indulgences”.

By all accounts, Tetzel was an extraordinarily effective salesman. He had personal charisma backed by Church authorities, and a persuasive sales pitch that exploited people’s fear of God’s judgement. Tetzel’s favourite sales tactic was to declare that a loved one’s soul would be released from purgatory the instant the proffered coins “clinked” in the money chest.

The sale of indulgences was only one of many abuses of power committed by the overseers of the Church. Over the centuries the Church centred in Rome became a hierarchy of officials, from parish priests to bishops to cardinals and on up to the Pope. These officials were considered the rulers, not only of the Church as an organization, but also of the entire civilized world. They assumed that their place was between God and the common people. They believed themselves to be commissioned by God, and, therefore, commanded the obedience of the people.<sup>5</sup>

From this position of power, the Church officers meted out God’s grace and salvation. They decided who was in the Church (and therefore able to go to heaven) and who was out (and therefore eternally damned). They interpreted the Scriptures for the people (too often adding their own teachings). Many ran the Church like greedy power-brokers. But, thankfully, not all!

Martin Luther, a German priest, realized how far the official Church dogma and practice had strayed from the teachings of Scripture (resulting, for example, in the perversion of the hawking of indulgences). Luther’s spiritual renewal through his study of the New Testament caused him to reject the Church’s hierarchical system including especially the supremacy of the pope. Instead, Luther espoused that people were saved by faith alone, not through deeds prescribed by the Church officials. “The noblest of all good works,” he said, “is to believe in Jesus Christ.” He then applied that truth to the practical, everyday life of the commoner. He taught that we must serve God in the midst of the world by faithfully performing the tasks of our daily occupations. Shoemakers, housekeepers, farmers, and businessmen, if they do their work to the glory of God, are more pleasing to him than monks and nuns.<sup>6</sup>

For such “insolent” teaching, Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Church by Pope Leo X. The Pope’s written declaration to this effect called upon all faithful people (1) to burn Luther’s books, (2) forbade Luther to preach, (3) ordered Luther and his followers to

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<sup>5</sup> B.K. Kuiper, The Church in History (Wm. B. Eerdmans 1964), p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> Kuiper, p. 173f.



## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

recant publicly within sixty days or be treated as heretics, (4) ordered the government to imprison Luther and his followers, and (5) declared that all towns or districts that sheltered Luther would be refused the sacraments (and, thereby, according to the Church's theology, the means of salvation and sanctification).<sup>7</sup>

Out of this milieu arose the Protestant reformation—a protest against the demagoguery of priests and the abuses of power inherent in the hierarchical structure of the Church. However, as Protestants, we need to be careful to not simply condemn the Roman Catholic Church as ungodly. We now make the distinction between Protestant and Catholic but the Church of Rome was *our* Church prior to the Reformation. The sins of the Church were *our* sins.

That this is so is evident in how Anabaptist reformers also used and abused position and its inherent power—from Ulrich Zwingli compromising his earlier teachings in order to retain power and influence over the Zurich city council to later Mennonite elders using their elevated status to rule over the colony. When the Mennonite Church in south Russia began operating as a hierarchy, a Mennonite-reformation began.

As mentioned earlier, some Mennonites longing for deeper spiritual vitality than was found in the established Church started meeting privately in homes for Bible study and prayer. These small groups asked a Church elder to serve them the Lord's Supper at their home meetings. This request came partly in reaction to partaking of communion with Church members who exhibited no evidence of personal faith in Jesus, and partly in accordance with Acts 2. The elder refused their request. So, in November 1859, the members of the home groups decided to take communion without the sanction of the Mother Church.

Eventually, these home groups wrote letters of secession from the Mother Church in order to form new Mennonite congregations. When the group who would become the Mennonite Brethren wrote their letter, the Mother Church and colony hierarchy responded quickly and harshly. The Church elders excommunicated the people involved and the colony administration prohibited further gatherings of the group. Violators were subject to arrest and imprisonment. The authorities also threatened exile, and the loss of civic privileges.

Such abuse of power was akin to that exercised by the Roman Catholic Church. A new and better theology of church life was needed to prevent such abuses happening in the future. And the Mennonite Brethren looked to the Scriptures for teaching about church life. 1 Peter 2 became a key text. There we read in part,

As you come to [Jesus], the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ...

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<sup>7</sup> Kuiper, p. 174f.

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.<sup>8</sup>

From this Scripture came the Mennonite Brethren doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers". Let's consider some of the implications of this teaching.

Firstly, we, as Mennonite Brethren, do not structure ourselves as a hierarchy but a community of God's people. Together, as the Bible states, we are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession." This does not mean that we shun all forms of leadership. God gifts some people to be leaders for the proper functioning of his body. All Mennonite Brethren churches are overseen by some form of leadership board. However, we believe our leaders are part of the whole congregation and not superior to or in absolute authority over the rest. The congregation empowers the leaders to make decisions and set direction on its behalf, but the leaders are also held accountable and can be overruled by the congregation.

So our Confession of Faith states,

God calls people to equip the church for ministry. Leaders are to model Christ in their personal, family, and church life. The church is to discern leaders prayerfully and to affirm, support, and correct them in a spirit of love.

Good leaders will not dictate to the church members what they must do. Leaders inform and involve the congregation in the overall operation of the church.

Secondly, we, as Mennonite Brethren, have this flattening of structures because we believe, according to Scripture, that we are all priests. We do not need an intermediary between us and God. As 1 Peter 2:5 states, "... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We have no popes, archbishops, cardinals, or priests who serve as mediators between God and the people. Our mediator is Jesus Christ. Through him we have direct access to God and can each go boldly before God's throne of grace.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, we believe that Jesus is the head of the whole body, the church. He is head of each individual congregation. He is the ultimate authority over us and we can gain direct

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 NIV

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:16

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

access to him as our leader without going through bishops or other denominational leaders.

Thirdly, as priests we have an important role in service to God and to each other. As we read in 1 Peter 2, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

In the most basic terms, priests function by bringing the people before God and God before the people. This then is our function toward each other. We are to bring people before God through (among other things) prayer, witness, and service, and bring God before the people through (among other things) teaching, admonishing, and loving.

So our Confession of Faith declares,

Christians enjoy fellowship with God and other believers. At baptism believers join the local church, commit to build up the body of Christ and witness to the good news of the Christian hope. In community members grow in maturity as they demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit, use their spiritual gifts, and practice mutual accountability in the disciplines of the Christian life. Christians confess sin, repent, and experience God’s grace in the life of the Christian community.

Lastly, as a community of priests forming a “holy nation” (i.e., a people of God’s own choosing), we are responsible before God and the church community to live holy lives. Biblically speaking, the word ‘holy’ is not exclusively, nor even primarily, religious; it basically means “different, distinctive.” Christians form a “holy nation” existing among the nations (= peoples) of the world. This means we are a people who are to be recognizably, visibly, and substantively different living among the peoples. We are a people belonging uniquely to Jesus, and therefore representing his character and ways to the world. Obediently following the ways of Jesus make us different from the world at large. Through our conduct we demonstrate the reality of God’s existence and the wisdom of following his instructions.

Our Confession of Faith provides some more explicit guidelines in this,

Jesus teaches that discipleship is the way of self-denial and promises blessing for those who suffer for righteousness. Disciples are to resist worldly values and systems, the sinful nature, and the devil. Disciples give generously and reject materialism, which makes a god out of wealth. Disciples treat others with compassion and gentleness and reject violence as a response to injustice. Disciples speak honestly to build others up and reject dishonest, vulgar, and careless talk; they seek to avoid lawsuits to resolve personal grievances, especially with other believers. Disciples maintain sexual purity

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

and marital faithfulness and reject immoral premarital and extramarital relationships and all homosexual practices. To be a disciple means to be true to Jesus in everyday life.

We know that none of us maintains such perfection. That is why, although each one of us is responsible for our own spiritual growth and behaviour, we value the instruction, encouragement, and accountability of the larger church community. We are a holy “priesthood” and “nation”, not just individuals.

So then, as a “priesthood of believers,” we exist to serve God and one another; to bear witness to the world through our words and deeds; to live in obedience to Jesus Christ as individuals within a larger church community; to be accountable for our actions to the church community; to receive and give encouragement and admonition; to give and receive love and care; to minister as gifted by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the spiritual temple, the church; and more. We dare not sit back and let the pastor or other ministry leaders do all the work; each one of us is an integral part of the life of the church. We cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility when things go wrong nor take all the credit when they go right. The church community needs us and we need the church community. The world needs to see the church’s holiness and we need to demonstrate holiness to the world.



## “Peace-Makers”

Our society’s heroes are those who go out to war to fight the enemy. This seems more true now than ever. At almost every major public event organizers salute the troops. However, can only warriors be heroes?

Mennonite Brethren are known as pacifists which the dictionary defines as “somebody who refuses to perform military service or take part in a war.” Pacifists are typically not held in high esteem; they are seen as the anti-warriors and, therefore, the anti-heroes. However, Jesus calls us to be more than pacifists (“conscientious objectors”); we are to *engage* in **making peace**. And not just with our friends, Jesus calls us to **love our enemies**. Our enemies may be defined as those who oppose us (whether a next door neighbour or terrorists in another land).

Does loving our enemies mean we need to be “nice people” who never do or say anything offensive to anyone, who always submit to those who oppose us, who accept injustices as part of life without attempting to address the imbalance? Is this what Jesus was like? Some seem to think so, but that is not how our Scriptures portray him!

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Jesus engaged his enemies; he did not shy away from confronting those who opposed him. He challenged them; not to a fist-fight but to rethink what they were doing and why. Furthermore, Jesus loved his enemies; not by affirming they could believe and do whatever they pleased, but by challenging their view of God and salvation. Jesus wanted people in general and (perhaps) his enemies in particular to embrace the greater salvation God was bringing in him. Unfortunately, the religious leaders were not persuaded. They began plotting Jesus' murder.

Who was the true hero? The religious leaders for resorting to violence to deal with their enemy, or Jesus who courageously confronted the enemy by doing good in order to reveal the true nature of God and his teachings?

The religious leaders convinced the Roman authorities to crucify Jesus for crimes he did not commit. They defeated their enemy through violence. On the other hand, Jesus submitted to the violence of the cross in order to win the ultimate victory over mankind's greatest enemies – sin and death.

Seeing Jesus hanging on the cross, the religious leaders thought they were the victors, the heroes. "He saved others but he can't save himself!" they mocked. "Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."<sup>10</sup> These religious yet spiritually blind men missed entirely the drama unfolding on the cross. The conquering hero was clearly the crucified Jesus.

The Apostle Paul certainly believed this. He wrote to the Colossians,

*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.*

*He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.*

*For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.*<sup>11</sup>

In the next chapter, the Apostle Paul writes about the significance of Jesus' actions on the cross for us and for our enemies,

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 15:31-32

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 1:15-20 NLT (emphasis added)

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

*You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by **his victory over them on the cross.***<sup>12</sup>

Jesus did not wimp out in the end and give in to his human enemies. He won victory over the ultimate enemy 'death due to sin', thereby providing forgiveness even for his enemies who had him crucified. Jesus made "peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of [his] blood on the cross." Consequently, Jesus – the conquering hero – prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>13</sup>

Here are the actions of a true hero: Jesus transformed the violence done against him into eternal good for his enemies. From the violence of the cross came peace for everything and everyone. How? By Jesus responding to the violence he suffered not with retributive violence, but with love.

And that is exactly what Jesus calls his followers to do in imitation of him.

*"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

*"If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.*

*"Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."*<sup>14</sup>

Jesus calls us to higher level of love than is typically demonstrated by the world at large. It is relatively easy to love our close family, good friends, and companionable associates. Anyone – even the enemies of God – is able to love such people. However, as disciples of Jesus, our love needs to extend even to the people who hate us. And this is an active, not passive, love. We need to be more than pacifists who refrain from retaliating against their

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<sup>12</sup> Colossians 2:13-15 NLT (emphasis added)

<sup>13</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>14</sup> Luke 6:27-36 NLT

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

enemies – as difficult as that is! Jesus teaches us to love those who oppose us; to treat them as friends, to pray for them, to work toward their well-being. That, supremely, is what it means to be peace-makers.

One early story especially illustrates this Jesus-imitating love of enemies.<sup>15</sup> In 1569, an Anabaptist named Dirk Willems was found guilty by the church of being re-baptized which, according to the presiding judges, “is contrary to our holy Christian faith, and to the decrees of his royal majesty, and ought not to be tolerated, but severely punished, for an example to others.” Consequently, Willems was sentenced to be burned alive at the stake.

Before his execution, Willems was incarcerated in a residential castle turned into a prison. Willems managed to escape from his second story cell room by letting himself out of the window with knotted together rags. The weather was cold enough that a thin layer of ice had formed on the water in the moat encircling the castle. So emaciated had Willems become with limited prison rations that the thin ice supported his weight. He made it across the moat to potential freedom.

A prison guard, however, saw him escape and gave chase. The guard being well-fed broke through the thin ice into the freezing water. When Willems saw what had happened to the guard he did not hesitate to risk his freedom; he returned to the jailer in order to rescue him. Willems’ good deed did not go unrewarded. The rescued prison guard escorted Willems back into the castle and renewed captivity. This time the authorities put him in a more secure cell high in the bell tower. Soon after Dirk Willems was burned at the stake.

Jesus said, *“Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.”* For Dirk Willems and many Anabaptist-Mennonites since, these words were not just helpful advice or a good suggestion; this command of Jesus was to be lived out dramatically and courageously. So then, the true and brave hero is the one who is able to respond to:

- wickedness with kindness,
- hatred with love,
- injustice with forgiveness,
- wrongness with goodness,
- disagreement with reconciliation,
- war with peace!

This is the kind of love God demonstrates to us, Jesus demonstrated to his opponents, and we are to show to everyone.



## **“The Gospel for the World”**

<sup>15</sup> Story in the Martyrs Mirror; Internet sources: [http://www.goshen.edu/mqr/Dirk\\_Willems.html](http://www.goshen.edu/mqr/Dirk_Willems.html);  
<http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/dirk-willems.htm>

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

In 1859, just a year before the Mennonite Brethren family came into existence, Abraham Friesen was born in South Russia to a wealthy industrialist family. As a young adult he became a partner with his father in the operation of profitable factories and flour mills. In his early twenties he married Maria Martens.

By all calculations Abraham was set for life; he had a good family, good wife, good work, and good prospects. Yet, he could not find satisfaction and peace knowing that millions of people had never heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He was captured by the words of Jesus, *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."*<sup>16</sup>

So Abraham and Maria Friesen left behind position, possessions, and a comfortable, secure future to pursue foreign missions. With the financial backing of the Russian Mennonite Brethren Church, the Friesens left for India in 1890. There they established a new work as the first foreign missionaries of our conference. A year later they baptized 178 converts to Christianity. Over the next 25 years, sixteen other Russian MBs joined the missionary work in India. The work continued until the First World War interrupted their efforts. By then, the Indian Mennonite Brethren numbered about 3000 baptized believers.<sup>17</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren have always had a strong impulse to share the gospel far and wide. We have believed that the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ was meant for the whole world. This conviction can be traced back to our roots in the early Anabaptist faith. The Anabaptist movement grew despite intense opposition in large part because of the genuineness of the adherents' faith in Jesus coupled with a strong desire to see others undergo the same conversion experience.

Unfortunately, as so often is the case, the passion of the early Anabaptist-Mennonites cooled over the ensuing years. In the mid-1500s, Mennonites settled in an area of present-day Poland. Polish nobles welcomed the hard-working immigrants to their estates as farm labourers. They drained lowlands, built farms, and established churches. For the next 250 years, the Mennonites lived in religious and cultural isolation. "They developed a lifestyle of religious tradition, cultural conservatism and lack of missionary vision that caused them to be known as 'The Quiet of the Land'."<sup>18</sup>

The area where the Mennonites lived came under Prussian rule in 1772. Under Frederick the Great, Mennonites were pressured to join the military and pay taxes for the armed forces. This forced the pacifist Mennonites to search for a new home. They found one in

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 14:26 NASB

<sup>17</sup> John B. Toews, *Pilgrimage of Faith* (Kindred Press 1993), 95; also [http://www.mbconf.ca/home/products\\_and\\_services/resources/published\\_genealogies/personal\\_papers/friesen\\_abraham\\_johann\\_and\\_maria\\_martens\\_friesen/](http://www.mbconf.ca/home/products_and_services/resources/published_genealogies/personal_papers/friesen_abraham_johann_and_maria_martens_friesen/)

<sup>18</sup> Jost and Faber, 11.



## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

Russia's newly acquired territories north of the Black Sea. Catherine the Great of Russia promised the new settlers freedom of faith, nonparticipation in the military, land ownership, and self-government.

Unfortunately this move did not result in widespread spiritual renewal. Over the next century, the Mennonites in Russia developed a form of religion with little spiritual power. As one history of our people states, by the mid-1800s,

Baptism was extended to those who completed a catechism class without insistence on personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Church elders began to act as civic authorities. Many elders showed no evidence of discipleship themselves. ... Divisions between wealthy members and the impoverished landless class deepened. Public drunkenness, gambling and moral decadence went undisciplined. The ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism took on a sacramental character, a sense that the rite itself replaced a need for disciplined Christian living. The Russian Mennonites faced social, economic, intellectual and spiritual stagnation.<sup>19</sup>

When Jesus stated that his followers were the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world", he surely did not envision that state of the Mennonite Church. So what did he foresee? Let's consider each of these metaphors in turn.

Jesus said, *"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless."*<sup>20</sup>

Salt had a variety of uses in the first century as now, but I think Jesus intended us to think of salt primarily as a seasoning. As we read, "what good is salt if it has lost its *flavor*?"

I believe Jesus, in calling us "salt", was referring to the flavour of our lives. How flavourful is our faith and lifestyle? Is it savoury, or has it lost its pungency? In other words, are we noticeably distinct from the world around us because we are followers of Jesus? Is our faith radical enough – Holy Spirit energized enough – to have produced profound and very evident changes in our hearts and lives? Or are we no different from the non-Christians with whom we interact?

Not only are we the salt of the earth, Jesus said we are *"the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jost and Faber, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 5:13 NLT

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 5:14-16 NLT

# HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

We are the light of the world like “a city on a hilltop.” Since light is intended to illuminate, it doesn’t make sense to hide it. The Mennonites in centuries past had so sheltered themselves from the world that their light could not be seen. The Mennonite Church closeted itself against the neighbouring peoples; content to busy itself with its own concerns. Eventually its light burned out.

Jesus wants his followers to let their light shine—boldly, visibly—so that people will see the light. Their good deeds, in other words their Christian faith and conduct, should so illuminate this dark world that people will find God.

The disciples of Jesus are the salt of the earth; salt permeates, flavours, and causes thirst. We are the light of the world; light penetrates, reveals, and allows sight.

Beginning in 1860, the Mennonite Brethren broke out of the cold, sterile, formulaic Mennonite faith into a fresh, Spirit-breathed, vitality of faith. They believed that the “salt” of faithful discipleship would express itself in a life of “light-shining” witness. Ever since then, Mennonite Brethren have sought to flavour and illuminate the places where they live. More than that, they have gone out from their homesteads to foreign lands to be a flavourful and illuminating presence in places that were spiritually dull and dark. They embraced the Great Commission of Jesus to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The gospel is meant for the whole world and it is up to Christians to bring that gospel to the world.

What does it mean to be salt and light in the world? Abraham and Maria Friesen asked that question. As a result they left behind family, security, and wealth to extend the gospel to India. As salt and light, they witnessed about Jesus. In obedience to Jesus, they baptized converts teaching them to also live as salt and light in their world. Because of their faithfulness, the gospel spread in India and the church grew. From humble beginnings in 1890, the Mennonite Brethren Church of India has grown into the largest MB conference in the world with over 900 churches and 200,000 believers.

Over the past 150+ years, many more Mennonite Brethren have asked, “What does it mean to be salt and light in the world?” As a result lives are being transformed and the world is being impacted with the good news. In fact, from a small start of about 50 people in south Russia back in 1860, the Mennonite Brethren family has exponentially multiplied; our family (as of our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2010) encompasses over 400,000 believers worshipping in over 2500 churches in 16 countries around the world.

What does it mean for *us* to be salt and light in the world? Among other things, continually becoming more faithful in following Jesus: learning from him in his Word; listening to him in prayer; responding to him in obedience. We have opportunity to do this with the whole congregation on Sunday, with smaller groups during the week, and on our own. We can

## HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH GOVERNANCE MANUAL

flavour our world of school or work or community with the salt of Jesus so that the people around us will thirst for what we have. We have the means to light our world with our Jesus-like conduct and speech providing illumination for others to also find an eternal kind of life in Jesus. We should be open to Jesus sending us into other parts of the world whether for a short or long time to be his witnesses among people who also need to hear the good news of God's kingdom come in Jesus.

To state it more simply, let us allow the saltiness and light of Jesus to permeate and fill us, and then emanate from us to the world around us.



I hope this overview of what it means to be Mennonite Brethren has given you a greater appreciation for our heritage and beliefs. "Now to [God] who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV