

A DISCERNMENT PRACTICE FOR ILLINOIS MENNONITE CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION

Illinois Mennonite Conference (IMC) is a thriving network of healthy Anabaptist Christian congregations through which congregational members and their neighbors experience and manifest the reign of God through Christ Jesus, as enabled by the Holy Spirit!

IMC is united by a common faith and common vision for God's church and world as expressed in the IMC Constitution. From time to time, however, circumstances arise that are not clearly addressed by current policy and practice. Such circumstances require the discernment of the entire conference. In order to do this discernment consistently and well IMC congregations and leaders commit to engaging in the following process of discernment.

INITIATING

The discernment process can be initiated by congregations or IMC Leadership. Congregations can initiate a discernment process when that congregation believes wider discernment from the Conference would be helpful for them and the whole of IMC. IMC leadership can initiate a discernment process when they (a) feel the scope and nature of an issue requires the discernment of the whole or (b) a congregation embraces a belief/practice that is at variance with the current teaching and practice of IMC and/or Mennonite Church USA.

In both instances, the discernment process is directed by the Missional Leadership Team (MLT). The discernment group consists of 2 representatives from all IMC congregations and credentialed pastors who are active in leading an IMC congregation.

PROCESS

1. Congregation(s) may initiate a discernment process by presenting the MLT with a written request that explains the issue/question(s), why they believe a discernment process is necessary and what they hope to accomplish through the process.*
2. The MLT will consider the request and follow up with the initiating congregation(s) with a recommendation. If the decision is to move forward the process will move on to step 3.
3. The MLT will appoint a team to prepare a **discernment document**. This document will include:
 - A clear presentation of the main issue/questions(s)
 - Biblical and theological resources
 - Relevant material from IMC and MC USA
4. The MLT will distribute the discernment document to IMC congregations, along with a call to prayer and an invitation to attend an initial discernment gathering (including date, time and location).

4. The initial discernment gathering will include Scriptural discernment, corporate prayer, clarifying the issue/question(s), and considering possible ways forward.
5. A second discernment gathering will occur no sooner than 30 days from the first discernment gathering for the purpose of additional Scriptural discernment, corporate prayer and drafting a recommendation for the MLT.
6. If a recommendation cannot be made, a third discernment gathering will take place for the purpose of additional Scriptural discernment, corporate prayer and drafting a recommendation for the MLT.
7. If a recommendation is made to the MLT, the MLT will discern how best to live into the recommendation which could include
 - The drafting of new IMC policy
 - The affirmation of new IMC processes
 - A recommendation to amend the IMC constitution
 - Deferral to the IMC Delegate body for action.
8. If no recommendation is forth-coming, the MLT can defer the matter to the IMC Delegate body.

****If the MLT initiates a discernment process, the process will begin with step 3.***

MUTUAL TRUST

This discernment process will be helpful to the degree that the participants trust the Holy Spirit to be at work as the participants engage in healthy, Jesus- centered, dialog marked by love, transparency, grace and a listening posture.