

Statement of Practice

Introduction

“I want to live the Christian life. I just don’t know how.” These words of a new convert to Christ rightly assume that Christianity is a system of doctrine that translates into a way of living. Paul wrote, “Watch your life and doctrine closely.” (1 Timothy 4:16) The Scriptures hold faith and faithfulness as inseparable. Early Christians were called “Followers of the Way” (Acts 24:14), a phrase denoting a way of life. How should we live? After much deliberation and revision, the answer to this question emerged in the *Conservative Mennonite Statement of Practice*. Replete with Scriptural references, the statement reflects the simple biblicism of early Anabaptism.

The *Conservative Mennonite Statement of Practice* is a companion document to the *Conservative Mennonite Statement of Theology*. While the former may change to reflect the current practice of CMC and its churches, the latter is of a more timeless nature. This statement of practice summarizes many of the principles articulated in the *1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith*, the *Danvers Statement*, the *Statement of Homosexuality*, and *The Church and Civil Government* and replaces them as one concise conference statement. It is a guideline for the congregation and a mandate for the minister.

The Executive Board of the Conservative Mennonite Conference implemented the process of formulating this statement in February 2005 by appointing a writing committee comprised of Roger Hazen, James Miller, Ben Shirk, and Max Zook. The process was completed in August 2007 when the ministers of the conference adopted the statement as official policy.

May this statement be helpful to all who seek to live the Christian life.

November 2007

The Mission of the Church to the World

We believe that Jesus Christ, to whom all authority is given, commanded the church to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and instructing them to obey all of His teachings. For this task Jesus promised His presence and power through the Holy Spirit.

Discipleship begins when a person receives salvation by grace through faith in Christ and continues as the individual surrenders to His lordship in all areas of life. While many opportunities for spiritual growth exist, we believe the local church is God’s most basic provision for the personal growth and accountability of each disciple.

In His mission to the world, Jesus not only preached the kingdom of God but also fed the hungry, healed the sick, cast out demons and set the prisoners free. Therefore the church, in her mission to the world, must preach the gospel and minister to the needs of the total person.

Matthew 9:35; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Luke 4:18-19; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 4:3-16

The Conference as an Association of Congregations

We believe that local congregations benefit by entering into association and fellowship with other like-minded congregations. The Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) exists to glorify God by equipping leaders and congregations for worship, teaching, fellowship, service, and making disciples. To accomplish this, CMC provides resources with an evangelical, Anabaptist, and conservative theological orientation to members and affiliates.

CMC is a Christian fellowship of evangelical, Anabaptist churches in North America and also maintains fraternal relations with church groups in other countries.

The congregations of CMC are self-governing within the policies of the conference. They share the doctrinal positions of the conference, exercise edification and discipline as needed for the growth and purity of the church, and are active in evangelism and ministries.

CMC congregations make possible the ministries of the conference and, at the same time, draw upon the resources and channels of ministry offered by the conference.

Acts 15:1-21; Acts 16:4; Colossians 4:16

Conference and Congregational Leadership

Selecting Leaders

We believe that godly leaders are called by God to lead His church. The Lord Jesus employed the metaphor of “shepherd,” conveying the protecting, caring, healing, nurturing, and guiding role of church leadership. As the Chief Shepherd, Jesus set the example as one who served willingly, joyfully, faithfully and sacrificially, laying down His life for the sheep. He demonstrated that true leadership is carried out with the spirit of a servant.

The primary qualification for those in leadership is the willingness to be under the authority of Jesus Christ. It is only as leaders follow Jesus that they are worthy to be followed. Christian character is the foundation upon which a leader’s ministry is built.

Each congregation provides its own leadership, which typically consists of a pastor or a team including a senior pastor and one or more associate pastors. These pastors or ministers must be officially appointed or ordained under the auspices of both the local congregation and CMC. Congregations planning to call a pastor or licensed minister shall give themselves to intense prayer, meditation and study of the New Testament qualifications for the ministry. They shall also discern the calling and gifting of the candidate under consideration. Authorization from the conference shall be obtained in advance of appointment. The installation service generally takes place in the local congregation.

Functions of Leaders

The minister is called to preach the Word of God, do the work of evangelism, provide pastoral care, equip believers for the work of ministry, and administer baptism, communion, foot washing, anointing the sick with oil, marriage and the laying on of hands in ordination.

Other recognized leadership roles include overseer, elder, bishop, and deacon. The overseer or bishop assists in giving vision to the congregation's life and ministry and serves as a pastor to the pastors. The elders and/or deacons assist the pastor with various aspects of congregational life.

Congregational leadership is generally best provided in the context of a leadership team consisting of one or more pastors, elders, deacons, or other leaders, in close consultation with an overseer, following the New Testament pattern of plurality of leadership.

The Scriptures indicate that when possible the church should financially support those who preach the gospel so that they may give their full energy to the work of the ministry.

John 10:1-18; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 9:14; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 1:3; 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:2-4

Functions of Congregational Life

Worship

As Christ offered up His life, so we gather to offer up to God our praise, our thanksgiving, our love, our repentance, our spirits, our bodies, our money – our all. When we worship God we give Him the honor and reverence He deserves. We worship God in our private devotional times, in our gathered worship services and in our everyday lives as we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices.

Fellowship

In Christ, the dividing walls of racism, sexism, status, class and other worldly barriers are broken down so that many individuals become one body. Fellowship involves sharing our common spiritual union with Christ and with each other as members of His body, and is expressed through worship, prayer, discussion, encouragement, visitation, mutual aid and other times of being together.

Evangelism and Discipleship

Evangelism is the distinct opportunity and responsibility of the church to introduce people to a personal relationship with the living Christ. Congregations evangelize and make disciples by demonstrating Christlike love, befriending and welcoming unbelievers, exposing them to the truth about Christ, and helping them to grow in Christ. As congregations demonstrate corporate worship, love, and community, people have the opportunity to discover the Christian life and become fully devoted followers of the resurrected Jesus.

Ministry

All members of the body perform invaluable functions by virtue of their connection to the Head, who is Christ the Lord. God gives gifts to each believer to use in bringing people to Christ and in strengthening other believers. Ministry takes place as we serve God by lovingly serving others.

Ceremonies and Symbols of Christian Faith

Water Baptism

We believe in observing water baptism as taught by Jesus Christ and as practiced by the early church. The church is commanded to baptize believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism is an external symbol of internal spiritual baptism. The external symbol may be administered by the pouring of water upon the head. This symbolizes the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual baptism may also be symbolized by immersing the believer in water. This symbolizes that the believer is buried with Christ in His death and raised with Christ in His resurrection to the newness of life. Water, as an agent of cleansing, also symbolizes the divine cleansing from sin and guilt.

Water baptism is administered upon repentance from sin and personal confession of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. While faith is very personal, it is not private. Water baptism, conducted in the presence of the church community, is a public confession of faith. Membership in a local church normally accompanies water baptism as an important step of accountability in which the new believer is making a commitment to the church and the church is making a commitment to the new believer.

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:16-21; Acts 10:44-48; Romans 6:2-6; I Corinthians 12:13; I Peter 3:21

Communion

We believe in observing the Lord's Supper as taught by Christ and as practiced by the early church. While observing the Passover meal, Jesus instituted the New Covenant sealed in His blood. Life in the New Covenant is initiated by faith in Christ and His work of reconciliation on the cross. His sacrificial death is the supreme act of God's love in giving His only Son for the salvation of the world. The Passover reached its fulfillment through the atoning death of Christ as the Lamb of God whose death restored our communion with God and with each other.

We recognize the bread and the cup as symbols commemorating Christ's body and blood. The Scripture commands self-examination to ensure not taking the symbols in an unworthy manner. Those who do take the symbols in an unworthy manner, by violating their relationship with Christ and others, are in danger of God's judgment.

Communion on earth anticipates the perfect communion of heaven where once again Jesus will drink anew the fruit of the vine in the fullness of the kingdom.

Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 10:16-17; 11:17-34

Washing the Feet of the Saints

Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as their teacher and Lord and taught them to follow His example. By observing the practice of feet washing, believers are reminded of the need to be washed of pride, rivalry, and selfish motives. Everyone, regardless of title, office, or position, is privileged to follow the example of Jesus by participating in the duty and blessing of service. Humble service is the high mark of greatness in the kingdom of God.

Matthew 20:26; John 13:1-17; James 4:10

Anointing the Sick with Oil

We believe that anointing the sick with oil is a symbol of healing established in Scripture. It is not the oil that heals, but the prayer of faith offered in accordance with God's will. The object of that faith is the Lord who has the ability to bring the healing whether physical, emotional or spiritual. The oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and of the healing power of the Lord who may heal by miraculous or medical intervention.

The sick person is to call for the leaders of the church to anoint with oil. Together with these leaders the sick person commits his or her entire situation into the hands of the Lord. If healing does occur as requested, it is a sign pointing toward the complete healing and redemption of the body at the resurrection of the saints at the end of the age. If healing does not occur as requested, it is a sign pointing toward the all-sufficiency of God's grace in this present age.

Personal sin may or may not result in physical illness. Confession of sin committed by the sick person will be efficacious for spiritual healing and may be efficacious for physical healing. The healing of body and spirit are closely related.

Isaiah 38:21; John 5:14; 9:3; Romans 8:23; James 5:13-16

Laying On Of Hands

We believe that ministerial offices recognized and commissioned by ordination should be accompanied by the laying on of hands. This ceremony symbolizes the imparting of responsibility and of God's power to fulfill that responsibility.

Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 1:18; 4:14; II Timothy 1:6

Marriage

We believe that God instituted marriage at the dawn of human history. He has given the church authority to establish, protect, nurture, and build marriage. It is a holy covenant made in the presence of other believers who hold the couple accountable to keep their commitment to God and to each other. Christian marriage between a man and woman for life is a symbol of Christ's self-giving love for the church and of the church's submission to Christ, the Head of the church.

Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; I Corinthians 7:39; Ephesians 5:22-33

Discipleship and Nonconformity

We believe that two opposing kingdoms exist to which men and women may give their spiritual allegiance, that of Christ and that of Satan. The kingdom of Christ is composed of those who have repented of their sin and been born again by grace through faith. Those of the kingdom of Satan live for sin and self and refuse to recognize and accept the claims of Christ upon them.

Those who are part of the kingdom of Christ recognize the lordship of Christ, seek to perform good works, pursue holiness in all areas of life, refuse any partnership or covenant with unbelievers, and enjoy the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They should openly manifest the love of God toward all people regardless of race, culture, or economic level. They regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, adorning them modestly and appropriately, crucifying the flesh and its lusts, and refuse any addictions or habits which will hinder their work for God, be harmful to their overall health, or damage their witness to the world. They participate in wholesome recreational activities that refresh their minds and strengthen their spirits. They are transformed by the renewing of their minds and seek to demonstrate God's perfect will in every aspect of life. They seek regularly to practice spiritual disciplines such as study, worship, prayer, fasting, silence, stewardship, and sacrificial living so as to have full participation in the life of God's kingdom and a vital relationship with Jesus their Savior.

Discipline within the Body of Christ

Mutual Accountability

We believe each member of the body of Christ needs the encouragement and loving accountability of others to be faithful to Christ and to become more like Christ. This kind of Christian discipline is best experienced in settings of trust, open sharing and prayer. In this way we "spur one another on to love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:24 NIV)

Acts 18:24-28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24, 25; 2 Timothy 2:24-26

Corrective Discipline

We believe Jesus Christ has given authority to His church to exercise corrective discipline within the community of believers. This discipline is intended to bring those who are in error to repentance, helping them to receive the forgiveness, grace, and love that are available in Jesus. It is to be carried out with a spirit of gentleness and humility with full knowledge that those enacting the discipline may themselves be easily tempted into sin.

The general pattern of discipline to be followed, as taught by Jesus, begins with private admonition given by a member of the church to the erring brother or sister. If the erring one refuses to hear such admonition, one or two other believers are to be included in giving the word of admonition. If there is still refusal to hear this small group of believers, the matter is to be brought before the church in a more public fashion. If the erring one refuses to hear the church on the matter, membership may be revoked in recognition that such a one has been separated from the body of Christ. The church will continue to pray for the erring one, using every opportunity to restore him/her to full fellowship. At any point if the erring one hears the admonitions brought and repents, he/she is restored to full fellowship with Christ and His church. The purposes of discipline include maintaining the integrity and witness of the church, restoring to fellowship those who are in error, building faithfulness in the believers, and strengthening

godly teaching and conduct. Such disciplinary work is to be accomplished by the entire congregation, not solely the pastoral leadership of the church.

Matthew 18:15-22; Galatians 6:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5f

The Roles of Men and Women

The Roles of Husband and Wife

We believe that man and woman were created with equal dignity and value before God. Adam and Eve equally reflected the image of God. God ordained distinctions in masculine and feminine roles as part of the order established in creation. As the head of the wife, man was created to provide loving and sacrificial leadership. The wife was created to respond with intelligent submission. Before the fall of humanity into sin, as recorded in Genesis 3, these distinctions were beautiful, harmonious and complementary. This fall introduced distortions into the relationship between men and women. Headship gave way to tyranny or passivity. Submission gave way to usurpation or servility. In Christ, men and women are restored to their God-given roles.

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; 3:1-7, 12, 16; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 1 Peter 3:1-7

The Roles of Men and Women in the Church

We believe redemption in Christ gives men and women equal share in the blessings of the Christian life in the church. Both men and women are equipped for ministry by the Spirit of God who imparts to them the gifts of the Spirit. A distinction in masculine and feminine roles is indicated by the principle of male headship, established in creation and continued as part of God's redemptive order in the church. To honor the principle of male headship, CMC reserves ministerial license and ordination for men. Within congregations, other roles of governance and/or teaching may be reserved for men. The spiritual giftedness of men and women should be sought out and cultivated for the common good of the church.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16; Galatians 3:28; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:2; Titus 1:5; 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:7

Submission to God's Order

Both men and women are called to respectful submission to God's established order of governance in the home and church. As Christ humbly submitted to His role, so must man and woman. Christ submits to God the Father. Man submits to Christ. Woman submits to man. In the eternal and perfect relationship between the Father and the Son, love and submission are inseparable. So in all Christian relationships, submission and love were never meant to be separated. While Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands, he also exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ sacrificially loved the church. This attitude of sacrificial love should be in the heart of church leaders and laity, husband and wives, parents and children. Denying the will of self and submitting to the will of God, brings all believers, men and women, leaders and laity, into times of mutual submission.

Submission is primarily an attitude of the heart and spirit. This attitude may be symbolized externally by the practice of men baring their heads and women covering their heads for prayer and worship. We accept the integrity of brothers and sisters who have differing views of these practices and affirm their sincere desire to be faithful to the Lord and His Word.

John 6:38; Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Corinthians 11:3-12

Marriage and the Family

The Institution of Marriage

We believe that God instituted marriage as the lifelong covenantal union of one man and one woman. This is a holy, profound and mysterious union by which two become one in body, soul, and spirit. Christian marriage requires that a Christian may only marry another Christian. The highest purpose of the marriage relationship is to illustrate God's relationship with His people. In the Bible we see explicit romantic images that depict God's love for His people. God intended the pleasure of romantic love to culminate in the sexual union of husband and wife.

Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Song of Solomon; Isaiah 54-5-7; Hosea 2:19; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7

Children

Fundamental to God's purpose for marriage is the procreation of children. God's will directs that children be born and raised under the security of parents who are committed to one another in married love. The church and society provide opportunities for the development of children, but the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture and formation of children rests upon the shoulders of parents. Parents must love God with all their hearts as they teach their children to love God with all their hearts. Christian families ought to prioritize time for regular family worship and participate as a family in the life of the church. Husband and wife will enhance the spiritual unity of the family by committing themselves as members of the same congregation.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4

Divorce and Remarriage

We believe that God intends marriage to be a life-long covenant between one man and one woman. The breaking of the marriage covenant is sin, whether it be through divorce, unfaithfulness, adultery, abuse, desertion, or other sins that destroy marriage. Wherever there is sin, the church must call for repentance.

We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is relevant to all persons, regardless of the sins they have committed or that have been committed against them, including divorce. The transforming message of the gospel includes the grace of God to forgive any sin and the call of God to a new life of holiness and purity, upholding the sanctity of life-long marriage.

We are committed to working redemptively with all persons who have suffered the tragedy of divorce and we are committed to working preventively in the lives of those who have not. We accept people who come to Christ in whatever marital state they are in, whether single, divorced, or remarried.

In our broken world we seek to promote and build stable and godly homes for the testimony of the gospel and the nurture of children. While we do not encourage or promote the remarriage of divorced persons, we acknowledge the diversity of views of remarriage in our conference and the difficulty of establishing one concise statement that will answer each specific situation faced in local congregations. We therefore allow godly and Holy Spirit-led local church pastors, overseers, and elders to discern how best to provide a Biblical ministry of grace, truth, and redemption to people in any situation.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:13-16; Matt. 5:31,32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7

Singleness

We believe that the state of being unmarried is highly honored in Scripture. Single persons, whether by circumstance, choice, or calling, can give themselves more fully to the work of God. As Jesus exemplified, a single person need not acquire a spouse to be effective in ministry or to be complete as a person.

Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:8-9; 32-38

Human Sexuality

We believe that sanctified sexuality encompasses all that God intended persons to be as males and females; this includes their sexual relationships. It is in violation of God's will to engage in sexual relationships outside the marriage of one man to one woman. The Bible forbids lust, pornography, fornication, adultery, homosexual practices and other sexual sins. Through the redeeming power of God, the church is called to lift sinners from the depths of sinful sexuality to the heights of sanctified sexuality.

We therefore invite persons experiencing sexual sins or temptations to seek cleansing by the blood of Christ. Freedom and release from sexual sins and temptations may be experienced through confession, counseling, discipling, prayer and wholesome activities that promote fellowship and growth within the family of God.

Leviticus 18:22; Matthew 5:27-30; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Ethics of the Kingdom

Sanctity of Human Life

We believe God created each human being in His image. All human life is sacred. Any actions and words which communicate anything about the worth, dignity or value of any human being therefore reflect on the honor of the Creator. We believe that citizens of the kingdom should respect life at all stages and should not participate in the termination of human life, whether through abortion, infanticide, murder, warfare, capital punishment, suicide, or euthanasia. We also reject hatred, slander, gossip, and derogatory racial and ethnic comments; these destroy the dignity and honor of human beings as bearers of the image of the Creator. Each person is either our brother or sister in Christ or a sinner for whom Christ died.

Love and Nonresistance

Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, both taught and practiced the way of love in all human relationships. Under the old covenant, God's people participated in warfare and capital punishment. Under the new covenant, Jesus commanded His followers not to resist an evil person or to fight with the sword to prevent His arrest because His kingdom was not "of this world." As members of His kingdom, we follow His example by extending love, humanitarian aid, and the truth of the Gospel to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national allegiance. Though we experience continual conflict with evil, we recognize that our primary enemy is Satan, not people, and the weapons we use in this conflict are spiritual, not physical. We should not jeopardize our primary allegiance to Jesus by participating in any office, career, or organization that requires us to employ the use of force, military service, or retaliation to accomplish its objectives. We believe the way of love applies to every area of life, including those situations that involve the use of litigation, strikes, international tension and war. We must, even at the risk of life itself, extend love to every human and alleviate suffering, overcoming evil with love.

Matthew 5:38-48; John 18:36; Romans 5:5; 12:18-21; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 2 Corinthians 10:3, 4; James 2:8; 1 Peter 2:23; 4:1

Oaths

We believe Jesus disallowed his followers from taking any kind of oath. Consistent honesty and transparency are required of those who imitate Christ. The surety of one's word is not reserved for the occasional oath but should characterize all normal conversations. No greater assurance than a simple "yes" or "no" is needed. Finite beings should never make promises that go beyond finite capability. Therefore, swearing by something or someone greater than one's self, as if to transcend human limitation, is to project a false sense of surety.

Jesus declared that anything beyond a simple "yes" or "no" is from the evil one. Therefore, in legal matters, followers of Jesus should affirm the truth rather than swear to tell the truth.

We also oppose membership in groups requiring the swearing of oaths of secrecy that violate the principle of Christian integrity and transparency.

Matthew 5:33-37; John 18:20; 1 John 1:5-7

Stewardship

We believe that stewardship, rather than ownership, defines the believer's relationship to all personal resources such as time, energy, abilities, spiritual gifts, money, properties and all material possessions. As a steward, the believer is called to manage all resources according to the kingdom purposes of God. Stewardship values extend to each stage of life, including estate planning and other opportunities for giving resources at the end of our lives.

We believe the teachings of Jesus stand in opposition to the self-centered materialism of our world that defines the quality of one's life by the quantity of possessions accumulated. The work of the kingdom suffers when its citizens are consumed with supporting a personal lifestyle adopted under the lure of materialism. Such a lifestyle leaves the church, as the visible

expression of the kingdom, to receive only a token contribution of leftover time and money. The principle of “first-fruits” giving is rooted in the ancient feast of Pentecost and was reaffirmed by Jesus, who commanded His followers to “seek first His kingdom.” We seek to give first priority to kingdom work. This is an act of faith in God, our provider.

Leviticus 23:10, 17; Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 24:1; Matthew 6:19-24; 6:33; Luke 12:21; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:10

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