

ICOMB Confession of Faith

June 2004

Accepted by ICOMB-Conference Leaders

Final Draft

Part 1. How does God work in the World?

God, the sovereign Lord of all, created the heavens and the earth through his powerful word. God made humans, male and female, in the image of God to live in fellowship and to be stewards of creation. Humans abused their freedom by rebelling against God in disobedience, which resulted in alienation and death. In the rebellion against God's rule, the evil powers of Satan, sin and death claimed control of the world.

God, the Deliverer, acted to establish a covenant people, beginning with Israel. God purposed to form the covenant community to live in relationship with God, to experience God's blessing, and to serve as a light to all nations. Through the prophets God communicated his law and purposes, expressing that God is forever faithful, just, righteous, with a father's tender mercies, and a mother's compassion. God promised the hope of a new creation.

God the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to the world born of the virgin Mary. Jesus inaugurated the reign of God, proclaiming repentance from sin, announcing the release of the oppressed and good news to the poor, and calling disciples to follow his way as a new community. Jesus responded to the violent evil powers by taking the cross in order to die for the sins of the world and reconcile creation to God. Jesus gained victory over sin, death, and Satan as God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him to God's right hand where he intercedes for the saints and rules forever.

At Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit, who had acted in creation, in empowering the prophets, and in inspiring the Scriptures. Through the Spirit, God established the church, the body of Christ, to proclaim God's reign and to give witness to the new creation. The Spirit is poured out on all who receive Christ, baptizing them and sealing them for redemption as God's children. All who believe and confess Jesus as Lord are born anew into Christ. Believers are baptized by water into the new covenant community in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. By grace they are saved through faith to live out God's peace and love in the face of opposing circumstances.

The church is God's new creation, agent of transformation, called to model God's design for humanity. The people of God call everyone to repentance and conversion, seek to promote righteousness, are faithful in suffering, share generously with those in need. They act as agents of reconciliation to reverse the alienation brought on by sin. In the Lord's Supper the church proclaims the Lord's death and celebrates the new covenant.

The new creation will be completed when Christ returns. All who belong to Christ will rise with a new body while Satan and those who have rejected Christ will face eternal condemnation. The new heaven and new earth will live under God's rule in everlasting peace and joy.

Scripture references: Genesis 1-3; 12,1-3; Exodus 6,6-8; Ps. 8; Isa. 49,6; Jer. 9,23-24; 31,31-34; Hos. 2,19-20 Matt. 4,17; 25,46; Mark 8,34-38; Luke 4,18-19; John 3,16;

Acts 2; Rom 8; 1 Cor. 11,23-32; 12,13; 15; 2 Cor. 5,17-6,2; Eph. 1,13-14; 2,8-10; 6,10-12; Col. 2,12-15; 1 Thes. 4,13-5,11; 2 Tim. 3,16-17; Hebr. 7,25; Rev. 21-22

Part 2. How do Mennonite Brethren respond to God's purpose?

The Mennonite Brethren Church is rooted in the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century Reformation, a movement that sought to recapture the faith and life of the New Testament church. The Mennonite Brethren Church was born within the Mennonite renewal in Russia in 1860. World mission and migration have produced a Church that circles the globe. As a world wide MB fellowship we commit ourselves to be a people of God.

People of the Bible

The Bible is the authoritative Word of God and the infallible guide for faith and life. World view. The Bible provides the framework for our understanding of the world. Interpretation. Our interpretation is Christ centered. We read the Scriptures with a New Testament perspective. The person, teaching and life of Jesus Christ bring continuity and clarity to both the Old and New Testaments.

Community of interpretation: Every believer is encouraged to seek to understand the Bible in order to discern God's will for obedience. Since the Holy Spirit is present and active in all believers, we read and interpret the Bible and its demands for today's life in community.

Scripture references: Ps. 1; 19; 119; Matt. 5-7; Luke 24,27; 44-49; 2 Tim. 3,14-17; Hebr. 1,1-2; Acts. 2,42; 15,1-29; 17,11; Col. 3,1-4; 1 Petr. 1,10-12

People of a New Way of Life

By God's grace the Holy Spirit calls people to a new way of life through conversion, discipleship and ongoing renewal.

Conversion. Christian conversion begins with new birth and always involves a deliberate personal commitment. As Christians we are called to turn from a broken relationship with God to a personal relationship with the true God from bondage of sin and past mistakes to freedom, forgiveness, and healing Discipleship. In Christ salvation and ethics come together. As Christians we are called to turn from individualism to interdependence with others in the church to prove ourselves faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus in everyday life.

Renewal. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer, testifying that we are God's children, offering continual renewal and cleansing in order to empower for a life of witness and service.

Scripture references: Is. 43,1; Mark 8,34-38; John 1,12-13; 3,5-8; 14,15-16,26; Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 4,2; Col. 3,1-4; Tit. 3,3-7

People of the Covenant Community

In the church, the covenant community, believers commit themselves to worship together, pray as Christ taught us, to fellowship, and to care for one another. Believer's Baptism. People from all cultures, nations and languages who are willing to follow Jesus as obedient disciples confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and are baptized by water into the fellowship of the church. The Mennonite Brethren church baptizes by immersion.

Lord's Supper. In the Supper the church identifies with the life of Christ given for the redemption of humanity and proclaims the Lord's death and resurrection until he comes. This Supper of remembrance expresses reconciliation, fellowship, peace and unity of all believers with Christ.

Accountability. The church interprets God's will, discerning what is right and what is wrong. All believers hold each other accountable for a Christ-like walk of faith. The purpose of accountability is to heal and restore through repentance and not punish or condemn. The church excludes those who consistently disregard discipline.

Priesthood of all believers. The Spirit of God gives all believers gifts for service to build up the body of Christ. The church discerns the call of God and confirms servant leaders who equip people for ministry.

Scripture references: Matt. 16,13-20; 18,15-20; 28,18-20; Acts 2,37-47; Rom 6,3-4; 1 Cor. 11,23-32; 12-14; Eph. 4,11-16; Col. 2,12-13; Hebr. 10,24-25; 1 Petr. 2,9-10; 4,10-11

People of Reconciliation

Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God. The mission of Jesus was to reconcile humans with God, each other and the world. The church is called to participate in God's mission.

Mission. Christ has commissioned the church to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all his commandments. Jesus teaches that disciples are to love God and neighbor by telling the good news and by doing acts of love and compassion. Since Jesus is the only way of salvation, the evangelistic imperative is given to all believers.

Peace witness. Peace and reconciliation are at the heart of the Christian gospel. Jesus calls the community of faith to be peacemakers in all situations. We believe that peace with God includes a commitment to the way reconciliation modeled by the Prince of Peace. As Christians we are called to turn from lifestyle choices that harm us, to choices that nurture wholeness, healing, joy and peace

from hating enemies and ignoring neighbors to showing love and justice to all Family. God blesses singleness, marriage and family. God calls all people to live a sexually pure life. Marriage is a life-long covenant commitment of one man and one woman. Godly parents instruct their children in the faith. The church nurtures family life and makes every effort to bring reconciliation to troubled relationships.

State. God has given the state the responsibility to promote the well-being of all people. Followers of Christ respect and pray for government authorities but resist the temptation to give the state the devotion that is owed to God. The primary allegiance of all Christians is to Christ's kingdom and his global church. In each state and society

Christians cooperate with others to defend the weak, reduce strife, care for the poor, and promote justice, peace and truth.

Scripture references: Matt. 5–7; 22,34–40; 28,18–20; Luke 4,18–19; 10,25–37; Rom. 12,17–13,10; 2 Cor. 5,17–6,2; Eph. 2; 5,21–6,4; 1 Tim 2,1–6; Jam. 2; 1 Petr. 2,21–25

People of Hope

The Church belongs to the in-breaking Kingdom of God. The citizens of the Kingdom model an alternative community, challenging godless values of this world's cultures. The people of God join in the struggle for justice, yet are prepared to suffer persecution knowing that sin, guilt and death will not prevail. Confident in this hope the church engages in mission until the Lord returns, empowered by the certainty that God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

Scripture references: Matt. 5,10–12; 10, 7; 13; 24–25; Mark 1,15; 13; Luke 17,20–37; 21,5–36; Tit. 2,11–14; Rev. 21–22

About the ICOMB Confession of Faith Project

Task force members:

Menno Joel (India),
Lynn Jost (USA),
Takashi Manabe (Japan),
Alfred Neufeld (Paraguay),
Arthur Duck (Brasil),
Pascal T. Kulungu (Congo)|
Heinrich Klassen (Germany)

Explanation re. historical development...

ICOMB (International Committee of Mennonite Brethren) addressed the question "What do MBs around the world believe?" in January 1997 in Calcutta, India. In October 2001 in Curitiba, Brazil, ICMOB commissioned a seven-member confession of faith task force to write a summary of MB convictions. Task force members from Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and North America worked in Abbotsford, BC, during the July US-Canada MB conventions. The task force surveyed existing confessional materials and considered the primary questions which MBs face world-wide. The international team produced a two-part document. Part One addresses the question "How does God work in the world?" with a narrative of God's creation, the fall, and God's re-creation. The story of God's actions represents an Asian and African approach to theology. Part Two answers "How do MBs respond to God's purpose?" by describing five core values regarding the church. The task force presented the first draft of their work to ICOMB July 29, 2002. ICOMB directed the task force to circulate the revised draft to all 17 national boards of faith and life and to the conference periodicals. The task force invites MBs world-wide to respond to any of its members in order to refine the confessional proposal. The task force met in Bielefeld in 2003 to consider suggestions from the national conferences. The purpose of the common confession is to guide

national conferences in formulating confessions specific to their own cultures and to define MB positions for national churches that have inquired about joining the MB church.