

Credentialing Review Document for Mountain States Mennonite Conference (MSMC)

Background and Rationale

While following the same polity manual, different conferences within MCUSA are arriving at differing answers to the question of who is eligible for credentialing. In light of these tensions, the Leadership Board of MSMC appointed a credentialing review committee to consider our current credentialing process. This credentialing review committee considered a functional understanding of what it means to be in relational accountability with one another, by seeking to embody the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and remain consistent with Biblical and Anabaptist teachings and practices – through study, prayer and discernment. The committee considered how views of credentials are changing within our context and among generations. The committee reviewed its credentialing process with the goal of outlining a way that fits MSMC's context in this moment while providing a bridge toward our future.

We sought to uphold these understandings in our process:

- We wish to strengthen congregational and calling bodies participation in this process of granting, accountability, and “holding” of credentials
- We seek to honor setting apart persons with a credential for ministry and the understanding that we are all gifted with spiritual gifting as a part of the “priesthood of all believers”.
- We desire strong relationships between those who are credentialed, the calling bodies and the Conference
- We desire to expand the understanding of who may be credentialed while increasing the opportunity for relational accountability among the Conference, congregations/requesting bodies and credentialed leaders. We believe this model will assist us in this time of transition in our churches and denomination to expand our concept of who is a spiritual leader while also holding relational accountability to a high standard.

Premises

1. We start with the credentialing processes as defined by Mennonite Church USA's “A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership” as our guideline. We understand that in our denominational system, the Conference is the credentialing body.
2. The congregation and the Conference share in granting of credentials and accountability of credentialed pastors. The Conference confers and “holds” these credentials at the request of the calling congregation.
3. Credentialing serves as an affirmation, validation, and recognition of a call to ministry and spiritual leadership. The ministerial credential also provides professional recognition.

4. At times a member congregation may call a pastor or other spiritual leader with different views than others in the Conference or the denomination. These views usually fit with the calling congregation. Deference is given to the discernment of the congregation unless there is evidence of harm caused to the calling body or a history of ethical violations.
5. “Relational accountability” is an important part of the character and function of MSMC. In our by-laws we have outlined practical ways for our congregations to be in relational accountability with one another. However, we have not outlined similar expectations for credentialed members of MSMC.
6. The Conference grants credentials not only to pastors, but to chaplains, and other persons in ministry. The Conference Ministerial Council is open to requests for credentialing for folks from member congregations who are involved in special ministries with continuing support from their congregation. Accountability in these cases is shared both by the institution that employs them (if applicable) and their home congregation.

We propose the following:

1. A congregational or organizational representative will be present for part of the credentialing interview and will take ownership for implementation of any follow up recommendations by the MSMC Ministerial Council
2. Each active credentialed leader will:
 - a. Participate in Boundary Training hosted by MSMC with the option of submitting a request for a waiver to the Ministerial Council should their place of employment already offer a similar training
 - b. Participate in one yearly continuing education opportunity provided by the Conference
 - c. Attend at least 2 of the regional pastor gatherings per year or 1 group set up for your ministry focus (like chaplaincy) per year. Respect and engage with the counsel of the gathering of other ministers in the group
 - d. Make attending the pastors retreat, Annual Assembly and the Faith and Life Forum a priority
 - e. Be in regular conversation with their Conference minister or submit a personal formation plan (especially in the case of being employed outside a congregational context)
3. The Conference will set up forums for persons in different ministry situations to share and support each other.
4. Because relational accountability is crucial, credentials will be moved from active to inactive if a credentialed person experiences a period of time without a call. The credential can be reinstated when this changes. This follows the procedure articulated in our “Shared Understanding of Church Leadership.”