



SASKATCHEWAN
CONFERENCE OF
MENNONITE
BRETHREN
CHURCHES



COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

AND
COMMON COVENANT
GUIDE

UPDATED 2022

Common Understandings and Common Covenant (CUCC)

What Motivated the Creation of the CUCC?

What are our Current Realities?

There exists a significant absence of concrete understanding among member churches as to...

- why they belong to SKMB;
- why SKMB exists;
- what is SKMB's mission and ministry;
- what exactly is expected of them as a member.

What is the CUCC's Purpose?

- To articulate specific, tangible faith & ministry convictions and expectations for all member churches of the SKMB family.
- To provide a clear template for what it means to be a member church.
- To provide a transparent and concise witness to the community of member churches of what it means to belong to the SKMB family.
- To tangibly bring together, rally, and inspire member churches toward a common kingdom venture.

Process of Development

In 2019 CCMBC adopted a new collaborative model of governance and a strategic framework for the mission and ministry of the denomination. Also, in 2019, the SKMB introduced a five-year strategic framework for mission and ministry at the Leadership Forum. It seems timely that the churches that make up the provincial and national Conferences take time to discern their past, present, and future commitment to the direction of their denomination. The Common Understandings and Common Covenant (CUCC) flows out of a desire to bring clarity to our mission and ministry as well as develop stronger unity and a deeper involvement in the mission of the conference.

- At Assembly 2020 delegates instructed the Executive Board to draft a clarifying and unifying document for the 2020 Leadership Forum.
- At the 2020 Leadership Forum the CUCC was introduced, and revisions were submitted. The Faith and Life Team met to make amendments addressing concerns. The Executive Board implemented these revisions.
- Late 2020, the CUCC was distributed to churches for feedback, several suggestions were received, and the CUCC was again revised.
- The CUCC was presented to Assembly 2021 and was adopted with minor revisions for discussion within the SKMB family.
- Informational Town Hall meetings were held (June and September 2021). The CUCC was affirmed with minor wordsmithing.
- The Executive Board connected with church moderators to process questions and concerns (June to August 2021) and had very positive conversations.
- The Director of Ministry was available to connect with pastors about the CUCC from June to December 2021.
- The CUCC was discussed at the 2021 Leadership Forum and received the green light to bring to Assembly 2022.
- At the Assembly (March 12, 2022), delegates passed a motion to adopt the CUCC (75%). The final step involves individual churches affirming the CUCC **by Assembly 2023**.

Clearly, we need to continue to talk through and determine how best to proceed with both those churches that affirmed the CUCC and those who have concerns. We would like to see broad engagement in each church. We don't see this as simply a pastor and board/council decision; we hope that churches will take this opportunity to foster greater congregational commitment to SKMB and our mission, ministries, and vision.

Frequently Asked Questions

We are already an SKMB member church, is that not sufficient?

Churches within the SKMB have much more diverse congregations and leadership than they did a generation ago. We see that as a blessing from God and the fruit of God's work in our midst. We want to affirm the theology and shared commitments which bring unity and cooperation to all we do together. As a leader within the SKMB,

- Have you or your leadership team spent time discussing why you belong to the SKMB?
- If the common refrain is "We've always been an SKMB church"? perhaps that's an opportunity to remind each other of the reasons you've chosen to identify with this family.
- Perhaps you or your leadership team could use a refresher on what is expected of you as a member church?
- With increasing diversity, perhaps it's a good time to encourage genuine buy-in regarding the existing mission and ministry?

Why should we participate?

- It is a healthy process to assess your church's current affiliations and commitments.
- It will provide a forum in your church for answering the question, "Why should we belong to the SKMB family of churches (Conference)?"
- It will bring clarity and insight into where your church wants to commit its time and resources.
- It will provide clarity of understanding around the mission and ministry of the SKMB.
- It will provide the opportunity for your church to strengthen or change its affiliation to the SKMB.

Is this being imposed by the Executive Board rather than being a grassroots initiative?

A commitment to a common covenant is something that several provincial MB conferences have developed over the last few years. This is where the idea of the common covenant originated. When the executive brought the idea to Assembly 2019 there was strong affirmation for this vision. We developed the existing CUCC document as a '*made in Saskatchewan*' response to the need to be unified around common over-arching convictions and a common mission. Input from churches and individuals have been received and incorporated into the current edition of the document. The strong affirmation for the vision and document presented to Assembly 2020 and delegate adoption of the final document at Assembly 2022 reflected a commitment from grassroots to the process.

How does the CUCC affect our working relationships with churches and agencies outside our denomination?

SKMB seeks to be kingdom-minded in its mission and ministry. The CUCC intends to strengthen our identity and mission as a family of churches, it does not seek to discourage partnerships with other Kingdom workers. Networks and joint working relationships are encouraged, as is appropriate for your community and context. We want to bless and be blessed by any of Christ's servants.

What is the relationship between the CUCC and our Confession of Faith?

The Confession of Faith is a formal collective expression of MB identity that communicates our theological convictions and how we have decided to live them out as disciples. The CUCC is anchored to the Confession of Faith, but it is not equal to, nor a version of it. The CUCC is intended to be a provincial specific inspirational clarity work seeking to help define our collaborative Conference – member church missional relationship and efforts in Saskatchewan.

What does it mean to “affirm the Confession of Faith” in the CUCC?

The [Confession of Faith](#) is understood to be normative for Mennonite Brethren churches because it describes what Mennonite Brethren believe the Bible teaches and what faithfulness to the gospel entails.¹ The idea of being “normative” highlights how a conviction or statement in the Confession reflects a faithful reading or interpretation of Scripture.² Thus, the Confession is binding for all Mennonite Brethren churches— pastors, teachers, and conference leaders are expected to affirm and teach the Confession.³ (from [Nature and Function of the Confession of Faith](#))

In order to get the full picture of what ‘affirm’ means, it would be best to read the pamphlet quoted above. The Confession expresses our shared “convictions and identity that ...

- reflects our commitment to live under the authority of Christ, who is made known to us in Scripture, as we are guided by the Holy Spirit;
- describes what Canadian Mennonite Brethren believe the Bible teaches;
- provides an interpretive guide for understanding and applying Scripture;
- focuses the teaching and preaching ministry to strengthen and lead the church;
- defines corporate MB theological identity; and
- applies the teaching of the Bible to the relevant issues facing the church.”⁴

To affirm this means that you join in our commitment to live, teach, preach and be guided in your theology and praxis by the Confession. While we recognize there are diverse theological views within the Conference, the Confession expresses our shared affirmation of our core convictions, which holds us all together and defines our corporate identity. As a Canadian Mennonite Brethren, whether in paid positions of leadership or leading as volunteers, our actions and teachings should align with the Confession.

How much of the Confession do non-teaching decision-makers in the church need to affirm?

We recognize that not everyone comes out at the same place in their personal perspective on theology. The Confession is worded to embrace a spectrum of nuances in theology that represent the diversity within the MB family. Those who are in church leadership but not involved in teaching should still affirm the

¹ Resolution on Confession of Faith,” 68.

² Toews, The Meaning of the Confession,” 7.

³ Resolution on Confession of Faith,” 68.

⁴ “Nature and Function of the Confession of Faith” (https://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FL001_COF2018_nature_function.pdf)

Confession. The Confession stands as a unified document and changes in one article impact all the rest. A person with differences or significant questions on specific aspects of the Confession of Faith that compromise our allegiance to Jesus needs additional study and discipleship to be ready for leadership. The following comments do not apply to those credentialed by the SKMB, they need to adhere to a higher standard of affirmation.

If someone feels that specific aspects of the Confession do not represent their understanding of biblical teachings, then a discussion of MB identity and vision should occur within the context of the local church. If someone would say things differently, has a different slant on a particular issue, etc. but can affirm the content and vision of the Confession, that level of affirmation is appropriate. As in the above, all those affirming the Confession should speak, teach and act in harmony with the Confession while they are participating as leaders or teachers in an MB church.

For instance, if someone feels that specific aspects of Articles 12 or 13 (Society and State / Love and Nonresistance), do not represent their understanding of biblical teachings, the local church may use their discretion to allow the leader to affirm providing they do not teach or act in a manner contrary to that article in the Confession. If the disagreement is wider than one or two aspects of an article, the provincial Faith and Life team can be available for consultation and engagement as the local church desires.

In all cases of disagreement ongoing conversation and study of the Scriptures is strongly encouraged.

What if our church would like to revise the Confession?

Revisions of our Confession of Faith are entrusted to the Canadian Conference of MB Churches with leadership by the National Faith and Life Team. Churches may forward a request for revision to their provincial Faith and Life Team who process the request and determine if the issue is shared by other congregations. If so, FLT will bring the request to the NFLT on the recommendation of the Provincial Executive Board.

If I am to sign the covenant, am I affirming for myself or for the church?

As leaders in the church, when we sign that the church affirms the Common Understandings and Common Covenant, we are signing as representatives of the church, not simply as an individual. As such, if a leader is not in 100% agreement with every statement in the CUCC, but the church has voted to adopt it, then in good conscience we can still sign the document on behalf of the church.

Will there be help from the Conference to engage this process?

The SKMB Director of Ministry is available to walk alongside any church requesting assistance.

In the area of financial support for the mission and ministry of SKMB, how is “generous giving” defined?

Scripture counsels believers to “sow generously” and to be cheerful givers (2 Corinthians 9:6ff). In fact, God blesses us so that we can give generously (2 Corinthians 9:8ff). This principle can be applied corporately to churches. The bottom line is that SKMB in its present form or function cannot exist without your giving. As a member of SKMB, you have (at some point in your history) affirmed the mission and ministry of the Conference – it was a commitment, a promise, even a covenant. To give generously to SKMB is more than meeting the “ask” (which presently is 3.75% of donation income) but investing monies beyond basic expectation in order that your church’s reach and impact can be felt through the work of the Conference beyond your local setting. Faithful giving (tithing, meeting the ask) sets the course for an adventure with God, giving generously (beyond the ask, even sacrificially) engages one on the adventure

itself. Giving generously to SKMB creates opportunities for God to work beyond measure, treating giving to SKMB like a 'membership fee' (contribute only the bare minimum), handicaps the same work. Generous giving reflects joyful living.

What are the consequences of not adopting the CUCC?

The preamble to the Common Covenant addresses the issue of not participating in the process. As a church, have a discussion around the following questions.

- What are the solid reasons we would choose not to participate (Fear of change? Don't want to deal with uncomfortable questions? What if the church decides they no longer want to be a member?)?
- In the long run, is participation still a better course of action no matter what is decided because likely these concerns already exist below the surface?

The Director of Ministry and the Faith and Life Team is available for questions, advice or participation in church discussions. If your church senses that it cannot support the covenant, please let our Director of Ministry know so that we can be part of the process of final discernment.

What if our church decides we no longer want to be a member of the SKMB family?

SKMB will respect the church's decision, ensure that a proper exit process is followed according to our constitution and bylaws.

Final Step?

At Assembly 2022, the delegates from member churches adopted the CUCC as a clarifying and unifying declaration for the purpose of enhancing the Conference's mission and ministry. We now invite member churches to individually affirm their support of the CUCC in one of two ways.

1. Sign the CUCC. We would welcome the opportunity to be present and encourage your church/leadership when you sign the Covenant. Please contact the Director of Ministry and he will let you know which of the SKMB Executive or FLT can come. Alternately, the Director of Ministry may choose to come himself.
2. Affirmation of the CUCC by the church council, leadership team or by the congregation. A suggested motion might run something like this: "We affirm the CUCC as a clarifying and unifying expression of our collective ministry and mandate as an SKMB family."

The SKMB Executive Board would like to affirm our commitment to you as well. Once you've signed the CUCC, please send it to our office and the conference moderator will sign that copy on behalf of all the SKMB churches and return it to you. If you've passed a motion in your minutes, send us a copy and we will sign it to affirm our commitment to you as well. Our goal is to have this process complete by Assembly 2023. If your leadership cannot see your way to affirm this call to mission faithfulness and corporate identity, please connect with our Director of Ministry.

Church Conversation around the CUCC

We would hope that the church leadership (board, council, or elders) will take time to read through the Common Understandings and Common Covenant together. In addition, 2021 and 2022 study guides are provided below for in depth study and discussion.

Discussion Guide 2021

- Discuss the vision statement for SKMB and reflect on its relevance for you and your church.

*We see a church passionately in love with God,
led by His Spirit on mission,
bringing Jesus' Gospel of redemption and restoration
to the four corners of Saskatchewan.*

- Discuss the mission mandate of SKMB and reflect on its relevance for you and your church.

Supporting SKMB churches and camps in making disciples.

- Read and discuss the statements of the Common Understanding document with their accompanying Scriptures (see the commentary in the CUCC).
 1. Jesus at the center of everything (Colossians 1:15-20).
 2. Preaching and discipleship shaped by Scripture (Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 3. Community formed by the Holy Spirit (John 16, 1 Corinthians 12, Galatians 5).
 4. A Church that reflects Jesus' transforming life (1 Peter 2:1-17, John 13:14).
 5. A Church that is on mission (Genesis 12:1-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).
 6. A Church that serves in an atmosphere of cooperation and accountability (Hebrews 10:25; Philippians 2:2).
- Discuss the Our Common Covenant document and reflect on its relevance for you and your church (see the commentary in the CUCC).
 - Participation in community
 - Formation in community
 - The SKMB Conference leadership and staff commitments

Discussion Guide 2022

The intent of this second discussion guide is to assist in reflection on our commitment to each other and God's work in Saskatchewan and in the SKMB family. This is for in-house, local church use only and specifically for pastors and church leadership (possibly on an every-other-year basis).

How significantly do the core convictions of the SKMB reflect the core convictions of our church?

1. We see Jesus at the center of everything.
1. Our preaching and discipleship are shaped by Scripture.
2. We are a community formed by the Holy Spirit.
3. We seek to be churches that reflect Jesus' transforming life.
4. We are churches that are on mission.
5. We as churches serve in an atmosphere of cooperation and accountability.

Participation in Community

How have we been doing as a visible and contributing church in the Saskatchewan MB Conference? Specifically, ...

1. How well are we doing in sending our leaders and pastors to Conference activities?
Please consider the following activities:
 - Provincially - Assembly, Leadership forum, Pastor clusters, Pastoral learning opportunities, etc.
 - Nationally - Assembly, Equip, training events from MB Seminary, etc.
2. How well are we doing in praying publicly for our sibling churches and Conference?
3. How well are we doing in speaking well of and encouraging our sibling churches?
4. How well are we doing in sharing our expertise, skills, and gifts with our sibling churches?
5. How well are we doing in mentorship and support of SKMB churches in our area?
6. How well are we doing in our financial support of SKMB and Canadian MB Conferences and agencies?

Formation in Community

How are we being intentionally shaped by and into the MB community and in turn offering our best to shape the community? Specifically,

1. How have we been doing in conducting the leadership, teaching and ministry of our church in line with the MB Confession of Faith and Common Understandings?
2. Have our pastoral staff completed their credentialing process no later than three months into their ministry? What assisted in that process or stood in the way of that process?
3. How well do we as a leadership team (elders, council, board, etc.) understand the Confession of Faith? How closely do we as a church align ourselves with it?
4. Who from our church is volunteering in Conference boards or teams as part of our church's ministry within the conference?
5. How are we doing a developing and implementing a discipleship and leadership plan for all ages and stages of faith? How much are we utilizing MB resources?

6. Have we been relating with other leaders in a spirit of trust, assuming the best intentions and taking responsibility for conflict resolution or relational reconciliation as necessary? How could the conference assist in facilitating these relationships? How well have you been taking initiative in these matters?

SKMB Commitments

How well has the SKMB Conference leadership and staff been in supporting you (pastors and church) over the past year? Please share the results of this discussion with the SKMB Director of Ministry. Specifically,

1. How have you seen us engaging with the national collaborative structure, both representing SKMB in Conference deliberations and holding forth a national vision to the churches of Saskatchewan?
2. Which newly developed church resources (spiritual health and theology, leadership and mission) have been helpful for you? What resources from the national and provincial conference have you accessed? What resources would you like to see developed?
3. How well have we been doing listening to you as church leaders and responding to the best of our ability? What contacts have you as pastors, moderators and treasurers had with the conference?
4. How effective have we been at being present to help your church in times of need or crisis?
5. How often have we as conference leaders and volunteers reminded you that we are praying for each of our churches and the national Conference? What prayer requests would you have that we could join you in praying?
6. How have you experienced conference leadership and staff as servant leaders? How have you experienced us as interacting with humility and transparency? How could we improve in these areas?

Thanks for taking the time and energy to work through these discussions. We hope and pray that these will assist you as a local church and the SKMB Conference of churches to better fulfill the mission Christ gave us and the unity to which Jesus called us.