

Introduction to the MB Confession of Faith (2023)

Canadian Mennonite Brethren believe that the Bible, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, is telling the Triune God's grand and beautiful story of redemption, healing, and renewal for all creation. Canadian Mennonite Brethren are part of an international Mennonite Brethren family who together share the following biblical-theological vision for what the Triune God has done, is doing, and will do in our world. The following is Part 1 of the shared Confession from the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB):

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.¹

The Canadian MB Confession of Faith with its 18 articles needs to be understood with God's love expressed through his Kingdom story of redemption and restoration constantly in the background. This is God's Kingdom story that reaches its peak with Jesus' incarnation, life, death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and final return (Acts 20:25; cf. 1 Cor 15). First, we proclaim that Jesus has broken the chains of death, sin, and Satan and is now the rightful King over the world (Matt 28:18; Phil 2:6-11). Second, we proclaim that every human on earth needs reconciliation with God through Jesus whose substitutionary death and victorious resurrection are the path to grace, forgiveness, new life, and welcome into God's family (Acts 20:24; Rom 4:25). Finally, we also proclaim that in Jesus' incarnation, life, teaching, death, and resurrection, we have been given a model for how to live in the way that God intended for humanity (Matt 5-7) and to participate in a community that lives out God's reconciliation and justice in the world (Luke 4:18-19; 2 Cor 5:18-21). God's Kingdom story includes all three aspects of what Jesus has done for us and for all creation.

Each of the 18 MB Confession articles is declaring part of God's amazing Kingdom story which makes all the articles inextricably linked with each other. The 18 articles describe the loving, righteous, and holy character of the Triune God revealed to us through both Scripture and creation (Articles 1-3); God's actions of forgiveness, salvation, and restoration through Jesus (Articles 4-5); the important role of the people of God in that Kingdom story (Articles 6-9); discipleship living in the way of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Articles 10-16); and God's future purposes for redeemed humanity and creation (Articles 17-18).

We have articulated our theological and ethical convictions in our MB Confession because we believe that they are an accurate picture and a faithful road map for us about what it means to follow Jesus and be the kind of people of God we believe Jesus is calling us to be. Often Mennonite Brethren are characterized as being “evangelical Anabaptists”² which describes our family as firstly and unashamedly “good news people” or “gospel people” which is the root meaning of “evangelical.” The good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection offers us grace, forgiveness, hope, adoption into God’s family, life eternal, and bodily resurrection into God’s new creation. We invite people from all nations to respond in repentance and faith to this divine invitation. We believe that being good news people is central to our faithfulness to Jesus’ teaching (cf. Matt 28:19-20) and foundational to our identity as an MB family (see Article 7).

We are also unashamedly Anabaptist, which identifies us with a long tradition of churches centred on and seeking to live daily into greater obedience to Jesus. By means of the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18; Gal 5:22-23) and the power and character that the Holy Spirit produces, we seek to be the kind of faithful community demonstrating sacrificial discipleship that we find in the book of Acts. There are at least two significant implications of this Anabaptist heritage. The first is that we value practical and costly discipleship in the way of Jesus. Articles 10-16 describe this day-to-day path of discipleship, and these articles are not an afterthought or an appendix to our Confession of Faith. The second is that we understand discipleship as necessarily lived in the context of a Jesus-worshipping church community. Discipleship is not a solitary walk with Jesus. The church community does not gather merely to assist individual disciples in their spiritual growth, but it gathers to be the signpost of God’s Kingdom on earth drawing people to Jesus until he returns. Articles 6-9 speak about the nature, mission, and ordinances of the church. We believe that being committed to practical and costly discipleship in the context of healthy Jesus-centred and Kingdom-focused church communities is essential for being good news people and part of our fundamental identity as an MB family.

Our identity as evangelical Anabaptists has implications for how we read and understand the Bible. The entire Bible records God’s big Kingdom redemption story. We affirm that the Triune God speaks with authority to us in both the Old and New Testaments, which means that both provide theological and ethical guidance for us today.³ The Old and New Testaments are “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16), that is “inspired by God through the Holy Spirit” (cf. 2 Peter 1:21; Article 2). However, we affirm that “God revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ” who brings “continuity and clarity to both the Old and New Testaments” (Article 2). Our MB Confession of

Faith points to Jesus, his call to make disciples who follow him with their entire being, and his transformative and hope-filled vision for the world that culminates with Jesus' return.

We hold our theological and ethical convictions because of the great love that God has lavished upon us through Jesus (cf. 1 John 3:1) who invites each of us to be part of his Kingdom story (Luke 6:20; Heb 12:28; Jas 2:5). Behind every article is God's reconciling love for the world and how we are called to respond to that love by loving God faithfully and loving our neighbours as ourselves (cf. Mark 12:30-31). As we explore the 18 articles of the MB Confession of Faith, let us keep Jesus in focus and God's grand and beautiful redemption story in sight. This vision provides the context and the motivation for understanding and living out our convictions.

Frequently Asked Questions on the MB Confession of Faith

1. How should the MB Confession of Faith function for us as an MB family?

The Confession of Faith rightfully functions in several ways within Mennonite Brethren churches. First, it expresses what we believe the Bible teaches regarding our core theological and ethical convictions. As such, the Confession defines our shared MB theological identity that conveys our commitment to live under the authority of Jesus, who is made known to us in the Scriptures, as we seek to be led by the Spirit of God. The Confession provides an interpretive guide for applying the teaching of the Bible to the relevant questions and issues facing the church.

Second, the Confession expresses our vision for faithful discipleship as Jesus' followers through who we are and what we say and do. The Confession calls our MB family to integrate what they believe with what they practice and how they worship. The Confession introduces new believers to the core teachings of the Bible and invites new leaders and churches to covenant together with our larger MB family. The Confession guides us in the process of mutual accountability within our covenant community.

Third, the Confession publicly proclaims our witness to the gospel story – God's redeeming, reconciling, and transforming work through Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. The Confession serves as our testimony both of who we are, as a family of churches, and who we are called to be, as we seek to follow Jesus faithfully in this world. The Confession offers shared convictions that can facilitate our participation together with other Christians in God's mission and partner with them as members of Christ's body.

2. Why do we choose a Confession of Faith approach rather than just agreeing on a short creed or labeling the 18 articles as our doctrinal statement?

The creeds, such as the Apostle's Creed, set forth the basic beliefs of the universal Church, which state minimally what all Christians believe together. A creed is foundational for defining orthodox Christian faith and unity by setting the boundaries between right belief and heretical teaching.

In contrast, confessions are expressions by smaller Christian groups and/or denominations that seek to provide a more detailed consensus regarding their understanding of the Christian faith in light of their particular or local contexts. For example, the MB Confession of Faith moves beyond the limits of a creed to provide much more detail about God's character, the nature and mission of the church, everyday discipleship, and God's new creation. Unlike a creed, it is understood that the MB Confession of Faith may have some elements that occasionally need rewording, or even elements that need to be added in order to address new issues facing the church.

The language of "doctrine" refers to what the church believes, and while the MB Confession of Faith contains our core "doctrines," we do not often use this term. Rather, we use the language of "shared convictions," which reflects our core beliefs and commitments that we embrace and live out together as a family. Shared convictions go beyond just stating our beliefs, but they guide us as we live out what God has called us to be. These convictions were formed out of much careful biblical study, group discernment, and prayer by our national church family. They hold special weight for us because of this.

Our Confession seeks to describe what we believe the Bible says: about God, humans, creation, and redemption; about living as disciples in this world; and about the truth that we should proclaim and teach. However, the MB Confession of Faith does not state convictions in areas where the biblical text is unclear to us and/or we believe that its application is limited to an earlier audience.⁴ When the MB Confession does state a conviction on a topic, it is because our family believes that biblical teaching here is not vague, ambiguous, irrelevant, or unimportant.

3. Is the MB Confession of Faith descriptive or prescriptive?

In reference to the MB Confession, we use the language of "descriptive" and "prescriptive" in specific ways. Because the Confession expresses our shared theological and ethical convictions based on our understanding of the Scriptures, we refer to the Confession as being "descriptive" of what we believe the Bible teaches. Because the Confession articulates our shared convictions that have been discerned together, it does not simply describe the result of a survey of what the majority of Mennonite Brethren might

believe at a given time. The point of reference for the Confession is the Scriptures. The Confession points beyond itself and is authoritative to the extent that it accurately describes what the Bible teaches.

The MB family “accept[s] the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice” (Article 2). If the Confession faithfully describes what the Bible teaches, then the Confession can be referred to as “prescriptive” for teaching, ministry, discipleship, and biblical accountability within MB churches. Affirmation of the Confession entails a covenant commitment both to the local congregation and to the larger MB family. Departure from the Confession constitutes a serious violation of these covenant relationships. Individuals and churches are not free to disregard or teach convictions that are not in agreement with the Confession. These convictions are “prescriptive” and “normative” for each and every local MB church and each and every MB leader (credentialed and non-credentialed) because we hold these convictions to be faithful to what God is telling us through Scripture.

In this specific way, we can refer to the MB Confession of Faith as both descriptive and prescriptive. Our 1987 Resolution on the Confession states: “Since the Confession of Faith represents our best understanding of what God’s Word teaches, we consider it binding for the life and teaching of the church.”⁵

4. How does the Confession of Faith function as a basis for MB identity?

Every Christian’s primary identity is “in Christ” and only after that to be part of a specific denominational family. It is Christ who was sent by the Father to deliver, save, heal, redeem, and restore the world through His atoning death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father. If we have repented and received Jesus’ forgiveness and salvation as well as the Holy Spirit, we have a new identity “in Christ.”

But it was not God’s purpose to produce scattered and solo disciples floundering along in isolation. Rather, God has brought disciples of Jesus together into a new family called the church (“the body of Christ” 1 Cor 12:27) so they can play a key role in God’s Kingdom story as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (1 Peter 2:9). To be “in Christ” means we have been baptized into one body, His church, by His Spirit. Our identity in Christ means that we are to live out our discipleship in the context of a local community (Acts 2:42; 6:2), which is a part of the larger body of Christ in the world (See Articles 6-9).

Today, Mennonite Brethren identify together as a family of churches because of several key and intertwined characteristics. Our unity results

first from our **shared experience of salvation and redemption** when Jesus, (because of his death, resurrection, and ascension), grants us forgiveness, grace, a new identity, incorporation into a new community, and hope for a bodily resurrection into God's new creation (1 John 1:3; Phil 1:5,7; 1 Cor 15:35-58). We share much more than a common "faith," a new awareness of being loved by God, or a desire to see the world changed. Because of what Jesus has done and through our faith, repentance, and bowing in worship before him, something real and true has happened to us. We have been "rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of the Son" (Col 1:13). Our experience of being saved, redeemed, and forgiven means that each of us is "in Christ" and because of this salvation, we are spiritual brothers and sisters worshipping together our Saviour and King. This is the common experience that leads us to eat and drink together at the Lord's table, bringing us together into one new humanity through the cross (Eph 2:15-16). Without this shared experience of the reality of salvation and redemption, all other attempts to bring us together and keep us together will ultimately fail.

But our specific unity around being Mennonite Brethren comes from **embracing a history that dates back to 1860**, which in spite of both high points and failures, has given us the kind of spiritual and theological DNA that we continue to believe is faithful to Jesus. This spiritual and theological DNA paints a beautiful vision of the Triune God and what God has done and is doing in the world, and this motivates us to live out these convictions today.⁶

In part because of this MB history, we have embraced particular **shared theological and ethical convictions**, expressed in our Confession, about who Jesus is, about God's amazing and ongoing work of salvation and redemption through Jesus, and about what discipleship and being the people of God look like. Our MB spiritual and theological DNA that draws us together is a unique mix of evangelical and Anabaptist. We also have **shared relationships** across our global MB family nurtured by worshipping together, growing in discipleship together, and serving together. Finally, we have a **shared local and global mission** that no local congregation can accomplish on its own, so we have partnered together to participate with God in his mission in the world.

Our Mennonite Brethren future depends on us continuing to embrace these identity-producing realities (viz., experience of God's grace, forgiveness, and salvation; understanding of being evangelical Anabaptist; shared theological and ethical convictions; shared relationships; shared local and global mission). If individual Mennonite Brethren churches and/or leaders ignore or live in conflict with our shared convictions, this deeply affects our

larger family and undermines what brings us together as we participate in God's Kingdom mission.

This is why we consider our Confession of Faith to be important for our whole church family because it articulates the things that we have affirmed together. As a result, we can walk together as we do God's work of worship, discipleship, and mission. Affirming our Confession of Faith is not about guarding legalistic or rigid boundaries but about the health and mission of our family. **The MB Confession reflects our mutually agreed upon, biblically based convictions about what it means for Mennonite Brethren Christians to focus on Jesus, be faithful disciples of Jesus, and participate in God's big redemption story in the world.**

5. What are the foundational expectations for MB churches, MB leaders (credentialed and non-credentialed), and MB local church members in relation to the MB Confession of Faith?

Because the MB Confession of Faith expresses our biblically based theological and ethical convictions, it is an expectation that all MB churches and leaders (credentialed and non-credentialed) "affirm" the 18 articles of the MB Confession of faith. To affirm our Confession means to embrace, teach, and live in alignment with the 18 articles. To affirm involves actively demonstrating support for the convictions expressed in our Confession of Faith. Demonstrating support requires more than just not publicly speaking or teaching against components of the Confession. Demonstrating support is a voluntary embrace of these convictions because of a willingness to join and live in a covenant relationship with the larger MB community that has agreed together to embrace these convictions. Affirming and supporting shared convictions is an act of the will on the part of leaders and local churches.

To affirm the Confession of Faith and actively demonstrate support for the Confession of Faith does not mean that a leader (or a church corporately) has no reservations or questions about how a particular line in the Confession is worded, or about how that conviction should be lived out in complex situations in our world. Affirming the MB Confession of Faith is about leaders being willing to embrace and support our shared MB Confessional convictions both personally and publicly, and about local MB churches living out an active embrace and support of these convictions in policy, teaching, and practice.

When it comes to members at the local MB church level, the ideal is that all members would affirm the MB Confession of Faith, but because we welcome new members at very different stages of their discipleship journey with Jesus, we are aware that the 18 articles could be overwhelming for some. While we do not expect every new member to have gone line by

line through our Confession of Faith prior to joining the local family, local churches will face significant challenges if large numbers of their members are later surprised by our shared convictions and fundamentally disagree with them. Churches will have a difficult time walking together in discipleship, corporate witness, and active mission if significant groups of the church membership never embrace these shared convictions. We recommend that all prospective members receive a basic and winsome introduction to the MB Confession of Faith (and God's Kingdom story that it reflects) in the hope that they can move toward affirmation and support of the convictions contained there.

6. What happens when an MB church and/or leader moves away from affirming/supporting the Confession of Faith?

For leaders, moving away from affirming the Confession of Faith involves no longer being able to actively support the convictions expressed in the MB Confession of Faith personally and/or publicly. This movement away from the Confession can show up in many ways. For example, moving away could involve living in conflict with our shared ethical convictions about what Christian discipleship looks like (and/or encouraging other followers of Jesus in this direction), and being uninterested in moving back toward the active support of the Confession of Faith. Moving away could also involve teaching, preaching, or declaring personal views that are in opposition to the Confession of Faith. Moving away could involve demonstrating a lack of respect for the larger MB community which has discerned these fundamental convictions together. (See Question #7 for how MB churches, leaders, and members can express their desire for possible revision of our Confession of Faith. This does not constitute "moving away" from our Confession.)

For churches, moving away from affirming the Confession of Faith could involve any action or group of actions that demonstrate that these convictions are actively opposed and/or are not valued in the overall functioning and ministry of the congregation. Encouraging and promoting activities and/or teaching in conflict with the convictions in the MB Confession of Faith gives the impression of a lack of affirmation and support of our convictions. Hiring leaders who are unable or unwilling to become credentialed through the local provincial leadership would be another indication of lack of affirmation and support.

For MB leaders and churches, deliberate departure from the Confession has always been understood to be a violation of their covenant relationship to both the local congregation and the larger MB family—which involves our shared obligations and promises to each other.⁷ Active support for the convictions of the MB Confession of Faith is part of the family covenant that

MB leaders and churches enter when they choose to identify with the MB family. The language of “MB church family” is intended to express that our local churches should operate with the kind of mutual care, accountability, support, and love that we would expect in a healthy biological or adopted family unit. That kind of mutual relationship should also exist as much as possible between all our MB entities Canada-wide and even beyond (e.g., our local MB churches, our provincial organizations, our national organization, and our related agencies world-wide). Departure from affirmation and support of the Confession of Faith harms these mutual relationships, undermines trust, and puts at risk our shared ability to work well together.

If an MB church leader cannot affirm and actively support the convictions expressed in the MB Confession with integrity, they should reconsider whether the MB family is a good fit for them. This should involve an honest and forthright conversation with whomever that leader is accountable to in an effort to seek a positive resolution. It may be that the leader has misunderstood the conviction, and integrity can be restored through further clarification. But it is also possible that integrity will require one to leave a leadership role and, for credentialed leaders, offer to surrender one’s credential status.

Being part of covenant relationships involves mutual accountability. For Mennonite Brethren, we believe that while our ultimate accountability is to Jesus, leadership in the way of Jesus is best practiced in the context of accountability to others. This means that all MB leaders, credentialed and non-credentialed, are to be held accountable for their covenant commitments expressed when they became leaders. If a local non-credentialed leader cannot affirm and support the shared MB convictions, local church leaders are the accountability group to seek a resolution. If a credentialed leader is in this situation, the local church and provincial leaders are responsible to go through a three-step process (e.g., discovery of what is true; conversation/intervention; and accountability steps). While intervention and accountability steps may produce positive and hopeful results that allow for continued leadership and ministry, ongoing credential status for MB leaders is predicated upon the credentialed leader affirming and supporting the MB Confession. If affirmation and support are not evident, removal of the credential, while a last resort, may be a necessary accountability step in the resolution. These sorts of difficult accountability steps are not in conflict with living in the way of Jesus (Matt 18:15-17; cf. 2 Tim 2:24-26).

If a local MB church cannot with integrity affirm and support our shared convictions expressed in the MB Confession of Faith, they should consider whether this is the best fit for them. Local MB churches are in an accountability relationship with their provincial leadership and

provincial church family. Again, while it is hoped that all intervention and accountability steps would produce a return to an embrace of our shared convictions, this may not be possible in certain situations and the church's affiliation with the provincial MB family may need to end.

7. If all MBs are expected to affirm and actively support the Confession of Faith, how could the Confession of Faith ever change?

The MB Confession of Faith is open to occasional revision as is demonstrated by the revision of Article 8 approved in 2021. Revision to an article in the Confession of Faith can be undertaken for one or more of the following reasons:

1. We believe that the older language needs updating in order to clarify the original intention of an article as understood when approved in 1999/2021.
2. We believe that something needs to be added to a specific article in order to address a new situation facing our MB family today.
3. We believe that a present article does not faithfully express biblical teaching.

It is not incompatible for MB churches and/or leaders to affirm and actively support the Confession of Faith while at the same time expressing a desire for our larger MB family to explore the possible revision of an article. MB church members should express this to their own church leadership while MB churches and leaders should express this directly to their provincial Faith and Life Team.

The Canadian Conference National Faith and Life Team (NFLT) is the group that gathers feedback and suggestions that relate to the MB Confession of Faith. They are the body that initiates the review of an article of the Confession of Faith. We do recognize that our Confession is not “infallible,” so we desire to be open to God leading us toward greater faithfulness and better understanding in our convictions. This process of review and possible revision offers individuals and churches an opportunity to participate in prayer, careful biblical study, and discernment together across our national family. Any changes made must be done with “uncompromising obedience to the Word of God.”⁸ Changes to our Confession need approval through our larger national family of churches. We do not change or revise the Confession of Faith without a significant and lengthy process of prayerful discernment, biblical study, and community engagement.

8. What role does “community discernment” and/or a “community hermeneutic” play in developing and/or revising the Confession of Faith?

The MB church, as part of the larger Anabaptist tradition, intentionally practices a community approach to discerning what God is speaking to us (Matt 18:18-20). This approach manifests itself in two ways. In cases when an individual or a local church senses a word from the Lord (1 Cor 14:29) or is asking God for direction in their circumstances, we call them to invite others to discern with them what God is saying. We refer to this process as **community discernment** when each individual and/or church prayerfully invites others to listen with them to the Holy Spirit on these questions. The goal is to clarify next steps based on the wisdom that they've heard. But community discernment, as helpful as it is for application questions, is NOT an adequate foundation for establishing our shared theological and ethical convictions.

When it comes to our shared theological and ethical convictions as expressed in the MB Confession of Faith, we move beyond community discernment to a process commonly referred to as a **community hermeneutic**. Hermeneutics is the term used for the careful interpretation and application of Scripture. A community hermeneutic in relation to our MB Confession of Faith involves a group of duly recognized representatives from our MB churches across the country who turn their minds and hearts toward the careful study of Scripture in order to discern theological and ethical convictions for the larger family. While this group process involves prayer and careful discernment, a community hermeneutic is specifically focused on the study of Scripture. This community study of Scripture is designed to produce Scripturally-faithful theological and ethical convictions which are tested widely and then affirmed by delegates from the larger Canadian MB family. This is how the present MB Confession of Faith was formed.⁹ The MB Confession of Faith represents the conclusions that grew out of our community hermeneutic.

The model of the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15), where a gathered group of leaders and local believers came together to discern how the gospel should be received by Gentiles, provides a concrete example of how our larger national church family can listen to the Word and the Spirit in the face of a new theological question. This was neither a democratic process favouring the majority, nor a forced harmonizing of all views. However, in the end, it is an example of healthy consensus-building around a shared understanding of Scripture, where in order to reflect the unity of the Holy Spirit, some must have willingly chosen to affirm and support the decision even though they may not have fully agreed with the decision (Eph 4:1-3; Col 3:14-16).

Since the expression of theological and ethical convictions in our MB Confession of Faith is a Canada-wide MB responsibility, our community hermeneutic is practiced necessarily by representatives from this national family. This means that the Confession of Faith is not revised simply because a local church (or even a group of local churches) has discerned together a different conviction. Because a local church is only one part of the MB family, it is inadequate to represent the fulness of a community hermeneutic when it comes to theological and ethical convictions for our whole national family. Local churches are welcome to participate in the process of Confession revision by sending delegates as part of the community hermeneutic process (see FAQ #7).

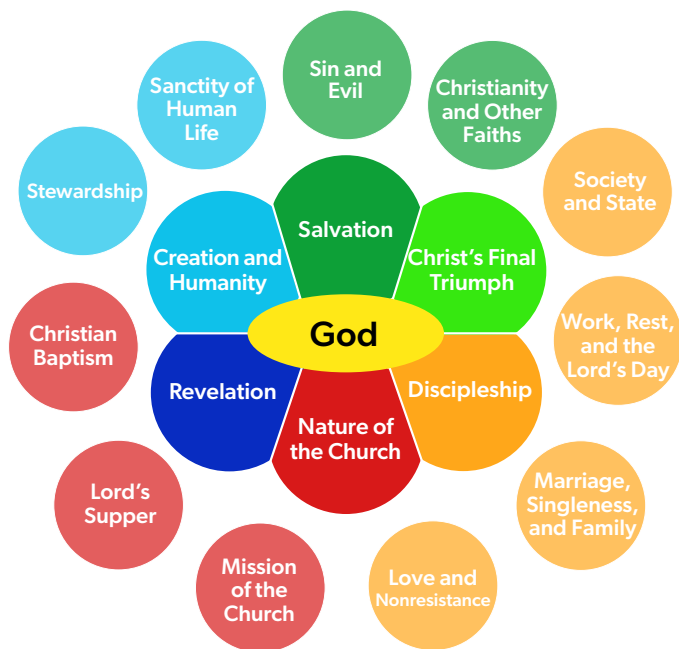
9. Are all articles in the Confession of Faith equally important or essential?

Mennonite Brethren have rejected the idea that the MB Confession has two tiers with some articles containing “essentials” and others “non-essentials.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, some of the 18 articles in the Confession of Faith may be more foundational than others (compare the articles about “Salvation” and “Stewardship”) while other articles address issues that flow out of previous articles (see “Creation and Humanity” and “The Sanctity of Human Life”). However, each article expresses Mennonite Brethren convictions regarding what the Bible says about a particular topic and it is included specifically because of its importance in the Scriptures and in the life of the church. If something is included in the Confession, this is already a declaration that we understand that to be essential.¹¹ We believe that both theological convictions and ethical convictions are “essential” to faithfulness to Jesus and thus to our Mennonite Brethren identity.¹²

The diagram below illustrates some of the ways in which the articles of the Confession of Faith are integrally related to each other—these relationships are not based on what is essential or non-essential. The Triune God is at the heart of everything, surrounded by central theological affirmations of our faith that arise from our understanding of God, as revealed in Scripture. **The outer circles are not placed there because they are less important but because they are the result of (or the visible fruit of) what is inside.**

Isaiah 5:1-2 describes a vineyard that has all the essential foundational ingredients (viz., excellent hillside, fertile soil, choicest vines) but it “yielded only bad fruit” (v.2). That vineyard was destined for destruction (vv.5-6) not because of its lack of essential ingredients but because of the bad fruit that was produced. The ingredients and the fruit that those ingredients produced were both “essential.” **We do not believe that we can separate an essential theological core (Articles 1-9; 17-18) from non-essential**

and non-prescriptive ethical fruit (Articles 10-16). We understand our Confession of Faith as having 18 articles deeply interconnected with each other, designed to work together to produce the healthy fruit of a faithful MB church family participating in God's great redemption story.



10. Why can't we have a shorter and less specific Confession of Faith that gives space for greater diversity in our family and breaks down barriers with non-MB churches?

Canadian Mennonite Brethren believe that the combination of theological and ethical convictions represented in our MB Confession of Faith is a valuable treasure that describes the centredness that Jesus is calling us to. Our Confession is a unified whole expressing what we believe about this theological centre and what it looks like to move toward this centre in day-to-day life. Limiting our Confession of Faith to only a few general theological and ethical convictions in order to ensure that there is room for increased diversity in our family is a misunderstanding of our Anabaptist commitment that true theology must be lived out day-to-day and impact

every area of our lives. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) models for us this deep connection between theology and ethics. A very diverse MB family that shares only some short universally agreed on confessional affirmations has little to guide the preaching, teaching, and mission within our MB family; little to contribute to the larger Christian family; and little to anchor us as a denominational entity.

We recognize that having a detailed and prescriptive collection of theological and ethical convictions will inevitably lead to some individuals, leaders, and/or churches stepping away from and/or losing their affiliation with our MB family because they cannot actively affirm and support these shared convictions. Shortening our Confession of Faith to a few “core” items and/or changing our expectations about what affirmation and support for the Confession of Faith means would certainly make more space for diverse voices within our family. But if our MB Confession is faithful in its description of what the Bible teaches, then it provides an accurate picture and a road map about what it means to follow Jesus and be the kind of people of God we believe Jesus is calling us to be. Making more space for diversity in conflict with these convictions would be a move away from rather than closer to our understanding of this centre.

In terms of other Christian denominations, we both humbly affirm and deeply cherish the theological and ethical convictions that we believe the Holy Spirit has led us to, while respecting and valuing these other denominational families. We trust that God is working through other denominational families for God’s larger mission in the world. Without ignoring or downplaying our own convictions, we want to partner well with Christian disciples from many other denominational families as we together proclaim and live out the gospel in our communities. But we do not expect them to rewrite their convictions to include only those that we share with them. We welcome these other groups to live faithfully to their convictions as we seek to live faithfully to ours. We believe that the people of God are strengthened rather than hindered when each group shares with the larger family the insights and gifts the Holy Spirit has entrusted to them.

11. Can a local MB church create their own Confession of Faith, adopt another Confession of Faith, and/or become affiliated with some other network or organization?

Since the MB Confession is a central part of our mutual covenant of commitment in our MB church family and an expression of our shared identity, it is essential that each local MB church affirm, support, and prioritize our Confession. In practice, this means that the MB Confession should guide theological/ethical teaching and congregational practice at

the local church level. The MB Confession should be utilized in the hiring of staff, selection of leaders, and welcoming of new members. A local MB church's affiliation with the larger provincial and Canadian MB family, along with the MB Confession of Faith (Summary and Full Edition) should be highlighted and accessible on the church's website for those seeking clarity about the fundamental convictions guiding the church.

Since the MB Confession of Faith does not clarify all theological, ethical, and/or church polity matters, local MB churches may want to express some additional commitments for themselves in particular areas. A local MB church may also want to express affiliation with another Christian network or organization. As long as these additional commitments and affiliations are not in conflict with the theological, ethical, and polity convictions articulated in the MB Confession of Faith, this is not a departure from one's covenant with the larger MB family. However, it should be clear that the MB Confession of Faith remains the primary statement of biblical convictions for the local MB church. Local churches should avoid creating their own confessions of faith even if based on the layout of the MB Confession, since this fails to honour the shared origins and affiliation represented by the MB Confession. It would be best to express any additional local church theological, ethical, and polity commitments separately from the MB Confession of Faith.

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Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.icomb.org/what-we-believe/>
- ² For further insights into the meaning of "evangelical Anabaptist," see Bruce L. Guenther, "Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Evangelical Anabaptist Identity" in *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections After 150 Years* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011), 47-82.
- ³ MB Confession of Faith: Article 2 notes that "We accept the Bible as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for faith and practice."
- ⁴ For example, our Confession of Faith does not talk about avoiding food sacrificed to idols, drinking blood, or other biblical imperatives that do not seem directly relevant for most Christians today.
- ⁵ "Resolution on the Confession of Faith." *1987 Yearbook, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Abbotsford, August 7-11, 1987), 69.
- ⁶ For insights into this history, see John B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America, 1860-1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1993); John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975).
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ "Consensus and Change in Respect to Ethical Issues," *Yearbook: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 51st Session* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1969), 11-12.
- ⁹ The 1999 MB Confession of Faith reflects the work of both the USMB family and the Canadian MB family (CCMBC). Presently, USMB and CCMBC have very similar but separate Confessions of Faith.
- ¹⁰ At a 1988 study conference, Mennonite Brethren rejected the creation of a two-tiered Confession of Faith and affirmed a unified approach. See Report of the Findings Committee, Board of Reference and Counsel Study Conference (Calgary, April 27-29, 1988), 1, CMBS (Winnipeg).
- ¹¹ Doug Heidebrecht, "Confessing Our Faith: The Significance of the Confession of Faith in the Life of the Mennonite Brethren Church," in *Renewing Identity and Mission: Mennonite Brethren Reflections after 150 Years*, edited by Abe J. Dueck, Bruce L. Guenther, and Doug Heidebrecht (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2011), 147.
- ¹² Ibid.

ARTICLE 1

God¹

We believe in the one, true, living God, Creator of heaven and earth. God is almighty in power, perfect in wisdom, righteous in judgment, overflowing in steadfast love. God is the Sovereign who rules over all things visible and invisible, the Shepherd who rescues the lost and helpless. God is a refuge and fortress for those in need. God is a consuming fire, perfect in holiness, yet slow to anger and abounding in tender mercy. God comforts like a loving mother, trains and disciplines like a caring father, and persists in covenant love like a faithful husband. We confess God as eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father

God the Father is the source of all life. In Him we live and move and have our being. The Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, and hears the prayers of all who call on Him. In the fullness of time, the Father sent the Son for the salvation of the world. Through Jesus Christ, the Father adopts all who respond in faith to the gospel, forgiving those who repent of their sin and entering into a new covenant with them. God gives the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, to all His children. God's creative and redemptive love sustains this world until the end of the age.

God the Son

The Son, through whom all things were created and who holds all things together, is the image of the invisible God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus took on human nature to redeem this fallen world. He revealed the fullness of God through His obedient and sinless life. Through word and deed, Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. Christ triumphed over sin through His death and resurrection, and was exalted as Lord of creation and the church. The Saviour of the world invites all to be reconciled to God, offering peace to those far and near, and calling them to follow Him in the way of the cross. Until the Lord Jesus returns in glory, He intercedes for believers, acts as their advocate, and calls them to be His witnesses.

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, is the creative power, presence, and wisdom of God. The Spirit convicts people of sin, gives them new life, and guides them into all truth. By the Spirit, believers are baptized into one body. The