

## 001 BP\_Associate Church Policy

### Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church (ONMB)

Version	Revised	Approved By	Approval Date
1.0	Associate Local Church Conference Membership Policy		2006
2.0	Associate Church Membership Policy		July 2013
2.1	2019 Revision	Board of Directors	May 2019
3.0	2024 Associate Church Policy, Revised to align with the 2022 ONCA Bylaws Revision	ONMB Board	2024-01-25
Next Revision: January 2029			

The purpose of this policy is to guide the provision of privileges of participation among ONMB for church fellowships unable or not yet ready to join full church membership.

### Section 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Historically, the Associate Church Policy has been used to guide the process for churches seeking full membership with the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (ONMB). The 2021 revision to the ONMB Bylaw included additional details regarding Associate Churches (See Article 16.2 below). With a broader, more inclusive definition of an Associate Church, making it possible for more fellowships to participate in ONMB activities, there are now two categories for Associate Churches, within this policy specifically. Note: These categories are not part of the membership approved General Operating Bylaw (GOB).
- 1.2 *Extended Associate Churches* are Missional Expressions or fellowships that are not currently able to be full members, as they may not take on the form of a traditional church, an *Exploratory Associate Churches* are those churches that are new to ONMB and discerning the possibility of becoming full member churches.
- 1.3 For both Extended Associate Churches and Exploratory Associate Churches, the intent is to provide privileges of participation among the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

### Section 2. Related ONMB Bylaws

- 2.1 GOB of the ONMB, January 2022

*16.2 Associate Churches*

*16.2.1 The Ontario Conference recognizes that not all Missional Expressions of the*

*church will be registered as charitable organizations with formal governing documents so as to qualify as a full Member Church. The ONMB Board, in consultation with the Provincial Faith and Life Team, may identify a fellowship or congregation that meets the membership requirements in Section 6.1 as a potential Associate Church of the Ontario Conference.*

*16.2.2 The Board will bring the candidate for Associate Church status to the next meeting of the membership for a decision by the Members. If approved by the Members, Associate Church status is granted for a period of five (5) years. Standing is renewable.*

*16.2.3 Associate Churches are not Members of the Ontario Conference, but may receive support from the Ontario Conference as outlined by policies of the Board.*

*16.2.4 As provided for in Section 6.6.5, the Board may grant up to three (3) individuals from an Associate Church standing to hold office in the Ontario Conference as an Associate Church Representative. An Associate Church Representative may register as a Convention Member and be a Voting Representative. (See 6.4.2 and 6.5.2)*

*16.2.5 Associate Church status can be revoked by a resolution of the Members or, in special circumstances, by a resolution of the Board. If an Associate Church receives full Member Church status, its Associate Church status terminates.*

### **Section 3. Definitions**

- 3.1 Associate Church Representative: a member of an Associate Church who has been granted standing by the ONMB Board to hold office in the Ontario Conference. This person may register as a Convention Member and be a Voting Representative.
- 3.2 Missional Expressions: a new or emerging church or disciple-making initiative of ONMB.
- 3.3 Missional Expressions Team: A team of the ONMB Board of Directors responsible to catalyze and oversee Missional Expressions
- 3.4 One-Stream Funding: the process by which financial support for the denomination is sent to the provincial conference with a portion being passed along to support the national conference. Churches do not give directly to the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC).

### **Section 4. Associate Church Categories**

- 4.1 Extended Associate Churches - Missional Expressions or fellowships that are not currently able to be full members, but are afforded privileges of participation. For some fellowships or Missional Expressions, it is not feasible or desirable to obtain charitable registration. Thus, they are not able to enter into full membership with ONMB. These churches are valued parts of our family of churches who deserve a voice and place at the table of ONMB decision-making and activities.
- 4.2 Exploratory Associate Churches - church plants or existing churches that are new to ONMB and discerning the possibility of becoming full member churches. This is the agreed upon status and process where both parties can get to know each other and determine if there is a healthy fit.

## **Section 5. Operating Expectations**

- 5.1 All Associate Churches are required to:
  - 5.1.1 Uphold the spirit of the MB Confession of Faith, accept the rulings of the National and Provincial Faith and Life Teams (NFLT & PFLT)
  - 5.1.2 Submit to the governance of the Conference which is led by the ONMB Board of Directors, the Executive Director and the PFLT
- 5.2 All Associate Church members are strongly encouraged to:
  - 5.2.1 Attend and participate in key Conference events, including the AGM, Pastor and Leaders Day and pastoral retreats

## **Section 6. Oversight**

- 6.1 Oversight of Associate Church Membership in ONMB falls under the jurisdiction of the PFLT. The PFLT will set the process to ensure that a congregation recommended for Associate Membership Church meets the qualifications set out in the ONMB bylaw 16.2.1. Membership requires ONMB membership ratification, and it may be dissolved by a resolution of the Conference Membership or by a resolution of the ONMB Board.
- 6.2 The ONMB Board's Missional Expressions Team may act as facilitator for Missional Expressions toward Associate Church Membership and will make such recommendations to the PFLT.
- 6.3 Associate Churches may not be seeking membership in other denominations or organizations that would create conflicts in oversight.
- 6.4 While an Associate Church is not a full Member Church of the ONMB, the Associate Church will operate in compliance with the principles of the GOB. (Also see 8.3.3 and 9.4.3)

## **Section 7. Participation in Events**

- 7.1 Churches who become Associate Church Members of the Conference are invited to attend and participate in all ONMB and CCMBC and activities. Full access to seminars, workshops, network activities, pastoral retreats, camping programs and other activities are available to Associate Churches.
- 7.2 Associate Churches may be granted up to three (3) Associate Church Representatives to attend and vote at AGM and other official meetings of the Conference. Associate Church Representatives, if in good standing, may also hold office in the ONMB Conference.
- 7.3 An Associate Church must apply to the ONMB Board for an individual to be granted status as an Associate Church Representative. This status is good for up to five (5) years and may be revoked at any time by the ONMB Board. (See Bylaw Article 6.6.5)
- 7.4 Associate Churches are encouraged to support and take advantage of the resources offered by Multiply and MB Seminary.

## **Section 8. Category Specifications: Extended Associate Churches**

- 8.1 Extended Associate Churches are Missional Expressions or fellowships that are not currently able to be full members, due to not having charitable status or other reasons, but are afforded privileges of participation. Fellowships or Missional Expressions which

profess the same faith as that of the Ontario Conference, accept its resolutions, Confession of Faith, values and mission, understand the responsibilities and expectations of membership, and desire to participate in its common undertakings may apply for Extended Associate Church status.

- 8.2 **Timeframe:** For Extended Associate Churches, this status is granted for a term of five (5) years and the term may be renewed. Renewal is permitted recognizing the fact that the Missional Expressions or fellowship may not be able to become full members.
- 8.3 Membership Application Expectations: For Extended Associate Churches, it will be expected that:
  - 8.3.1 There has been careful review the MB Confession of Faith and that the leaders agree to support and teach its theological convictions
  - 8.3.2 Pastoral staff (half time or greater) be credentialed by ONMB and attend a Pastors Credentialing Orientation (see [www.onmb.org](http://www.onmb.org) for details)
  - 8.3.3 There is a willingness to abide by the General Operating By-law of the ONMB and its Board of Directors
  - 8.3.4 Establish a percentage giving budget to the work and mission of the ONMB (currently recommending 5% of church budget to go toward ONMB One-Stream Funding and 2% to Multiply)
  - 8.3.5 The financial documents of the church have been reviewed and they are in good standing with the federal government and registered charities commission (if applicable)
  - 8.3.6 Liability or other such appropriate insurance is in place (if applicable).
  - 8.3.7 Any governing documents will be reviewed and updated to align with the Conference membership.
- 8.4 **Jurisdiction:** Final decision for a church entering full membership into the ONMB will be made by the ONMB Board of Directors at the request of the Executive Director and PFLT. At the next AGM, this new member church will be introduced to the Convention for formal ratification by the Membership.

## **Section 9. Category Specifications: Exploratory Associate Churches**

- 9.1 Churches may apply to the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to become full members within this Conference of Churches. The process of Exploratory Associate Church Membership in ONMB is a season of mutual discernment toward this end.
- 9.2 There are three application categories:
  - 9.2.1 Church Plants: Church plants will be accepted as ONMB member churches upon the affirmation of the Provincial Faith and Life Team (PFLT) in consultation with the Missional Expressions Team. Having met the criteria for membership the ONMB Board of Directors will recommend their full membership for ratification at the next ONMB Annual General Meeting (AGM). In certain situations, church plants may be directed into the Associate Church process before becoming full member churches.
  - 9.2.2 Church Adoptions: Churches from other denominations or independent ministries may request membership within the ONMB and will begin this process by entering the Associate Church process.

- 9.2.3 Transitioning Churches: Churches birthed out of a church crisis may request membership within the ONMB but are required to become associate members of the ONMB before becoming full members.
- 9.3 Time Frame: The Exploratory Associate Church designation is not intended to be a long-term process for those seeking full membership in the Conference. Usually this process will take one to three years depending on timelines for charitable registration and credentialing of staff. However, up to five years is permissible under the ONMB bylaws. The transition to full membership is undertaken cooperatively between the applicant church, the PFLT and the ONMB Board, as outlined in article 6.4.1 of the ONMB Bylaws. For those applying under Church Plants or Church Adoptions, if after five years no formal decision has been reached, the applicant church may be withdrawn from its Associate Church status by resolution of the ONMB Board. Renewal is not allowed unless a special resolution is passed by the ONMB Board
- 9.4 Membership Application Expectations: For Exploratory Associate Churches, prior to Full Membership, it will be expected that:
- 9.4.1 There has been careful review the MB Confession of Faith and that the leaders agree to support and teach its theological convictions
- 9.4.2 Pastoral staff (half time or greater) be credentialed by ONMB and attend a Pastors Credentialing Orientation (see [www.onmb.org](http://www.onmb.org) for details)
- 9.4.3 There is a willingness to abide by the General Operating By-law of the ONMB and its Board of Directors
- 9.4.4 Establish a percentage giving budget to the work and mission of the ONMB (currently recommending 5% of church budget to go toward One-Stream Funding and 2% to Multiply)
- 9.4.5 The financials of the church have been reviewed and they are in good standing with the federal government and registered charities commission (if applicable)
- 9.4.6 The church has liability insurance in place (if applicable).
- 9.4.7 Church bylaws will be reviewed and updated to align with Conference membership.
- 9.5 Jurisdiction: Final decision for a church entering full membership into the ONMB will be made by the ONMB Board of Directors at the request of the Executive Director and PFLT. At the next AGM, this new member church will be introduced to the Convention for formal ratification by the Membership following the process defined in the GOB.

## **Section 10: Staff Benefits**

- 10.1 Paid pastoral staff may access the benefit program of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (CCMBC), including medical, dental, Life Insurance, LTD and Pension. CCMBC also offers payroll services for paid pastoral staff.

## **Section 11: Contracts**

- 11.1 An Associate Church may choose to develop a ministry agreement or contract for purposes of adjusting, or adding distinctive elements to, this standard agreement. In such cases, the ministry agreement or contract needs to be approved by PFLT, and Board of Directors where necessary.

11.2 If the Associate Member Church receives financial support from the ONMB, a contract is required to clearly outline the expectations, terms and conditions of such funding.

## **Section 12: Associate Membership Dissolution**

12.1 During the term of the associate membership, a church may withdraw from membership as long as they do not violate any contractual agreements.

12.2 Associate membership may be dissolved by vote of the Membership of the Conference at a meeting of the Members.

12.3 The ONMB Board of Directors, in consultation with the PFLT, may choose to dissolve a church's associate membership as long as the ONMB does not violate any contractual agreements.

12.2 If associate membership is dissolved with a church in good standing, then the credentials of the pastoral staff may be maintained until they are transitioned to another credentialing body, for a period of no more than six months.

12.3 If the church is not in good standing at the time of associate membership dissolution (eg. through pastoral moral failure, theological insubordination or financial misconduct) then pastoral credentials will be removed immediately by the PFLT.

## **Section 13: Notwithstanding**

12.1 This policy is meant to provide additional clarity related to handling of Associate Churches. This policy does not supersede the General Operating Bylaw.

12.2 This policy is not binding upon the ONMB Board of Directors in any case where it would create a conflict with their duties as Directors.