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# Proposal for a Community of Spiritual Leadership<sup>1</sup>

(originally Congregation of Ministerial Leadership Working Group)

*It is recognized that exactly how the CSL will work will be impacted by other structures developed in the transition process. Further, it is recognized that there will need to be openness to adjustment as the new structures are experienced.*

## **Who**

The Community of Spiritual Leadership (CSL) consists of those recognized by congregations and Area Churches as providing spiritual leadership in their congregations or in the larger church (paid and unpaid ministers, scholars, conference leaders). The CSL will also make an effort to include emerging leaders, as well as voices and perspectives of those who may have been historically marginalized in the church and society.

## **Organization**

- Membership of the national CSL is rooted in Area Church ministry groupings, with congregations determining who their spiritual leaders are, and Area Churches adding those who could supplement this, e.g., emerging leaders, voices needing to be heard
- Leadership for national CSL activities and relationships will be provided by a group consisting of the Area Church Ministers along with a number (5?) of CSL members as selected by the larger CSL.
  - This leadership core will establish itself as a community through regular communication during the year (e.g., teleconference, other electronic communication options) to discuss successes, issues, concerns and development needs for themselves and the congregations. It is recommended that there be one face-to-face meeting per year.
  - This leadership core will suggest issues and topics for consideration by the larger CSL.
  - Some staff time will be needed to assist the CSL leadership in this agenda.

## **Mandate**

The Community of Spiritual Leadership is a body that shapes and nurtures a strong Anabaptist identity<sup>2</sup> within Mennonite Church Canada through study and discernment, thereby supporting leaders of today and tomorrow in their ability to guide, serve and inspire their congregations to be salt and light in their communities.

## **Study and Discernment**

The CSL will study Scripture, pray, listen, talk, and discern together on various issues facing the church.

- Serving as a group that “takes the pulse” of what’s happening in our congregations and sharing collected observations, celebrations and concerns.
- Studying and discerning ethical, theological and ministry practice issues the church faces;
- Helping leaders and congregations to continue to discern and live faith via an Anabaptist lens;
- Offering vision to MC Canada for how its congregations might most faithfully serve as communities “of grace, joy and peace” as they serve as channels of “healing and hope” in a continuously changing world.

- 1 • Walk alongside congregations in addressing theological questions through brief statements  
2 or letters to offer encouragement, confession, practical advice, public statement, prophetic  
3 challenge, or guidance for further study. In these ways, the CSL would be a structure of  
4 spiritual leadership within Mennonite Church Canada.  
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### 6 ***Support and Mentorship***

7 The CSL will nurture, support and mentor spiritual leaders (as distinct from the more formal  
8 agenda of leadership development).

- 9 • Nurturing and supporting those in leadership in our congregations;  
10 • Mentoring and supporting new leaders (both salaried ministers and lay ministry leaders);  
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### 13 **Discernment Assemblies**

14 The CSL will meet as a larger body every two or so years in a **Discernment Assembly**. The  
15 key agenda of the Discernment Assembly will be to study Scripture, pray, listen, talk, and  
16 discern together around various issues facing the church. This discernment process would  
17 impact the Anabaptist identity of congregations as the CSL members return to their  
18 congregations inspired and empowered in their ministry.<sup>3</sup> These assemblies might also result in  
19 brief statements which would be shared with congregations offering encouragement,  
20 confession, practical advice, public statement, prophetic challenge, or guidance for further  
21 study.  
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23 It is very possible that MC Canada may schedule national assemblies for worship, fellowship  
24 and study which could include congregational and area representatives, along with anyone who  
25 chooses to participate. The CSL discernment assembly is different from this, but might be  
26 planned in conjunction with national assemblies. If and how it might intersect with such larger  
27 MC Canada assemblies would need to be determined.  
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### 30 **CSL and Mennonite Church Canada Connections**

31 The CSL has no “program” responsibilities in the sense of overseeing any budget or staff  
32 people, nor does it have any formal governance role. At the same time, some staff or substantial  
33 volunteer energy will be needed to plan events, prepare materials, draft possible statements,  
34 and follow-up on steps the CSL takes.  
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36 In order that the insight and discernment of the CSL impact the direction of MC Canada, there  
37 will need to be some structural connection between the CSL and the governance structures of  
38 MC Canada (Leadership Council?). This might happen by having at least one or two  
39 representatives from CSL on MC Canada governance structures.  
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<sup>1</sup> The FDTF gave the name of this body “Congregation of Ministerial Leadership.” Our working group fairly quickly developed discomfort with this name, with each term having its own difficulties. The working group thus is suggesting instead the name “Community of Spiritual Leadership.” Replacing “ministerial” with “spiritual” points to a broadening of the group beyond formally named ministers. Replacing “Congregation” with “Community” seems more fitting with Mennonite polity, and our sense of what this body was. Even here we debated whether we might have used “Gathering” or “Network.” We retained the term “Leadership” despite the recognition that it also had some negative connotations, but at the same time, we affirmed the notion that this was a body of leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Consistent with the language of the FDTF and the transition process, this proposal uses the language of “Anabaptist identity.” Conversation within the working group raised some question about the term “identity” in that it wanted to make sure it included the connotation of theology or convictions. At the same time, it was concerned that the term “Anabaptist” not imply some theological system apart from it being embodied in a people, and that it be recognized that this people is very much part of the larger Christian church. Replacing “Anabaptist” with “Anabaptist Christian” might make that point, but at the same time is awkward. Perhaps a further question might be how this relates to the term “Mennonite,” with the connotations of the terms “Anabaptist” and “Mennonite” far from fixed or consistent in various settings.

<sup>3</sup> Central to the logic of the CSL is the conviction that congregations will be impacted by having their spiritual leaders meet together with their peers across Canada to discuss issues of importance for the church. As suggested in the next sentence, the Discernment Assembly might lead to a formal statement from the assembly for the congregations. But probably of more significance will be the informal “trickle down” impact of these assemblies. Whereas formal statements risk being experienced as “from above,” or “from them,” more significant will be leaders returning to their settings inspired and empowered to exercise their ministry with a sense of support and accord with the larger body, always toward the goal of nurturing, serving and leading congregations to become communities of “grace, joy and peace” as they grow as channels of “healing and hope” in a continuously changing world.

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