

CCMBC Bylaw FAQ: As of Draft 1-8

At the 2019 Convention, Member Churches approved the Collaborative Model of governance. To implement the new model, revisions have been proposed to the CCMBC Bylaw. This document uses a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) format to provide some insights into the revisions.

What is the Collaborative Model?

The “Collaborative Model” is the name given to a new governance model for the MB Denomination in Canada. While the six provincial conferences and the national Conference share a common group of member churches, it has been difficult to coordinate decision making as ministry plans were often developed independently of one another and resources were divided. In 2019, the MB churches in Canada approved a new model for working together in a more collaborative fashion. This model introduces such features as the National Ministry Team and the National Assembly as new places for the leaders of MB organizations to meet for planning. New planning documents called the Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan (CUSP) and Strategic Partnership Agreements are introduced as well as the concept of a Principal Organization to support the model.

Why has collaboration failed in the past and why will it work now?

Our organizational structures use cross-board or ex officio appointments in efforts to coordinate ministry. For example, the Executive Board includes the moderators or a designate from each of the six provincial conferences. These ex officio appointments enable some information sharing from the provinces at a national table, but they do not enable or empower collaborative decision making. Given the current board polity, a single representative from a provincial board does not have sufficient authority to commit their organization to a decision. When the Executive Board, with its provincial representatives, makes a unanimous decision, the provincial boards are not obligated to comply with the national decision. An Executive Board decision is often viewed as a decision applicable to just the CCMBC organization and CCMBC staff. Also, a single provincial board representative, who is serving as a volunteer on the provincial board, often lacks the detailed operating knowledge of a senior staff leader, so information sharing is very limited at the national level. For ministry collaboration across MB organizations, the Collaborative Model identified that several key elements must be in place:

1. Multiple delegates from each board, not just one person, must be able to meet for planning purposes. The National Assembly is the gathering place of the boards of the MB Organizations so that greater ministry cooperation is possible. If a national plan, the CUSP, is formulated by the National Assembly, then the plan should be supported by each provincial board and MB organization when it is brought to the churches for approval.
2. The senior staff of the MB organizations must be able to work together on a regular basis and interact with the Executive Board to fill in knowledge of operational gaps. Hence, the National Ministry Team is created. This team of senior leaders has the detailed operating knowledge that can assist the Executive Board and the National Assembly in formulating plans that can be supported by each organization.
3. One organization must be identified to be the administrative support for the Collaborative Model. This organization is called the Principal Organization. This organization provides critical communication services as well as measuring and monitoring of results around the common initiatives in the CUSP.
4. The Member Churches, who have been electing people to these different boards, need to hold these boards accountable, and need to take ownership of the plan formulated by their elected boards and approved by themselves, the churches. For this reason, the CUSP and the national budget are approved by the churches. Referenda voting at provincial conventions is allowed so that churches can see how provincial and national ministry is aligned.

In the past, the nine Member Organizations and CCMBC worked independently, without a common plan, because the denomination lacked a governance model for bringing all organizations together to

work under the authority of its churches. The new the Collaborative Model of governance does not replace the existing structures. It encourages the existing structures to work collaboratively.

What is the MB Denomination in Canada?

The MB Denomination in Canada is founded upon the 1945 Act of Parliament that recognizes the “Charter of the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America”. The CCMBC General Operating Bylaw, as approved by the churches, describes the operations of the national Conference. All Canadian MB churches must be members of the national Conference (as well as their provincial conference) to be part of the MB denomination. Being a “denomination” recognizes the Conference as a theological organization founded upon the MB Confession of Faith. Only the national Conference, the body of all MB churches in Canada, can amend the Confession of Faith of the denomination. Hence, the denomination is best understood as being this national body of MB churches as well as the MB organizations that are now members.

What is the role of the Confession of Faith?

The Confession of Faith defines the theological identity of all MB churches, MB organizations and the individual members of the churches. It unites the MB family and strengthens our common mission. The Confession is written into the governing document of each MB church and MB organization. It can only be amended by a resolution of the national Conference, i.e. all of its Members. Provincial conferences are not denominations in themselves (i.e. they do not have their own confession); they are part of the Canadian MB denomination. Including Member Organizations into the Conference helps to strengthen the relationships of the MB organizations to the MB denomination.

What is the authority of the provincial conference relating to church membership?

As written into the national Bylaw, a church must first become a member of a provincial conference, then it becomes a member of the national conference by virtue of being a member of the provincial conference. This hierarchy gives the provincial conferences the authority to define church membership in their conferences, and subsequently in the national conference and the denomination. Matters of church membership and discipline (i.e. removal of a church from the conferences) begin with the provinces. For this reason, the Provincial Faith and Life Teams and National Faith and Life Team work closely together around Confessional issues.

Do MB churches have two memberships in two conferences?

Churches are members of both their provincial conference and the national conference. This dual membership has advantages in terms of the registration and operation of a church. Churches often create legal registrations, own land and are licensed provincially. Churches in a region work together on projects to build schools, camps and other related ministries. As already noted, national membership makes a church part of the MB denomination.

With two memberships, the churches are meant to support both the provincial and national conferences. The historical challenge has been aligning the work of all seven conferences in Canada as they represent an intersecting group of churches. Under the Collaborative Model, the increased use of Referenda is designed to allow more national decisions to be made by Member Churches when attending provincial conventions. Making provincial and national decisions at the same convention will help create stronger alignment. In the past when churches voted at two separate conventions, the national and provincial decisions were separated instead of being aligned under one denomination.

Why have Member Organizations been added to the national Conference?

CCMBC began as a “conference of churches”. The members of the national Conference were only the MB Churches in Canada. The national Conference now has two classes of membership: Member Churches and Member Organizations. A Member Organization is a nationally affiliated organization that

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adheres to the MB Confession of Faith as defined in its governing documents. Member Organizations were included to create the National Assembly under the Collaborative Model. The Member Organizations include the six provincial conferences, MBS, Multiply and CCMBC Legacy Fund Inc. These MB organizations can now participate in the Conference as full members with delegates voting at Assemblies. Because of the hierarchical structure of membership (i.e. churches are first members of their provincial conference in order to become members of the national conference), it is important to include the provincial conferences themselves in membership, not just churches, to create alignment and accountability under the Confession of Faith. The same can be said for the other Member Organizations that are operating as Canadian Mennonite Brethren organizations.

Who can become a Member Organization in the Conference?

As defined in the Bylaw, any nationally affiliated organization that adheres to the Confession of Faith as defined in its governing documents, and that has been accepted into the Conference upon recommendation of the Executive Board and a resolution passed by the Members can become a Member Organization. Bible camps and bible schools are most often connected to provincial conferences and might seek affiliation or membership within the provincial conferences.

Why was the National Assembly created?

Even though the churches are often the members and supporters of most MB organizations, it can be challenging to align the decision-making processes of all the leadership boards of these organizations. Each board works on behalf of its group of members and it may or may not consider the context of the overall MB denomination and MB family. Under the Collaborative Model, the National Assembly creates a place where the leadership boards of MB organizations can meet for planning. Working together, national proposals can be formulated for church approval, that are then understood and supported by all Member Organizations. For example, when a proposal relating to leadership development is formulated, all Member Organizations can meet at the National Assembly to determine how best to participate in that proposal to create collaboration and not competition. The organizations work to align their ministries through a shared Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan, formulated together, and approved by the churches.

How do Member Churches relate to Member Organizations?

The Member Churches are the “primary” members who were the original members listed in the Charter. The Conference was created for its Member Churches. As the primary members, the churches have control over the Conference. Their authority is used to grant membership to national organizations joining the Conference. It is important to note that the Member Organizations are led by individuals elected from the MB churches. The Member Organizations are supported by the MB churches. All organizations operate under the MB Confession of Faith as part of the denomination.

What is an Assembly?

An Assembly is simply a meeting of the members. In the past, these meetings were called Conventions.

Why are there two types of Assemblies?

With two classes of members, there are two kinds of Assemblies. The General Assembly is an annual general meeting that is used to gather delegates from both the Member Churches and Member Organizations to elect officers, approve financial statements and approve the Conference auditor. The National Assembly was created to allow the boards of Member Organizations to meet for planning purposes as well as to monitor progress related to the Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan (CUSP).

Are there differences in delegate privileges?

Within the Bylaw, delegates come from Member Churches and delegates come from Member Organizations. Each delegate receives a vote at a meeting of the members. All delegates, whether from a Member Church or a Member Organization, have the same privileges at a General Assembly. As noted, only National Assembly delegates attend the National Assembly.

How are Referenda used?

The Collaborative Model introduces decision making by Referenda voting so that delegates can cast ballots on national decisions while attending the six provincial conventions. Even with electronic meetings which reduce travel costs, fewer people attend national conventions. Using Referenda enables greater delegate participation as well as better alignment of provincial-national decision making. Historically, there has been as many as four times the number of delegates at the provincial conventions compared to national conventions. By using virtual townhall gatherings, it will be possible for churches across Canada to discuss national questions prior to Referenda voting.

What is the National Ministry Team?

The National Ministry Team (NMT) is made up of senior leaders from each of the Member Organizations, as well as the Chair of the National Faith and Life Team. The CCMBC National Director is the leader of the NMT. This team meets monthly to plan and coordinate the operations of the ten organizations in alignment with the church approved Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan. This group of leaders also plays a crucial role in establishing a culture of collaboration among Member Organizations. The National Ministry Team works closely with the National Assembly to oversee the work being done under the Collaborative Model.

What is the CUSP or Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan?

The CUSP is the central document that aligns the work of the Conference membership (churches and organizations) so that true collaboration can happen. It is a plan for the denomination that is created by its members to describe the collective national impact created by coordinating the contributions of all its members. The National Assembly brings organizational leadership together to formulate proposals that every Member Organization will be able to support and recommend to its own members, most often the churches. All Member Organizations work together to discern what should be done in the CUSP. For example, in the CUSP, all provincial conferences agree to the national Conference responsibilities and the funding needed. Finally, the CUSP must be approved by the Member Churches so that the churches take ownership in supporting the plan as formulated by the Member Organizations.

How will the CUSP work?

In the past, each of the six provincial conferences and the national Conference had its own pool of funds and its own board making plans about the spending of those funds, as approved by the church membership. Within the old national bylaw, there was no meeting place created for the seven conference boards and there was no plan to strategically align the cumulative contributions of the MB churches in Canada. With the creation of the National Ministry Team (NMT), leaders from Member Organizations meet regularly to understand the ministry needs, as well as the ability of each organization to assist in addressing those needs. The NMT is able to make assessments and bring ideas to the National Assembly so that collaborative governance of Member Organizations can happen.

With the creation of the National Assembly, all boards of all Member Organizations work together to form the CUSP so that they are comfortable with how their own organizations' plans and budgets will align with the CUSP. It is about creating a process by which all Member Organizations can recommend the CUSP and the related budgets for approval by their membership. For example, when Ontario churches vote on the Ontario conference budget, that budget will include funding for national ministry. Ontario churches also vote to approve the national budget that is funded by all six provincial

conferences to create the national budget. With the CUSP, it becomes a national budget built together and funded together. National and provincial ministry plans and funding are formulated together to create collaboration.

What is the purpose of the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)?

The CCMBC Bylaw cannot control another organization. Each organization is governed by its own operating bylaw. The SPA is a legal agreement between the national Conference and the Member Organization that defines mutual expectations in support of the Collaborative Unified Strategic Plan. By design, the National Assembly formulates the contents of the SPA for each of the Member Organizations in order to create clear and transparent sets of expectations that are consistent for all Member Organizations. As appropriate, the Member Churches will pass any necessary resolutions to approve the signing of the SPA by each of the organizations.

Why are there so many policy documents in the Bylaw?

In efforts to keep the Bylaw clear and simple, external policy documents are used. These policy documents are still approved by the Members. Using external policy documents allows the Conference to organize the rules and procedural details for specific Articles or Sections of the Bylaw while still keeping them public. Typically, policies will need time to evolve and will change more frequently than bylaws. Having separate policy documents will greatly assist in the design and amendment process. For example, while the Bylaw defines the requirements to approve an amendment to the Confession of Faith, the National Faith and Life Team Policy will describe the details of the review and amendment procedures to be followed .

What about relationship and trust?

The MB denomination is often described as a “family”. While bylaws can be used to define rules, the family primarily operates through relationships that require trust. The MB family has not used strong institutional controls over its member churches. Instead, it has tried to focus on its theology and mission to unite the family. The level of engagement of MB churches with the conferences, both provincial and national, has varied. There are many similarities between the individual members engaged in a local congregation and the member churches engaged in the denomination. Individuals do not attend a local church to serve its bylaws. It is a relationship with Jesus and belonging to the family of God that draws them into the church. In the same way, churches are not part of the denomination to serve its bylaws. As the Bride of Christ, the church seeks to be one Body to serve God. Bylaws are not the focus of the denomination. Bylaws are created to assist the denomination in its operations, and they can be changed as needed. Bylaws are not the starting point of ministry; rather, they act as operational documents for giving support and clarity to structures and processes in the denomination.

Who is the “MB Church of Canada”?

A new term, the “MB Church of Canada” is used in the CUSP to describe the collaboration of all parts of the Mennonite Brethren denomination in Canada. The MB Church of Canada is made up of:

- over 30,000 individuals who are members of MB Churches
- over 250 MB Churches that are members of both a provincial MB Conference and the national MB Conference
- 6 provincial MB Conferences that are members of the national MB Conference, and
- 3 other MB organizations that are members of the national MB Conference,

all of whom support the MB Confession of Faith for defining their theological identity. To be part of the MB denomination, or MB Church of Canada, means following the Confession of Faith and being a member of the national Conference that operates under the authority of its members.

Other Important Notes:

Following are a few final points that are not necessarily specific to the Bylaw revisions, but may be helpful reminders when considering the successful implementation of the Collaborative Model:

- **Single Stream Funding:** The Bylaw was not revised to include single stream funding, i.e. the decision that church support for both conferences will go to the provinces who will then fund the national conference. The single stream funding approach is an operational decision that does not need to be included in the bylaw.
- **MB Family Meetings:** A concern has been expressed that using Referenda will reduce the opportunities for the MB family to gather. An annual general meeting, or General Assembly, must still be held each year and will most likely be a virtual meeting. The national Conference is moving towards hosting a study conference every year. Also, more virtual townhall meetings will be hosted by the Conference throughout the year to discuss national matters.
- **Data Points:** Many decisions supporting the design of the Collaborative Model came from national surveys of the churches to understand what was working and what was not. For instance, the idea for single stream funding through the provinces came from church feedback. It is often helpful to remember the history that led to the formation of the new model.
- **Structure and Relationship:** The Task Force that helped to form the Collaborative Model identified the following: *“Instead of a single national organization being responsible for national impact, what if the combined and coordinated outputs of many organizations could be viewed as creating a collective national impact.”* It was identified that both collaborative relationships and supporting structures were needed as the two rails on which the train of mission could run. The alignment of collaborative relationship and supporting structures, side-by-side for the purpose of mission, became the basis of the Collaborative Model.
- **Collective Impact:** The Collaborative Model is based, in part, on the Stanford University model of “Collective Impact”. This is a specific form of collaboration that is created by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication that are supported by a Principal Organization. The model is founded upon the awareness that the work of any individual (or church or organization) toward a common mission has the potential to accomplish much more when efforts are coordinated and combined with other like-minded individuals. There has been substantial research done and many case studies completed that show the effectiveness of this approach. (See <https://ssir.org/>)
- **Think Differently:** The Collaborative Model was birthed in a call to think in new ways. There has been a desire to act more like one conference sharing a common mission that is deployed across many regions by many churches and partner organizations. The old governance model enabled too many silos to form. Silos create independence and weaken the denomination as a whole.
- **Humility:** A critical moment in the formation of the Collaborative Model came at a meeting of the leaders from what are now called Member Organizations – all 7 conferences and 3 MB organizations. At this meeting, there was a shift from “me” to “we”. Instead of asking, “What do I lose by working together?”, the question became, “What do we gain by working together?” Leaders came in humility, willing to serve one another, for the goal of greater kingdom impact.
- **Culture of Collaboration:** On its own, a new governance model is not enough to bring about true collaboration. It begins in a spirit, a desire to work together instead of separately. For the new model to succeed, a culture of collaboration must be built throughout the denomination.