

To the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! We have received your request for a written response to four questions relating to our proposal that Mosaic transition from a member conference status in MC USA to a Program Entity/Ministry Partner. We have prayerfully considered your questions and hope that our responses will further clarify our experiences and pave the way for future partnership around shared vision and mission.

You asked, “What specific problem(s) in the current relationship between Mosaic and the rest of MC USA would [becoming a Program Entity] resolve?”

Mennonite Church USA’s board and staff are aware of the struggles Mosaic has experienced for many years as a member conference of MC USA. Mosaic (and Franconia Conference before it) has reached out to staff and board members on many occasions, asking for changes in the way the denomination is structured and operates. What we have encountered is a lack of desire to fix what has been broken; even when problems are named, little has been done to repair the harm or change unhelpful systems. This includes difficulties with credentialing persons who do not speak English, problems accessing the MLI, global credentialing needs, immigration concerns, use of Mennonite World Conference’s Shared Convictions rather than the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, and times that some of Mosaic BIPOC congregations and leaders have not felt valued or heard.

Communication between MC USA staff and Mosaic staff has been infrequent and, at times, difficult rather than collegial. Instead of taking our feedback seriously, we have frequently felt dismissed and MC USA staff has not taken responsibility for their own missteps in our relationship. We have not experienced the MC USA staff to be open to collaboration; instead, they make and enforce policies more often than seek ways to creatively and flexibly navigate the changing dynamics in the church (such as the impact of globalization and immigration on mission and identity).

Although many congregations and conferences within MC USA have experienced significant loss, pain, and division, MC USA staff and board have not acknowledged those struggles, nor do they change MC USA structures or habits to repair or heal them. At times, MC USA seems more focused on maintaining itself than on supporting its conferences, using its bylaws as justification. As a result, nearly half of MC USA conferences are struggling and reduced resources have led to added stress on MC USA’s staff and systems. We do not want this hemorrhaging entity to further harm Mosaic.

Much of the pain in our relationship with Mennonite Church USA has been borne by BIPOC leaders in our conference. This has continued even with BIPOC leadership staff in MC USA roles. Power has often been used to work towards a dominant “white” priority of sexuality/gender inclusion while not used similarly to address racial-ethnic, immigration, and urban priorities. Some Mosaic BIPOC delegates have not had positive experiences at the MC USA delegate Assembly; it is often difficult to find people who want to attend Convention as it does not feel like safe space (we described some of these dynamics in our letter to the Executive Board in November of 2022). We have experienced MC USA staff and board to privilege a

certain way of being “Mennonite” even when many BIPOC members of our conference have been Mennonites our entire lives. As Mosaic, we are beginning to recognize multiplicities of ways of being Anabaptist and we need structures that support this diversity and don’t (formally or informally) strive for uniformity (what one MC USA staff member called a “boutique denomination”).

Many of us in Mosaic Conference have a long history with MC USA, and its predecessors General Conference and Mennonite Church. We desire to be a part of this community, but the current system is no longer healthy for us. It has become too painful to immerse ourselves in a system that does not seek to change. We long for transformation in our relationship with MC USA, so that we can maintain connection without getting tangled up in struggles over power and authority.

We do not believe that transitioning from a member conference to a Program Entity/Ministry Partner will resolve all of these problems. We do believe that it is our best option given the constraints of MC USA’s structure and cooperation, one that will allow us to maintain relationships with our siblings in MC USA while also constructing boundaries and mutual clarity that will allow both Mosaic and MC USA to flourish.

Becoming a Program Entity/Ministry Partner will enable us to share our gifts and resources with our sibling conferences without the intermediary structures of MC USA staff and board, which has not felt mutual. It will also provide a blank slate, on which we can define healthy parameters and expectations for our relationship with MC USA staff and board moving forward.

Becoming a Program Entity/Ministry Partner will communicate to the BIPOC leaders among us who have experienced harm that their pain matters and that our conference is willing to make significant structural changes to cultivate a community of belonging where we can shape our identity and mission together.

Becoming a Program Entity/Ministry Partner will provide the space that we need to explore new possibilities, including welcoming many new and emerging congregations who desire membership with Mosaic but do not desire to be members in MC USA.

We wonder if you believe Mosaic’s transition to a Program Entity/Ministry Partner would be beneficial to both Mosaic Conference and Mennonite Church USA. If not, what suggestion do you have for an alternative option that does not maintain the pain of the status quo?

You asked, “If this proposal is rooted in disagreements with other parts of MC USA, what steps toward reconciliation has Mosaic taken toward those other parts of the church?”

While we sometimes feel out of place in MC USA gatherings because of the significant demographic shifts we have experienced in the last decade, we have felt supported and loved by many of the executive leaders of other conferences in the years since we have begun this discernment process. We have had many healthy conversations with conference moderators and conference ministers, and we are continuing to schedule one-on-one meetings to listen and discern together. Additionally, Mosaic board and staff have regularly participated in the Constituency Leaders Council, Hope for the Future, conference executive meetings, moderator gatherings, and MC USA delegate assemblies since the beginning of MC USA.

We have come to realize that much of the tension in our relationship with MC USA has been because of unhealthy patterns in the ways we relate with MC USA's executive staff and board. While trying to be informed and engaged members of MC USA when Mosaic was formed in 2020, we were also working to meet the needs of our congregations and credentialed leaders during a pandemic. We were supporting pastors who were birthing churches along relational networks, meeting food scarcity and vaccine needs due to COVID, and working to discern Mosaic's vision and mission. Our first 2 years of existence were very difficult. At times when we asked for support and communicated a need for adjustments, those requests were received as adversarial.

In November 2022, we communicated with the MC USA board in writing and followed this up with a conversation with the executive board in January of 2023. Later that year, we had multiple conversations between Mosaic and MC USA staff members exploring options for a future relationship. MC USA and Mosaic moderators have continued those conversations in 2024 and 2025.

Reconciliation and navigating conflict are one of the five pillars of our strategic plan. We have been actively looking for opportunities for shared mission and ministry with MC USA. We value MC USA's leadership in filing the lawsuit to protect worshiping space as a sensitive location and we are grateful for the ways we have been able to work together in recent months to collect and provide immigration resources.

At the same time, we find that at times the staff and board of MC USA respond to us with irritation rather than collaboration. We requested in our open letter to the executive board for MC USA staff to lean in during our discernment process. Instead, MC USA staff have rarely responded proactively. We asked for additional accompaniment for leaders of color in our conference who felt excluded and unvalued; this did not happen. We asked for prayer and storytelling, for times of silence and discernment, but instead have received press releases and antagonism. We asked for help in discerning a way forward but have been largely left to figure this out on our own and then defend our proposals. We long for a curious, consistent, and responsive engagement from MC USA staff and board.

We wonder how you would describe your steps toward reconciliation with Mosaic. What further actions would you propose for continued work at reconciliation between Mosaic and MC USA's leadership?

You asked, "What specific 'programs and services that carry out specific churchwide goals' (MC USA Bylaws Article X.1) would Mosaic plan to provide?"

We suggest collaboration on shared vision and core priorities including intercultural leadership development, church planting accompaniment, and youth faith formation. This includes participation and resourcing for Hope for the Future gatherings, translation services, contributing staff time to MC USA's Hispanic Ministries education initiative, providing participants for MC USA's racial-ethnic constituency councils, contributing Menno Snapshot articles on faith formation and intercultural best practices, and local and global church planting accompaniment.

We wonder what other gifts you recognize in Mosaic that you would like to see offered to the broader church community. In what shared vision and mission do you desire Mosaic's accompaniment?

You asked, “How does this address those congregations within Mosaic that seek to remain members in MC USA?”

We find this question to be ironic and a bit problematic. You acknowledged to us that in “MC USA’s current bylaws, a program entity does not provide a pathway for congregations to hold membership in the denomination.” It feels paternalistic for you to ask us to fix a problem that you are responsible for creating.

The reality is that our congregations will not be able to remain members in MC USA without a willingness to create a path forward on your part. Our desire is for any of our congregations who wish to do so to maintain a direct membership status with MC USA. Since MC USA has indicated an unwillingness to make the changes in your bylaws to make this possible, we have been exploring other possibilities. While we have been in conversations with other conferences about providing additional membership, many of our congregations have indicated that the requirements of multiple memberships could be overwhelming. They will pursue that path if it is their only option, but they request that MC USA consider opening another avenue for membership.

A Program Entity/Ministry Partner relationship would allow Mosaic congregations and Conference Related Ministries to stay connected to other MC USA conferences and agencies. It will provide a path forward for congregations who internally can’t agree on whether they desire to be members of MC USA, so they don’t have to “choose sides.” Congregations will be able to support the vision and mission of both Mosaic and MC USA.

We wonder how you would suggest welcoming more direct participation for congregations who want a connection to MC USA. What does membership in MC USA provide for them beyond what they would receive in a partnership relationship?

This is God’s church, and we are all part of God’s family: one body with many parts. We believe Jesus is what unites us and that we are called to serve one another and love even our enemies. We desire to be recognized as a part of the peace church, and we believe that we share with MC USA a missional call to work together towards shalom and God’s ongoing reign. We hope that by redefining our relationship with MC USA as Ministry Partners, we will be able to preserve the unity of the church while cultivating space for our diversity to thrive.

We acknowledge that we are broken and we are beautiful. We long for transformation in our relationship with MC USA. We invite you to work and hope with us.

In Christ,

Angela Moyer Walter & Roy Williams, Moderators,
on behalf of the Mosaic Conference Board