



# The Shepherd's Staff

## Church Membership/Ministry Tracking Instrument

### Introduction

The study and discernment process initiated by the Resources Commission of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada around issues of church membership has revealed that there is need for instruments designed to help congregations track their membership and design their ministry. This need arises due to many factors some of which are:

1. **Mobility:** Our process reveals that our members are mobile. There is permanent and temporary displacement due to job, study, family, and other factors.
2. **Inter-denominational loyalty:** Church attendance and membership are increasingly influenced more by service offered to the attendee and the accessibility of these services than by denominational loyalty. It is not uncommon to attend the church in the neighborhood rather than attend a church because of denominational commitment.
3. **Tradition, History, and Belonging:** Some prefer to maintain contact with the home congregation long after they have left that congregation. This contact is often most keenly symbolized by continued membership in that congregation, even if membership does not translate into participation.
4. **Relevance of Services offered:** There are large numbers of people who wish to make use of serviced offered by congregations without becoming a part of that congregation. Some of these include: children's Sunday school and clubs, parents' time out, day-care centres, health facilities, etc. There are thus a large number of users who do not wish to be connected formally with the congregation.
5. **Reluctance to Formalize Commitments:** There are increasing numbers of people who wish to be active in the life of the congregation but are reluctant to formalize that participation through baptism and membership.

It should be understood that a concern for understanding and tracking Church membership/ministry is not legalism, bureaucracy, administration, or a simple concern about numbers. It is first and foremost a concern for faithfulness. Christian/Mennonite teachings, such as communal process, mutual accountability, covenant, ethics, and witness, move the Church to clarify questions of membership and ministry. The diverse life-situations of our people require variations in ministerial strategy on the part of the congregation.

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This tracking instrument is designed as a tool for ministry and greater faithfulness. It is an instrument of discernment that can lead to more effective strategic planning in ministry. It is with these purposes that it is presented to the churches.

### **Compatibilities**

1. Is fully compatible with suggestions and perspectives in the study document *Naming the Sheep*.
2. Is fully integrated with data gathering process of the Mennonite Integrated Directory.

### **Benefits of the tracking instrument procedures**

1. These procedures allow shifting members' names from one list to another, but do not allow removing names altogether, i.e., archival list. Only in the case of non-members (lists 9, 10, 11) could a name be removed entirely.
2. These procedures create helpful, understandable, flexible and useful categories. Each congregation can decide for itself how to use these lists. For example:
  - congregational pictorial directories might include list #s 4, 7, 8;
  - conference membership statistics might be taken from list #s 4, 7;
  - congregational newsletters might be sent to list #s 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11;
  - outreach activities and visitation programs might keep in mind list #s 5, 6, 9, 10, 11;
  - the regular participants in the Lord's Supper would be those on list #7;
  - those expected to vote at annual meetings and be considered delegates to conferences would be on list #7.
3. Church celebrations and liturgy could be designed to recognize the contributions and needs of the people in each category. Some might include:
  - Births
  - Baptisms and membership transfers
  - Child dedications
  - Covenantal celebrations
  - Recognition of participants
  - Hospitality days to patrons/clients and seekers
  - Memorial services for the deceased
  - Intercession for the partners
  - Contact days for the adherents and seekers
  - Special courses for seekers
  - Information events for patron/clients seekers

# **The Shepherd's Staff**

*A church membership and ministry tracking instrument*

## **Church Membership/Ministry Tracking Instrument**

### **1. Archival List**

- A list indicating all who are or ever have been a member in that congregation. Names can be added to but never subtracted from this list.

### **2. Membership Transfer or Former Member List**

- Those on the archival list whose membership has been formally transferred away from the congregation where documentation of transfer is available.

### **3. Death of Member List**

- Those on the archival list who are known to have died.

### **4. Partner Member List**

- Those on the archival list who are temporarily away from the congregation and are not able to participate in congregational life for this reason.
- This assumes that these members are active in a congregation in their new location during their time of absence.

### **5. Affiliate List**

- Those on the archival list who for geographic or other factors are not presently attending or active in the life of the home congregation and have not covenanted with any other congregation, but who wish to maintain some arms-length connection with their congregation.

### **6. Cessation List**

- Those on the archival list whose membership has been ended for whatever reason.

### **7. Covenanted List**

- Those on the archival list who are present and actively committed to the life of the congregation.

### **8. Associate List**

- Those who wish to become members without relinquishing membership in another congregation.

### **9. Participant/Adherent List**

- Those not on the archival list but who are active participants in the life of the congregation.
- This list includes non-baptized children and youth.

### **10. Patron/Client List**

- Those who make use of some of the services or programs of the congregation but do not get involved in or commit to the life of the congregation itself. Examples might be parents who send children to club and Sunday-School programs without attending any functions themselves, or those making use of day-care facilities, etc.

### **11. Seeker/Explorer List**

- Those who may not be attending regularly but who have expressed interest in exploring and understanding the Christian/Mennonite faith and wish to be contacted regularly.