

# The Operating Guidelines of the Yarrow MB Church

September 2017 Draft

## Introduction

The Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church refers to the followers of Jesus Christ who meet on a regular basis at the building on 41995 Yarrow Central Road in Yarrow, British Columbia, Canada, where the group has been meeting since 1929. There are many words to refer to this group of people, such as *congregation*, *fellowship*, or *church*, all of which are appropriate. Along with these words, the term, *Yarrow MB*, will be used throughout this document, as will the first-person plural, *we* and *our*. Also, where the word *Church* is used in its capitalized form, we will be referring to the universal and historic body of Christ, of which we see ourselves as a local expression.

## Vision Statement

In 2013, Yarrow MB affirmed the following: “Our vision is to glorify God through the power of the Holy Spirit by introducing people to Jesus, discipling each other in our faith, and equipping each other for service.”

## Purpose

It is the purpose of these operating guidelines to help us fulfill this vision in ways that are practical and give honour to God and each other.

## Article #1: Identity: The Body of Christ, Affiliation and Ministry Partnership

1) The Body of Christ: At Yarrow MB, we teach that all followers of Jesus are members of the body of Christ. Practically, this means that we work at unity with the broader body of Christ and wherever possible we seek to cooperate with other churches. This also informs our practice of Communion as a table that is open to every person in our gatherings who professes to be a follower of Jesus. Every such follower will be expected, and taught, to function faithfully as a member of Christ’s body. Those who discern a sense of belonging to Yarrow MB will be invited to participate in all aspects of our common life and encouraged to exhibit a lifestyle of integrity, humility and mutual accountability. The primary basis for our unity in Christ and our fellowship with one another is our faith in Jesus.

2) Affiliation: Yarrow MB is affiliated with the British Columbia Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches ([bcmb.org](http://bcmb.org)), as well as the Canadian Conference of MB Churches ([mennonitebrethren.ca](http://mennonitebrethren.ca)). As such, we are also affiliated with the International Community of MBs ([icomb.org](http://icomb.org)). This affiliation reflects our agreement with the MB Confession of Faith (see [mennonitebrethren.ca/resource/the-mb-confession-of-faith-detailed-edition/](http://mennonitebrethren.ca/resource/the-mb-confession-of-faith-detailed-edition/)). We

recognize that our congregation benefits from this affiliation through access to various resources and services, i.e., leadership training and credentialing, administrative and legal support, camp ministry, publications, national and global mission opportunities, etc. Likewise, we take the responsibility seriously to be active within the MB Conference and to regularly contribute financial and moral support.

3) Ministry Partnership: According to our Constitution, we are required by law to have some way to identify voting members of our church. Article #2 states: “the members are those who have been accepted by Yarrow MB according to the established operating guidelines.” Thus, herein we define and identify members as *ministry partners*, namely those who have decided to formally identify themselves with Yarrow MB and with the MB denomination at broad. We do this in order not to confuse between the spiritual reality of membership in Christ’s body and temporal reality of membership in a formal and legal entity such as Yarrow MB. However, we do acknowledge that this practice provides us with the legal and practical guidelines for certain aspects of our governance, namely when a corporate decision requires ratification by a majority vote. Therefore, for those in our congregation who desire to become ministry partners, there are two basic requirements, notably adult baptism and agreement with the MB Confession of Faith.

Anyone interested in becoming a ministry partner at Yarrow MB will be interviewed by the elders. All those who have, in effect, already attained this standing by virtue of our former practice of church membership will be acknowledged as already being ministry partners. However, from the time when the new Operating Guidelines are ratified, in order to maintain this standing, each person will be required to renew it every three years in the month of June with our church office.

The only roles within our church that require the standing of ministry partner are Elders and Staff. All other roles are open to anyone who professes to be a follower of Jesus.

4) Summary: At Yarrow MB, we embrace all followers of Jesus as members of the body of Christ and we see it as our corporate responsibility to challenge every follower of Jesus in our midst to be faithful to Christ and to his Church. Those who discern a sense of belonging to Yarrow MB will be invited to participate in all aspects of our common life and encouraged to exhibit a lifestyle of integrity, humility and mutual accountability. Those who desire to take on voting responsibilities within our church and who seek to identify with the MB Conference of Churches will have the opportunity to become ministry partners, based upon two requirements: adult baptism and agreement with the MB Confession of Faith.

## Article #2: Foundational Practices and Meetings

1) Baptism: We believe that baptism is a public sign of faith and obedience in the life of the Christ-follower and that it also signifies a commitment to discipleship and an allegiance with the Church, the body of Christ. We teach that baptism should always include both of these elements – personal and communal. We would like to be a church body that

practically embraces the significance of baptism in light of the Scriptural teaching and actively seeks to baptize people who display a sincere readiness to follow Christ in this way.

2) Communion: We celebrate the Lord's Supper typically once per month during a Sunday morning worship service. We celebrate Communion at a table that is open to every person in our gatherings who professes to be a follower of Jesus. The Deacons are responsible to prepare and distribute the elements. Anyone from the congregation can be designated by the Elders or Worship Director to lead the Communion service.

3) Weekly, Monthly and Occasional Meetings: Our common practice is to meet weekly for corporate worship services on Sunday morning. There are occasional special services for teaching, prayer and/or worship. We celebrate the Lord's Supper together once per month. Baptism services take place whenever possible.

4) Quarterly: Our Ministry Team Leaders meet every three months for prayer and sharing. Each Ministry Team is responsible to send a representative from the team (their Leader or point-person), so that there can be effective interaction with the elders and the other teams. The elders give leadership to these meetings wherein there is sharing, planning, and prayer.

5) Annual: Our Annual General Meeting takes place at the end of May and our Annual Business Meeting takes place at the end of January. The elders give leadership to these meetings.

### Article #3: Elders

1) Role: A team of elders, ideally 5-7, gives leadership to the church. These elders meet regularly (at least monthly) to read Scripture together, pray and discuss church concerns. As needed, people from the church, including staff, can also attend the elder's meetings for special prayer or sharing of concerns. Each staff member is accountable to the team of elders. Each elder is responsible for several Ministry Teams and is encouraged to be available to the respective Ministry Teams for support, counsel and encouragement.

2) Terms of Service: Elders serve for four-year terms with the possibility of serving two consecutive terms. If an elder desires to continue as an elder after serving two consecutive terms, they would be required to take one full year off.

3) Selection and Affirmation: When an elder's term is approaching its end, and they have decided not to continue for a second term, the elders will communicate this to the congregation and make a call for nominations. Each person who makes a nomination must approach the individual and ask them personally to give their consent. If the nominee consents to letting their name stand, their name should be presented to the current team of elders. After the elders discuss the list of nominees, they will interview the nominees before

names are presented to the congregation. To be affirmed as a new elder (or to continue as an elder for a second term), the nominee must be affirmed both by the current team of elders (unanimously) and by the congregation (75% vote).

4) Resignation: If at any time, and for whatever reason, an elder resigns from their role, the above procedure should be followed, unless the current elders decide that they would rather continue without replacing that elder.

5) Eligibility: The role of elders is open to both men and women who meet the Biblical qualifications of elders as expressed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Elders must also be ministry partners in good standing.

#### Article #4: Ministry Teams/Committees

1) Ministry Teams: There are various ministries in the church that require a team to serve effectively. As a congregation, we seek to affirm these ministries and to provide the encouragement and support necessary to see them thrive. Each Ministry Team, or Committee, is empowered to make decisions regarding their sphere of ministry in the church. Each elder is responsible for a number of Ministry Teams and will offer support and direction as needed. As well, each Ministry Team is accountable to a particular elder for their ministry and can rely on that elder for support and direction as needed.

2) Ministry Team Leaders: Each Ministry Team should choose a Leader or point-person who will represent the team at Ministry Team Leaders meetings four times in a year. The Leader may also choose to designate leadership responsibilities to others on the Team as the Team sees fit.

3) Nominations: When Ministry Teams desire to add people to their team, they should nominate people who would be suitable to serve alongside them. Responsible elders should help with this process when necessary. All nominations are communicated to the elders and, if approved, would be affirmed by a simple majority vote by the church. Once a year, at the Annual General Meeting, nominations will be gathered for new positions and team members will be voted on and affirmed as required. Leaders, or point-persons, will also be affirmed at this time. If necessary, nominations can also be put forth during the year and voting procedures followed at the next available congregational meeting. All roles on Ministry Teams, except Elders and Deacons, will be affirmed for one-year terms.

4) Deacons: The role of deacons is open to both men and women who meet the Biblical qualifications of deacons as expressed in 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6. Deacons are affirmed for three-year terms and are eligible to serve any number of consecutive terms.

#### Article #5: Staff

1) Roles: All staff and contract roles are approached on an as-needed basis according to the needs and desires of the church. Detailed job descriptions will be created and presented for each new role, and each role will be reviewed on a regular basis. All candidates for staff roles need to be approved by the elders and affirmed by a 75% majority vote by the congregation.

## Article #6: Making Decisions

1) Open Dialogue: We believe that God's Spirit works through the community. Therefore, we seek to practice open dialogue when facing decisions as a community. We respect and value everyone's perspective, and therefore we want to encourage people to both express their views and to listen carefully to the views of others.

2) Elders: The elders have been affirmed to make decisions regarding the well being of the church. This role is taken seriously and all such decisions are committed to sincere prayer and careful discussion. The elders operate by consensus – all decisions require unanimous agreement. When deemed appropriate, the elders will seek counsel from others and initiate open dialogue to gain perspective and understanding on the decision.

3) Voting: When church decisions require a vote, the elders will call a congregational meeting. All votes require only a simple majority (50%), except where specified, such as 75% for the voting in of elders and staff.

## Article #7: Resolving Conflict

1) Love and Forgiveness: We believe that conflict between people is inevitable, but we also affirm that love and forgiveness are the trademark characteristics of those who follow Jesus. Therefore, we actively seek to make peace between each other and to resolve our conflicts in a way that honours God. Whenever appropriate, we believe in open confession and accountability. We value humility, integrity, repentance and restitution.

## Article #8: Amending Operating Guidelines

1) Anyone may propose an amendment to the Operating Guidelines by submitting it in writing to the elders. The elders will review the proposed amendment and, if approved, will present it at the next congregational meeting. Amendments must be affirmed by a 50% majority vote.