

## **Western District Conference Annual Delegate Assembly 2022**

### **Recommendation to receive Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Casa de Paz, Guatemala City, Guatemala, as a member congregation of Western District Conference:**

From the WDC Constitution: ...*"Congregations may apply for membership by submitting, in writing to the Executive Board, not less than 30 days before the Delegate Assembly, a brief history of the congregation and description of present activities, a membership covenant or statement of faith and constitution adopted by the group, and other helpful documents such as an annual report and a list of charter members. Congregations are encouraged to have at least ten members before seeking membership. The Executive Board will make a recommendation to the Delegate Assembly. The vote for acceptance into the Western District Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority of all delegate votes cast."*

Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Casa de Paz (House of Peace Christian Anabaptist Church) began in July 2015 to bear witness to peace and service in the context of Guatemala, under the direction of Pastor Gilberto Flores, a retired credentialed minister in Western District Conference. The congregation currently has 30 members and 5 children, with additional online attendees. They meet weekly for worship on the campus of SEMILLA, a Latin American seminary located in Guatemala City, with online worshipers also attending virtually.

Casa de Paz affirms its convictions within the general framework of the Anabaptist family of churches, and subscribes to the *Shared Convictions* of Mennonite World Conference - <https://mwc-cmm.org/shared-convictions>. In their membership covenant, members of Casa de Paz promise to help and encourage each other to walk together in Christian love, contribute according to the blessings received from God, cultivate spiritual practices, honor the value of people without discrimination, bear witness to the presence of Christ in word and deed, and care for each other with mutuality and reconciliation.

Casa de Paz grew out of Pastor Flores' vision shared with the WDC Executive Board in 2015 when he retired from serving as an Associate Conference Minister in WDC, and moved back to Guatemala. His vision was for WDC to develop a church-to-church connection in Central America to build resource opportunities for leaders and pastors, nurture awareness of theology and mission, and support Anabaptist church planting, while maintaining accountability and credentialing within WDC. The Executive Board affirmed further exploration of Pastor Flores' proposal, and the Church Planting Commission carried on conversation and connections with Pastor Flores for several years.

WDC leadership consulted with Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Mission Network about the process of considering a member congregation outside of the United States, since Mennonite Mission Network is designated to navigate international relationships and partnerships for MC USA. In further conversation between WDC leadership and Casa de Paz, it was clarified that Casa de Paz is not a mission project of WDC but is an independent congregation seeking to have a direct church-to-church relationship with WDC not mediated through a mission agency. Casa de Paz has positive relationships with other Mennonite church groups in Guatemala, but chose to join WDC because they determined this aligns best with how Casa de Paz practices Anabaptist theology, provides a strong base for credentialing and leadership support, and naturally builds on the relationship already existing between pastor Gilberto Flores and WDC. Since Casa de Paz is not in the United States, it will not be recognized by MC USA as a member of MC USA or send delegates to MC USA assemblies, but

Casa de Paz will participate as a full member of WDC and WDC will hold credentials for ministers at Casa de Paz.

In 2021 it was determined that Casa de Paz had moved from being a church plant to being an established congregation, and could apply directly for membership in WDC to formalize a fraternal and structural relationship with WDC. At the WDC annual delegate assembly in 2021, Casa de Paz was introduced with the intention to apply for membership during the coming year.

On March 24, 2022, the WDC Executive Board reviewed membership application materials from Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Casa de Paz, Guatemala, City, and approved bringing a recommendation to WDC delegates to receive Casa de Paz as a member congregation of WDC.