

## Vision and Structure

### WHAT IS GOD'S SPIRIT CALLING US TO IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY? Future Directions Task Force Summary

After considerable consultation, testing, and prayer, the Future Directions Task Force finds most support for a simpler, sounder, and more integrated understanding of church as outlined below. For details, please see our *Final Report* and *The Backstory*.

#### VISION

##### Revitalizing and Enriching **Local Congregations**

The congregation is the primary setting for worship, witnessing to our faith as intergenerational and intercultural communities, and working together to embody God's justice, peace, and reconciliation. We envision local congregations as sources of inspiration, challenge, and Christian community. Pastors and other congregational leaders nurture the Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and theology of their congregations, empowering them as the church gathered and sent--living out their faith and mission to follow Jesus and inviting others to follow.

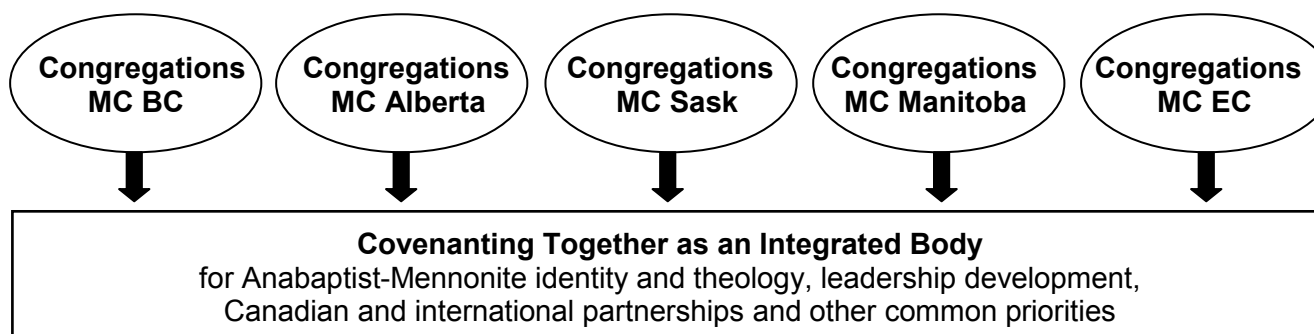
##### **Regional Churches** as Catalysts for Mission

We envision regional church bodies that encourage, inspire, and resource local congregations for the work God calls them to. The regional church empowers gifted leadership, credentials pastors, encourages congregational leadership teams, fosters relationships between diverse congregations through regional assemblies and common ministries of peace, healing, and hope (e.g., Indigenous relations, church planting, advocacy for the marginalized).

##### Regions Covenant as an **Integrated Body** for Canadian and Global Partnerships

We envision regions covenanting to work together on existing and new Canadian and international partnerships, with common priorities in mission, leadership development and Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and theology, as well as common group benefit plans and other supports for congregations. A Congregation of Ministerial Leaders will bring together pastors, perhaps with other congregational leaders and educators from across Canada for networking, encouragement, formation, and sharing their wisdom.

#### INTEGRATED STRUCTURE





## Frequently Asked Questions

### WHAT IS GOD'S SPIRIT CALLING US TO IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY? Future Directions Task Force Summary

#### ***1. In what way is the proposed vision different from what we have now?***

The proposed vision sharpens our focus on revitalizing and energizing congregations in mission, with regions as catalysts and supporters of congregations, working together as regions across Canada on Anabaptist-Mennonite identity and common priorities. It expresses the vision statement: God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

#### ***2. In what way is the proposed structure different from what we have now?***

Currently congregations are members of both an area church and a national body. The proposal is that congregations would be members of a regional body only, with the regional bodies covenanting together on nation-wide and international missions, as well as common program strategies and support services. The new structure invites congregations to engage more closely with the work of the larger church, and for the larger church to engage more closely with congregations.

#### ***3. What would be the common national initiatives that we would work together on?***

Our report identifies: Anabaptist-Mennonite Identity, Leadership Development including our post-secondary schools, Resource Centre, Indigenous Relations, International Partnerships, Support Services like Communication and benefit plans for congregations. We also propose a Congregation of Ministerial Leaders that would bring together pastors, congregational leaders, and educators for networking, encouragement, formation, and sharing their wisdom.

#### ***4. Where are the cost savings in this model?***

The proposed Transition Team will need to work on final staffing, budget, and governance decisions, with greater sustainability coming from:

- o A significantly smaller national staff,
- o A smaller national board and phasing out current program councils,
- o Greater cost efficiencies from more closely aligned regional and national programming,
- o Cost efficiencies by developing common communication and other program supports,
- o Linking international witness commitments to confirmations of call from congregations along with commitments for financing,
- o A clear expectation that all initiatives have specific goals and time-lines, accompanied by tangible measures and accountability.

#### ***5. What are the next steps?***



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Area church leaders and the General Board of the national church have approved this report in principle and commended to Area Churches for consideration before bringing it to Assembly 2016 for final decision. We continue to pray, receive feedback, refine details, and wait for national and area church delegates to respond at their annual meetings. If approved, a Transition Team would be appointed to implement this proposal.



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## **WHAT IS GOD'S SPIRIT CALLING US TO IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY?**

### **Future Directions Task Force Final Report**

#### **GOD'S SPIRIT IS MOVING**

Two nurses coordinate shifts so they can share lunch together and watch a you-tube video about rediscovering what life would look like with Jesus as the centre. Their discussion continues even during their next break.

Although most people at First Mennonite Church choose to worship on Sunday mornings, other times of community worship are regularly offered, and revised annually, to help encourage connection and discipleship in the midst of people's diverse schedules.

An early morning jogger listens to a podcast sermon from a local Mennonite church about current violence in the world and what it means to love our enemies. An email address follows to contact the nearest Anabaptist small group.

A public transit commuter glances at the daily text message and is reminded that the Spirit of God is at work among those who know Christ and in the world at large.

Broadway Mennonite Church has become more and more open to its surrounding neighborhood with many community activities taking place in the church building. Among the active participants, only a handful have any kind of historic Mennonite heritage, with the majority from many different ethnicities and diverse backgrounds. Together, they form a welcoming and energized faith community.

Anabaptist community members regularly participate in missional teams both locally and internationally. A website lists a rich variety of options that are updated regularly.

Reflecting the ethnic diversity of Anabaptist communities of worship, multicultural teams provide the necessary leadership.



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Clusters of Anabaptist Christ followers form around shared activities and events, like hosting faith conversations with spiritual seekers, playing hockey, gathering in coffee shops, taking morning walks in shopping malls.

Persons who have been in Anabaptist community all their lives are freshly invigorated by the experience and testimonies of newer Anabaptists.

Calloused hands and tender hearts share good work and conversation during weekly service projects.

The church is changing. Some things we have not yet imagined will emerge. Some things we have always done will fade. In this final report of the Future Directions Task Force, we set out both strengths to build on and recommendations for creatively engaging God's calling. For further details and background considerations leading to this report, please see *The Backstory*. God's Spirit is moving, and the future of the Anabaptist Mennonite expression of Christian faith and ministry will be a movement of Christ followers with

***Vibrant faith    Renewed community    Creative mission***

## **STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON<sup>1</sup>**

1. Grounded in Scripture as inspired by God and spoken to in our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, three core convictions have been treasured by Anabaptist Mennonites: 1) **Jesus** is the centre of our faith; 2) **Community** is the centre of our lives; 3) **Reconciliation** is the centre of our work.
2. Our identity as an **'upside-down' kingdom people** means sharing the good news of Jesus and extending the peace and reconciling love of God to all people; nurturing followers of Jesus to grow in relationship with God; cultivating loving, caring and praying Christian communities; living out our faith in Jesus as a people of integrity, with simplicity, and generosity in sharing time, talents, money and goods.
3. The **congregation** is the foundational unit and expression of God's work in the world and the primary setting for worship, being a caring community, discernment, and mission. At the same time, because the body of Christ is not limited to any one congregation, for most effective mutual support and witness, congregations are best served by partnering together in congregational clusters, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

## **CREATIVELY ENGAGING GOD'S CALLING<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>For more detail, see *The Backstory*, pp. 4 - 5.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 6 - 10



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**4. We envision vital and spiritually healthy congregations** led by gifted, empowered and inspired leaders. Together they:

- **Invite all to follow Jesus**, whether for a first-time commitment or renewal, for those outside of the church, within it, and on the margins;
- Draw near to God in **worship and prayer**;
- Find new and creative ways to engage young, middle and older people in **forming faith**, increasing biblical literacy, and enhancing their sense of Christian community and identity;
- Nurture a **loving and caring community** of support;
- **Partner with other congregations** for mutual support, resourcing, and accountability;
- Encourage **Individuals and families** to take part in worship, faith studies at home, small groups and congregational programs using existing and creative new resource materials;
- Engage in **missional outreach initiatives** to share the good news of Jesus beyond our faith communities, and to encourage young, middle and older people to align themselves with God's activity in addressing injustice and working together with disadvantaged and disempowered people;
- Encourage and develop **different leadership gifts** for ministry; and
- **Affirm people** for their commitment of faith and generosity of spirit, time, energy and resources.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

**5. To support and encourage vital and spiritually healthy congregations, we envision each region as a catalyst to:**<sup>3</sup>

- Encourage **congregational clustering to share** information, support one another and imagine together where joint mission might be undertaken;
- Encourage 'missional catalyst teams' of volunteers to bring **creative new ideas for mission/service** aligned with God's activity in the world;
- Encourage **ministerial leadership teams** in all congregations including those who are more experienced and younger, men and women, paid and unpaid;
- Establish **best practices in discerning, calling, training, and empowering gifted leadership** both paid and unpaid;
- Establish criteria and accountability for **credentialing**;
- Encourage **greater diversity** (ethnic, racial, economic) within congregations and through congregational partnerships.
- Support **development of alternative, innovative models** of being congregation to complement more traditional models.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 10 - 13



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6. We envision that our current model of area churches and a national church working independently be replaced by a **simpler and integrated body with regions covenanting to work together** on common priorities including to:

- Proclaim that **the good news of Jesus** is the reconciliation of the whole world. Towards that end, our task is to **facilitate domestic and international opportunities** that engage young, middle and older people in witness/service that extends the peace and reconciling love of God beyond our congregations.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage **church schools and camps** as an intentional resource for congregations in creatively shaping faith and identity of children through adults, developing leaders, engaging mission beyond our communities and learning from each other through exchanging ideas and collaborating across Canada.<sup>5</sup>
- Develop and maintain a **common virtual Resource Centre and network** that curates content for Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, age-appropriateness and other criteria, with the capacity to facilitate idea and information exchange networks;
- Form a **Congregation of Ministerial Leadership**, a collegial gathering of paid and unpaid ministers (i.e., members of the congregational ministerial leadership teams), perhaps with individuals from church schools and other bodies involved in theological study and leadership development, that meets regularly (e.g. biannually) for purposes of studying ethical and theological issues, fellowship, networking, discerning vision on theological matters the denomination might consider, mutual encouragement and support;<sup>6</sup>
- Create an **integrated Ministerial Leadership Development plan and program**, focusing on the formation and training of both paid and unpaid ministerial leaders for diverse congregations;<sup>7</sup>
- Provide consultation and deliver **support services** to regions and congregations on human resources, governance, legal issues, finances (e.g., pension plans), etc., possibly with an arms-length Support Services Agency.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

7. To **integrate the work** we do together, we envision a simpler, sustainable structure where:<sup>8</sup>

- Each **congregation is a member of a region**, to which it sends delegates for annual assemblies for worship, inspiration, setting regional direction, etc.;
- **Regional leaders meet together regularly** for aligning vision, theological identity and programming;

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<sup>4</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 13 - 16

<sup>5</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 16 - 18

<sup>6</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 18

<sup>7</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 19 - 20

<sup>8</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 22 - 24





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- An **Executive Minister** works with an integrated board to provide spiritual oversight and vision for mission, including development and pursuit of common priorities, and to represent our collective voice in ecumenical relationships and international partnerships;
- An **integrated identity** reflected in name, logo, and web presence;
- An **effective communication plan** with a unified flow between congregations and the integrated body;<sup>9</sup>
- A unified flow of **financial resources**, with a covenant determining the allocation of regional/national/international initiatives, with some consideration of an equalization of resources to make similar programs possible across the regions and opportunity for congregations to allocate funds to specific programs.
- A **covenant** to pursue common priorities with room for regional variation, allocation of financial resources, mutual accountability, etc.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

To prepare transition plans and finalize organizational arrangements we recommend a **Transition Team** of 1-3 constituents, led by a chair, be appointed conjointly by area and national church moderators. The transition process led by the Team, working with 7 senior staff (1 from each area church [presumably the Executive Director] plus 2 from the national church) would prepare the covenant and transition plan (including details of program transitions, staffing and budgeting) within 6-12 months for final approval by our existing area and national boards; implementation of transition plan to take place within 2 years. More detail is provided in *The Backstory*.

As a Future Directions Task Force, we respectfully submit this report with our **prayers for the present and future church**. May God's Spirit continue to guide us as we seek to follow Jesus, and may God be glorified in our congregations, wider church and world. **Amen.**

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<sup>9</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 20 - 22





## Future Directions Task Force

### Formed by:

Mennonite Church Alberta  
Mennonite Church British Columbia  
Mennonite Church Canada  
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada  
Mennonite Church Manitoba  
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan

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# What is God's Spirit Calling Us To in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? The Backstory

## PREFACE

*What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are the best ways for the church to thrive and grow?*

These questions framed the *Terms of Reference* for the Future Directions Task Force set up by joint action of leaders from Mennonite Church (MC) – Eastern Canada, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Canada in late 2012. There was concern that programs, services and structures once serving the church well were no longer sustainable emotionally or financially in the rapidly changing context of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was time to ask: how should we as a people of faith respond? Six objectives for the task force were to:

- *Take stock of the various factors affecting the work of the church,*
- *Discern broad directions where God's Spirit seems to be calling the church,*
- *Identify particular opportunities for church growth as communities of grace, joy and peace,*
- *Articulate a robust set of program emphases for the church at its various levels to thrive and grow,*
- *Identify strategies and structures to sustain proposed program emphases for the foreseeable future, and*
- *Formulate recommendations on these for MC – Canada, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Eastern Canada.*

From its first meeting in February 2013 on, the Task Force has sought to prayerfully discern directions through its research, and through consultation with our constituency across Canada and outside sources. Along the way we prepared two interim reports plus presentations for testing at plenary and workshop discussions at area church gatherings, Assembly 2014, meetings with special interest groups and others (see: <http://www.commonword.ca/Browse/2092>). These provided a rich array of source materials and thoughtful feedback. We thank all who gave of their time and insights.

Our final report builds on earlier reports, notably the *Interim Report* (October 2013) and *God, Mission and a People* (February 2015). It is in two parts – a brief main report that points to directions and emphases we commend to the body; and, this supplement which details some of the background considerations leading to the main report.



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Our church is changing. It's an exciting time. We invite God's blessing as together we pursue God's mission in unity of spirit.

**What is God's Spirit Calling Us To in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

**The Backstory**

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## INTRODUCTION

We know that the North American context and culture, and Christianity within it, is in the midst of immense change. Conversations with and feedback from hundreds of our constituents across Canada these past two years shows broad understanding that old assumptions about the place of church in society have changed. Contributing factors and effects on congregations have been spoken to in previous reports.<sup>1</sup>

We also know this isn't the first time the Church has experienced a change of this magnitude. The most recent convulsion of similar scale arguably was the Protestant reformation and Catholic counter-reformation 500 years ago<sup>2</sup> out of which our Anabaptist Mennonite movement emerged. Others occurred in earlier millenia – a part of "God's way of working in a messed up world ... always working toward blessing and reconciliation."<sup>3</sup>

So we ask what is God calling us to in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, confident we have a part to play in the continuing drama. The Church is the Body of Christ, with all parts vital in God's mission—congregations, conferences of congregations, agencies, cross-denominational partnerships, and other expressions – and we as an Anabaptist Mennonite people bring a distinct voice to the church universal (see next section).

Central to this question is how we Anabaptist Mennonites understand the congregation. In our first report<sup>4</sup> we framed this as: the congregation is the foundational unit and expression of God's work in the world – the primary setting for worshiping, forming disciples, belonging to and participating in a caring community, and for holistic witness beyond the church doors.<sup>5</sup> But, it is equally our conviction that congregations should be part of larger communities, partnering together in clusters and in conferences, regional,

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<sup>1</sup> See *God, Mission and a People* (2 Feb 2015), and also *FDTF Plenary 2: Rethinking Strategies: The 'How' and 'What'* by Aldred Neufeldt, Chad Miller and Rebecca Steiner (<http://www.commonword.ca/Browse/2092>).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, *The Great Emergence – How Christianity is Changing and Why* by Phyllis Tickle (Baker Books, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> *FDTF Plenary 1: Rethinking Foundations: The "Who" and "Why" of "We"* by April Yamasaki and Gerald Gerbrandt

<sup>4</sup> See [Future Directions Task Force Interim Report: October 11, 2013](#).

<sup>5</sup> Some suggest this stance varies from the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Article 16. That is not our intent, nor should it be construed as taking away from seeing the church as a 'seamless garment' with accountability/responsibility at every level. Experience these past few generations, though, reminds us that the other levels of church we know could hardly exist in the absence of support from congregations.

national and international for both practical and theological reasons. And our **first conclusion** was that: *The key to remaining faithful and effective as a larger body in our changing world is revitalizing the life of its foundational unit, the congregation.*

In our brief main report we build on that conclusion, setting out directions and emphases on how to be faithful to God's mission and, in particular, how to strengthen the ability of congregations in their task. In this supplement we set out the "backstory," the deeper considerations that went into the propositions and recommendations. We begin by identifying the strengths on which our denomination can build its response – our convictions and identity.

## **STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON – OUR CONVICTIONS AND IDENTITY**

*God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace  
so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world*

This vision statement was adopted by Mennonite Church Canada at its birth and represents our understanding of God's calling for us as a church and denomination.<sup>6</sup> It points to a future rooted in a triune God – God who sent the Son, Jesus, into the world to reveal God's love and care; and, together, the Holy Spirit given to empower followers of Jesus for witness in the world.<sup>7</sup> And it embodies three convictions we understand as central to shaping the tasks of the church sent into the world to restore it to God's good purposes:

*Jesus is the centre of our faith  
Community is the centre of our lives, and  
Reconciliation is the centre of our work.<sup>8</sup>*

These convictions are at the core of our **identity** as Anabaptist Mennonites, harking back to those of our 16<sup>th</sup> century spiritual ancestors who sought to reproduce the simplicity and commitment of first-century Christians. As *followers of Jesus* we seek to challenge ills of the world by identifying with the weak and marginalized rather than the

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<sup>6</sup> Adopted by both Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA as a sign of common commitment across boundaries of our two countries.

<sup>7</sup> Grounded in Scripture and spoken to in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*

<sup>8</sup> Palmer Becker's restatement of earlier wording "We are called to be followers of Jesus Christ,...to live in Christian community,...to offer healing and hope" in *What is an Anabaptist Christian* .

rich and powerful – an ‘upside down kingdom’<sup>9</sup> compared to the dominant culture where power and prestige are privileged. In our life together as a *church community* we seek to model the love and care revealed to us in Jesus, a witness to God’s intent for all people. As we participate in God’s mission, we seek for all those we encounter to experience *the healing and reconciling love of God* that fills us with hope.

These ‘upside down kingdom’ convictions once were peculiar to Anabaptist Christians, but that is changing.<sup>10</sup> It is easy to forget that the words ‘Anabaptist’ and ‘Mennonite’ began as ‘swear words’ to condemn our spiritual ancestors when thousands were killed as martyrs; or, that only a few generations ago mainstream churches characterized Mennonites as a ‘sect’. But as North American society abandons the church as its ultimate moral force, our Anabaptist Mennonite voice has come to be welcomed by other denominations,<sup>11</sup> and by people new to our convictions – new Canadians fleeing repression and violence, people of other faith traditions seeking new ways of being faithful to Christ, and formerly non-religious people seeking meaning in their lives. That is quite a change, thanks be to God!

At our best, Mennonites have acquired a reputation as people of integrity, as a peace making people, who live out our faith in Jesus as part of daily living, as generous in sharing of time, money and goods, as committed to living simply, and in other ways that attract favourable public attention. There are even marketers who advertise ‘Mennonite’ sausage or furniture or quilts as a testament to quality, at considerable discomfort to many of us.

We know full well our own shortcomings and the difficulty of living up to reputations, yet our convictions inspire us to live in the way of Jesus. We have a God-given gift, a treasure in earthen vessels, offering opportunity for witness and social change in a new way – an opportunity to be a ‘light on the hill’ in our faithfulness and to work together as a people, and with other denominations, on a mission of healing and hope for the world.

## PRIORITIES IN ENGAGING GOD’S MISSION

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Donald Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (multiple editions).

<sup>10</sup> See Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist* (Herald Press, 2010)

<sup>11</sup> For example, our Anabaptist Mennonite voice is encouraged in both in the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada;

In a world of relativism, full of secular gods and claims of truth, it's more important than ever for congregations to pursue three priorities flowing from our core convictions:

1. Disciple making and Christian formation – nurturing followers of Jesus to grow in their relationship to God and become dynamic participants in a 'Christian community,' actively engaging in life changing 'Christian witness'.
2. Christian community – nurturing loving and caring communities in and through our congregations, where all are welcome to grow together in faith.
3. Active Christian witness – introducing the good news of Jesus to people of a secular world seeking wholeness in their lives; extending the peace and reconciling love of God to challenge the violence, injustice and pride in the world around us, creating opportunities for followers of Jesus to change the world to a better place – whether across the street or around the world.

To these we add the practical priorities of:

4. Leadership development and strengthening.... nurturing the development and growth of the "different (leadership) gifts of the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4-5) in our Christian communities to provide creative leadership both within our communities and in extending God's mission into our ever changing 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts.
5. Fostering generosity – encouraging followers of Jesus to replace the dominant 'me first' and 'self-serving' attitudes of our 21<sup>st</sup> century context with a generosity of spirit, time, energy and resources in advancing God's mission.

## **CREATIVELY REALIZING THE PROMISE OF CONGREGATIONS**

The Task Force heard voices criticizing the church and its congregations, including from those hurt or disillusioned by their experience, but mostly from people who lovingly critiqued church practices. We confess that congregations are not perfect, given they are made up of ordinary and fallible human beings. We hold that in common with 1<sup>st</sup> century congregations described by Paul and other Apostles, and with congregations throughout history that have had times of difficulty and dissension.

Yet, time and again, in working through such imperfections with the help of the Holy Spirit congregations may become stronger as communities of faith and a witness to others. In our encounter with people from many congregations we were impressed by the good work carried out, some in the context of considerable frailty. The promise of congregations is that, despite (perhaps because of) our imperfections, it becomes the





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foundational unit of the church carrying out God's work in the world in Spirit inspired ways.

The challenge is how to realize the promise of the congregation in a context where we have more educated and professional people than ever before, and where there is increased value given to individual freedom and having a say on all aspects of life. As well, the way in which people live, study, work and worship has been impacted by smart phones, tablets and the Internet that can be both disruptive and empowering. New ways are needed for new times, while not tossing aside approaches having proven their worth across centuries such as:

- *Hi-tech – hi-touch.* In an age of 'hi-tech' we encourage creative use of information and communication technologies, without giving up on the value of 'hi touch' person to person conversations and community discernment;
- *Networking – personal reflecting.* In an age of networks we need creative thinking about how to be catalysts and connectors in enabling meaningful exchanges between people on common interests, while not giving up on spiritually important tasks of deep personal reflection.

## NURTURING FAITH, NETWORKING AND RESOURCING

**1. Proposition:** *We envision vital and spiritually healthy congregations led by gifted, empowered and inspired leaders. Together they:*

- *Invite all to follow Jesus,, whether for a first-time commitment or renewal, for those outside of the church, within it, and on the margins;*
- *Draw near to God in worship and prayer;*
- *Find new and creative ways to engage young, middle and older people in forming faith, increasing biblical literacy, and enhancing their sense of Christian community and identity;*
- *Encourage Individuals and families to take part in worship, faith studies at home, small groups and congregational programs using existing and creative new resource materials;*
- *Nurture a loving and caring community of support;*
- *Partner with other congregations for mutual support, resourcing, and accountability;*
- *Engage in missional outreach initiatives that invite young, middle and older to address injustices and work together with disadvantaged and disempowered people;*
- *Encourage and develop different leadership gifts for ministry;*



- *Affirm people for their generosity of spirit, time, energy and resources;*
- *Discern and set tangible measures and accountability, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries*

## 2. The Challenge

A draft background paper prepared for the Task Force under auspices of the Formation Council reports that within our congregations we experience challenges to forming and nurturing Christian faith different from those several generations ago, including:

- Irregular worship attendance and irregular Sunday School attendance, both of which traditionally played a major role in fostering healthy faith practices;
- Parents who are less literate in the Bible than in the past, or less willing or struggling to take primary responsibility for forming their children's faith;
- Difficulty identifying and equipping congregational lay leaders for Sunday School or for mission/service activities with many excusing themselves for reasons of 'too busy', or 'unwilling' or 'feel inadequate to the task'; and,
- The unique challenge of an ever-changing Canadian culture where children and youth face new choices and issues very different from their parents' generation. New Canadians face an added layer of complexity as parents need to mediate between their cultures of origin and Canadian culture to form the faith of their children and youth.<sup>12</sup>

These and others reflect pressures on congregations as described in *God, Mission and a People*,<sup>13</sup> and beg the question: how do we, in this time, engage individuals, families and congregations in forming and nurturing faith, increase familiarity with the Good News, and enhance our sense of Christian community and identity?

More use of digital communications technologies is part of the answer, but they too have their limitations. In a 'think piece' for the Task Force Andy Brubacher Kaethler illustrates how these both hold promise and risk for the Great Commission to form faith and bear witness.<sup>14</sup> "Technology giveth and

<sup>12</sup> Abstracted from a draft background paper prepared for the Future Direction Task Force under the auspices of the MC Canada Formation Council by Dave Bergen (Dec. 2013).

<sup>13</sup> *God, Mission and a People* (Feb 2, 2015) at: <http://www.commonword.ca/Browse/2092>.

<sup>14</sup> *Technology, Formation and Witness in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a draft 'think piece' prepared for the Future Direction Task Force prepared by Andy Brubacher Kaethler, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Feb 2014).

technology taketh away, and not always in equal measure,” he quotes from Postman.<sup>15i</sup> The lure of technology almost always is about *efficiency* – faster, safer, easier, or more portable/universally accessible. We value Skype and smart phones and various apps for how immediately they access information or communicate with others.

But once in place, Kaethler says, our expectations for efficiency are not directed just towards objects (what the technologies are meant to do), they also come to characterize our *expectations for all interactions* – we come to expect immediate and accessible responses not only with objects (other computers, the Internet, etc.), but also with each other in personal relationships, and with God. So, while technologies are extremely helpful for the reasons they were created, for faith formation the concern is that technological advancement doesn’t dilute the Good News, he says, “conveyed in Jesus Incarnate, the Lamb of God who suffers, dies and is resurrected....to demonstrate God’s power over hatred, suffering and death...the Good News that Jesus saves and Jesus is Lord”.<sup>16</sup> In short, while digital technologies may be helpful, for nurturing and deepening faith and our commitment to service we also need approaches that encourage personal reflection, inter-personal encounter and encounter with God.

For work we do together there are other challenges. Widespread acceptance of digital technology not only challenges the use of denominational print materials as resources, it also challenges the very idea of common church-wide curricula and other resources. No matter how good they are, in this age they are inherently limited in how they address the specific contexts and needs of congregations and individuals. With proliferating resources available on the Internet, and a population more educated than ever before, congregations can look for and access artisanal, creative, and uniquely suited resources for their life together and as they reach out in mission to their community and the wider world.

The questions then become: which resources readily available on the Internet and other digital sources are consistent with our Anabaptist Mennonite theological understandings; and, in what circumstances should we as a

<sup>15</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly: the Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Abstracted from Andy Brubacher Kaethler, *op cit.*, who cites John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom and Theology of Missions*.

denomination (perhaps together with sister Anabaptist denominations) create our own?

### 3. Faith Formation, Networking, Resourcing<sup>17</sup>

These realities suggest a broadened way of thinking about how we conceive of faith formation generally, the kinds of Biblical and other faith based information and content resources we use, and how we access them. Plausible ways to proceed on this include the following:

1. In this age it seems more important than ever for individual Christians, our congregations and our denomination to think creatively on how to proclaim the Good News from an Anabaptist Mennonite perspective, and how to nurture and support our individual and collective faith.
2. We have a deep history to build on – both our commitment to being ‘people of The Word’, with everyone encouraged to know and understand the Biblical narrative of the Good News; and, our practices of gathering in smaller and larger groups to discern together how to be faithful in our ministries and supports to each other and those around us. Given our changing context, it seems important to experiment with new and creative ways of forming and deepening faith, and transforming such faith into action, as individuals, families and congregations.
3. On a larger scale, individuals (and congregations) with like interests should be encouraged to learn from each other and exchange ideas and experiences. The strength of electronic communication technologies can aid in this – particularly in supporting communication between networks of people, linking together gifted individuals in congregations with area church clusters interested in similar topics, or our schools and other bodies to finding and/or creating resources appropriate for use by our congregations and families. Some of these networks, in turn, may become mini-resource centres for others.
4. For networks to support and thrive, a centre of energy is needed to nurture them – creating and tending a network of networks. Our existing Resource Centre is a logical resource to be central to this role, supplemented by resource people located in the various networks or centers across Canada.
5. Apart from tending to one or more resource networks, key roles of an expanded and dispersed Resource Centre would include:

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<sup>17</sup> The following elaborates content set out in *God, Mission and a People*.



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### I. Curating content:

- Identifying resources of sound quality,
- Consistent with our Anabaptist Mennonite perspectives,
- Evaluating them for topic, age-appropriateness, and various other criteria congregations may find helpful in seeking resources for niche purposes,
- Promoting availability

This could include a network of reviewers and develop into greater on-line capacity for users to find worship resources and do sermon research.

- II. Facilitating the sharing of resources created by our congregations.
- III. Expanding the kind of content beyond resource materials, video material, websites, etc. to include a directory of people, organizations, and networks helpful in assisting churches to address particular issues, work through conflict, etc.
- IV. Creating electronic linkages for congregational leaders to access other similar resource centers (e.g. those in regional/area offices, those in colleges/universities, at Menno Media, etc.)
- V. Where significant content gaps are noted, partner with like-minded groups to finance, develop and publish new resources to fill gaps, as determined by the Resource Network.

## REGIONAL CHURCHES AS CATALYSTS

1. **Proposition:** *To support and encourage vital and spiritually healthy congregations, we envision each region as a catalyst to:*
  - *Encourage congregational clustering to share information, support one another and imagine together where joint mission might be undertaken;*
  - *Encourage 'missional catalyst teams' of volunteers to bring creative new ideas for mission/service aligned with God's activity in the world;*
  - *Encourage ministerial leadership teams in all congregations including those who are more experienced and younger, men and women, paid and unpaid;*
  - *Establish best practices in discerning, calling, training, and empowering gifted leadership both paid and unpaid;*
  - *Establish criteria and accountability for credentialing;*
  - *Encourage greater diversity (ethnic, racial, economic) within congregations and through congregational partnerships.*



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- *Support development of alternative, innovative models of being congregation to complement more traditional models.*
- *Discern and set tangible measures and accountability, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.*

## 2. The Challenge:

The main challenge to fostering the spiritual health and vitality of congregations is comfort with the status quo. In our meetings we found a broad assumption that the national expression of our body would have to change, with less emphasis on regional or congregational changes. However, an assumption of the status quo does not do justice to our changing times, nor work toward the reinvigorating of our congregations and denomination as we seek to extend the good news and peace of Jesus.

Programs run from central offices that served us well in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whether national or regional, have lost much of their potency in our post-modern world for all the reasons cited in earlier reports.<sup>18</sup> The church is changing, and this is a time for us to be bold and venture out in new ways.

The words of Vincent Harding, an African American historian, scholar, and former Mennonite pastor foreshadowed our context when he said:

*Mennonite Christians, men [and women] who love humanity, where are we? If ... Jesus is our guide to life, where are we? ... In churches singing and preaching excellent theology to the same names for generations? In quiet communities proclaiming law and order and free enterprise? Huddled behind the barricades of the status quo, praying the storm will soon be over so that life can continue undisturbed? March out saints and be counted. ... March out of the conformity and terror of the roaring*

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<sup>18</sup> In particular, see *Future Directions Task Force Interim Report* (Oct. 11, 2013) and *God, Mission and a People* (Feb 2, 2015) at: <http://www.commonword.ca/Browse/2092>. A few may argue that changes would not be needed if duplication were eliminated and cost efficiencies between area and national church obtained. In our review, we found little duplication of function where some modest cost-efficiencies might be obtained, and a glance at annual audited financial statements with their tale of operating deficits and gradual decline in income quickly puts such an assumption to rest. It's not the absence of wealth. Our constituency, arguably, is wealthier than ever. It's that wealth is gradually being directed elsewhere.



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*night. You have nothing to lose but your lives and a world to gain. The Master is already on the road and he says, I am the way, follow me.*<sup>19</sup>

In response to the Master, some new congregations with a strong missional impulse have been formed, some have shaken off the status quo and been inspired to experiment with imaginative forms of witness and worship, and a goodly number are experimenting in more modest ways. But a sizable portion are struggling – some with an aging population, reducing membership and underused buildings that could be an asset to their ministry rather than a burden; others wanting to step out of the status quo, yet having difficulty imagining what opportunities God has for them. While the church has changed in many ways since Vincent Harding's words, his essential challenge remains.

Along the way we have absorbed some of our surrounding culture's value of independence and individualism, weakening our ability to witness as a body.<sup>20</sup> Where congregations once identified themselves as part of clusters (*gemeinde*) linked together by a 'bishop' or 'aeltester,' over the past several generations, congregations increasingly have come to see themselves as independent from each other and from regional conferences meant to replace *gemeinde*. With independence in their DNA congregations, like individual people, tend to hesitate in sharing their joys and sorrows or at working with others on common missions, and the overall sense of mutuality becomes diminished.

### 3. Catalysts for Missional Creativity

We know that if injury is done to one part, it hurts the whole; and if one part enjoys great blessings it is a blessing for the whole; and that if congregations covenant and identify with each other it becomes part of the church's witness to the world.<sup>21</sup> In this light, we heard a goodly number say they would welcome support in becoming more missional. They are calling for an organic, decentralized approach that emphasizes collaboration and facilitation, not trying to solve local problems but helping to inspire and work toward church health, fostering a larger sense of unity and theological identity.

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<sup>19</sup> From his plenary address at the 1967 Mennonite World Conference in Amsterdam, excerpted from Joanna Shenk, "Widening the circle of church". *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, Spring 2013, Vol. 14(1), pp. 75 - 83.

<sup>20</sup> Along with increased individualism there seems to be a regrettable loss in commitment to mutual responsibility and accountability as per the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Article 16.

<sup>21</sup> The importance of joining together is elaborated on in *God, Mission and a People*.



To nurture congregations to be vital centers of worship, spiritual nurture and missional activity, regional churches must reimagine their role from perceptions of ‘being available but on call’ to a more immediate and interactive role in both assisting congregations and fostering mutuality of spirit and witness. This won’t happen automatically, given the challenges mentioned. Just how this is done may vary from area to area, but a number of creative possibilities seem evident.

One is to **build on clusters of congregations**, linking congregations within geographic areas, or by common interests in affinity networks. Both offer possibilities to nurture mutual support between congregations, share information and, perhaps more importantly, to think together on the gifts each brings, the challenges faced, and where God is calling them to witness.

A second is to provide some small amount of staff support as **“missional creativity partners.”** In *God, Mission and a People* we suggested calling them “congregational resource ministers”. Whatever the name, their role could take several forms. One might be to facilitate meetings of clusters on a regular basis. Another might be to function as a ‘travelling resource minister’ in the fashion of Paul, a person who is intimately familiar with each congregation – encouraging it in times of difficulty, cheering its creative ministries. To foster this intimacy, perhaps each regional church staff person could support at least one such cluster.

A third is to develop **‘missional catalyst teams’** of volunteers to help identify how God is at work in local congregations, and how these might be strengthened and supported.

Nurturing missional creativity in this way is bound to catalyze any number of extra-ordinary and innovative expressions of God’s people at work, enlivening our congregations, and giving confidence in our Anabaptist Mennonite expression of faith.

## MINISTRIES AT HOME AND ABROAD

1. **Proposition:** *Proclaim that the good news of Jesus is the reconciliation of the whole world. Towards that end, our task is to facilitate domestic and international*



*opportunities that engage young, middle and older people in witness/service that extends the peace and reconciling love of God beyond our congregations*

Our Anabaptist Mennonite perspective provides an important voice and role for forming faith communities and reconciling troubling issues in our world. Working with existing churches and planting new ones has been an important part of Anabaptist Mennonite engagement at home and abroad. Increasing global tribalism needs the Anabaptist Mennonite model of loving God while loving your neighbour. Reckless global consumption needs the challenge of the Anabaptist Mennonite practice of simple living as a spiritual discipline that promotes economic justice and global generosity. The uncontested assumption of growing militarism needs to be confronted with the Anabaptist Mennonite commitment to peace.

At the same time our changing context is impacting how the role of the church in mission/service is understood. A different approach may be necessary to ensure that the role of the church in mission/service remains a vibrant priority.

## 2. Challenges:

Four major changes in perception and context have significant impact on the role of the church in mission/service:

1. Our global context has changed. **The global Anabaptist Christian Church has matured and grown**, and the Church in the South has many things to teach the Church in the North. The growth of Mennonite World Conference is an example of how the global Anabaptist church has matured and developed.

Yet, as indicated in a draft report from Witness<sup>22</sup> and supported by commentary supplied by outside readers, it is still important for the church in Canada to remain in relationship with the global church. To abandon international relationships would be to risk becoming insular and egocentric in our thinking and experience. Fostering generosity remains vital to our spiritual health and will prevent the church in a context of wealth from becoming subtly sabotaged by an egocentric focus.

2. **A partnership model is critical.** Current sensitivities assume that North American engagement in international work defaults to colonial attitudes and

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<sup>22</sup> Draft background paper prepared for the Future Direction Task Force under the auspices of the MC Canada Witness Council by Norm Dyck and Tim Froese (Jan. 2014).



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practices unless care is taken to avoid them. A posture of partnership is important in addressing these sensitivities and to work together with the global church.

3. **Successful financial and emotional support for international engagement has become highly relational in character.** The growth of congregational short-term mission teams (1-2 weeks) is increasing in some of our congregations, and presents new questions on what it means to partner internationally. However, when congregations have a strong relationship with international work/workers the increased sense of ownership and enthusiastic support can be a very positive experience.

4. A congregation's sense of mission in the past focused on supporting international mission/service program initiatives. However, the strengthening missional character of our congregations has developed a **greater awareness and commitment to aligning with the activity of God in our local contexts**. At the same time, congregations are still looking for new and creative ways for our young, middle and older members to express their faith through mission/service both at home and abroad.

### 3. A New Strategy for Witness/Service

In light of these challenges, we envision a shift toward more local and domestic witness/service, and toward more collaborative, shorter term international assignments in response to invitations from global partners. Moving forward, we propose a new strategy that would more firmly ground witness/service in the affirmation and support of congregations/regions. With respect to:

1. International Relationships - We envision a review of current programs and partnerships to discern funding support or to transition to other arrangements as needed. Continuing of existing and start of any new international initiatives would be discerned with regional churches and congregations, including a commitment of funding.
2. Domestic Relationships – Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report, we envision that reconciliation work with Indigenous peoples remains a priority, with discernment by regions on how best to follow through with this and other domestic priorities in their region and cooperatively with one another across the nation.

To implement this strategy, we recommend the following.



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### **International Partnerships:**

- The regions cooperating together will establish common priorities and values for international partnerships.
- Current/historical international programs and partnerships will be given initial profile so that regions/congregations/clusters of congregations can discern a confirmation of call that would include a commitment of the necessary funds. Where there is a need to transition to other arrangements, great care will be needed to complete the program assignment in a positive way and to remain on good terms with our international workers and partners as part of the body of Christ.
- Before moving ahead with any new international witness/service invitations, these would be first discerned as regions/congregations/clusters of congregations, including a commitment of the necessary funds.
- While some contexts may require a long-term commitment and approach, most responses requiring personnel will normally be a few months to 1 year) and on a volunteer basis with some financial support.
- In a spirit of global partnership, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) will serve as the primary platform for discerning global gifts available to congregations. This is anticipated as regular input and exchange, with regions assisting congregations in their discernment.
- Opportunities for international service term exchanges will be encouraged through our church agencies and schools (i.e. MCC, Out of Town, new initiatives that might develop, etc).

### **Domestic Initiatives:**

- Domestic ministry initiatives (e.g., Indigenous relations, peace witness, environment concerns, interfaith dialogue) will be discerned together in clusters of congregations or regional church gatherings, with regions working together to discern national priorities and cooperating together on national initiatives.
- Current/historical national ministry programs and partnerships will be given initial profile so that regions, congregations/clusters of congregations can discern a confirmation of call that would include a commitment of the necessary funds. Where there is a need to transition to other arrangements, great care will be needed to complete the program assignment in a positive way and to remain on good terms with personnel and partners as part of the body of Christ.

**Necessary support:**

- Oversight of personnel for domestic ministry initiatives and those sent to international settings.
- Assistance in obtaining necessary visas, medical and operational support.
- Maintenance of relationships with other national church bodies.
- Financial systems to monitor expense and budgets.
- Placement and support of international guest teachers.
- Facilitation for discerning confirmations of call.
- Sufficient global circulation/familiarity to receive international attention/invitations.

**FAITH FORMATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT - SCHOOLS AND CAMPS**

**1. Proposition.** *Encourage church schools and camps as an intentional resource for congregations in creatively shaping faith and identity of children through adults, developing leaders, engaging mission beyond our communities and learning from each other through exchanging ideas and collaborating across Canada*

**2. Background**

Central to the church and the congregation is faith formation, community and witness. Our story highlights the very significant role schools and camps play in assisting the congregation in this vocation. The role of schools (elementary, secondary and post-secondary) in faith formation is clear and straight forward. Camps may have started as summer programs for the Christian education of children and youth (i.e., “campers”), but over the years they have evolved into dynamic centres for the faith formation of campers, staff, and indeed congregations and special interest groups.

The integration of faith formation with building community in each of these settings long has been a strength. Our camps especially have increasingly integrated these with witness through new programming and as the number of children from outside the faith community at camp has grown.

Leadership development is a further important contribution of these institutions. Courses, modeling by teachers, and student associations each play a role in the



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leadership development offered by schools. Camp staff programs are a much under-recognized setting for leadership development.

The post-secondary institutions have a more focused responsibility in leadership development, especially in the preparation and training of ministers for congregations. This happens in each of the three undergraduate institutions, Columbia Bible College (CBC), Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), Conrad Grebel University College (CGUC), and even more so in the three graduate programs at CMU, CGUC and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).

Elementary and secondary schools and camps are by their very nature regional in focus. It thus fits that they are the programs of regions, or even groups of congregations (both models exist today). We affirm this and also encourage camps and schools to greater idea exchange and collaboration to strengthen their ministry.

Post-secondary institutions are a little more complex, both inherently and in terms of their historic place in our denomination. The proposed shift in structure would leave governance for CBC and CGUC largely unchanged since their accountability is already largely regional in nature. However, for CMU the proposed shift raises a question of a change in governance relationship with the Mennonite Church which now is national. One possibility is that CMU governance could also become regional, with the congregations of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba taking responsibility for the Mennonite Church side of CMU governance. Questions also remain for how the integrated body might retain a role in the governance of AMBS.

### 3. Desire for a National Strategy

- From leaders of post-secondary schools we heard a call for a renewed vision for post-secondary education as a national priority within our denomination, with regions together forming a collective body to hold and call forward this vision through its group of post-secondary schools. We support that call as part of a renewed vision and strategy for faith formation and leadership development that includes post-secondary and other church schools as well as church camps.
- For post-secondary schools, in addition to further discussion on the impact of any structural changes, we envision further conversation on the particular gifts and strengths of each school and how these complement



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each other in strengthening faith formation and leadership development for our congregations.

- For other church camps and schools, we recognize their considerable diversity in location, governance, and ministry, and encourage greater exchange of ideas and collaboration across Canada.

## CONGREGATION OF MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP

1. **Proposition:** *Form a Congregation of Ministerial Leadership, a collegial gathering of paid and unpaid ministers (i.e., the members of the congregational ministerial leadership teams), perhaps with individuals from church schools and other bodies involved in theological study and leadership development, that meets regularly (e.g. biannually) for purposes of studying ethical and theological issues, fellowship, networking, discerning vision on theological matters the denomination might consider, mutual encouragement and support.*

2. **Background**

The biblical story consistently expects the people of God to have leaders who guide them in the right direction. As we moved away from the strong, sometimes autocratic leadership of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we now are moving beyond the solo (or even multi-staff) professionally trained and salaried pastors of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The **emerging model of leadership** is one which appreciates and recognizes the diverse gifts that young and old, male and female have to offer, without forcing them into set molds or types, a leadership which fuses together into a dynamic partnership committed, dedicated people called from within the congregation, together with salaried staff commonly called from the outside. What we need in this time of change are leaders who are biblically and theologically grounded, responsive to their own congregation's unique context for mission, and yet intimately connected with the missional direction of the larger church.

The Congregation of Ministerial Leadership is envisioned as a body that nurtures and supports leaders of today and tomorrow in their ability to guide and inspire their congregation to serve as salt and light in their community through study conferences on theological and ethical issues, mutual support and counsel, and mentoring of new congregational leaders. Participating in this body could also



enable congregational leaders to have a prominent role in discerning missional priorities for the body.

## INTEGRATED PROGRAM FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- 1 **Proposition:** *Create an integrated Ministerial Leadership Development plan and program, focusing on the formation and training of both paid and unpaid ministerial leaders for diverse congregations*

- 2 **Background**

Historically our denomination has tended to assume that leadership development took place largely within its educational institutions. For many years Canadian Mennonite Bible College was a primary context for this, with Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and then Conrad Grebel and Columbia taking on increasing roles. This is not to say that conferences did nothing in this area. Over the years various area churches have sponsored courses for pastors, often cooperatively with one of our post-secondary schools. But the primary focus of denominational ministers who organized these events was on matters like assisting congregations in hiring pastors, supporting and resourcing pastors, responding to crises, and becoming involved in pastor-congregation relations, with the expectation continuing that leadership development was largely a matter of academic or formal training.

While our educational institutions should and will continue to play an important role in the training and formation of future church leaders, it seems critical in the years ahead for the denomination to take a more concerted and focused approach in the systematic training, preparation and growth of effective pastors. This is especially important given the relatively small number of Mennonite Church people currently involved in undergraduate and graduate theological education, the number of pastors being called who do not have Anabaptist Mennonite education and training, and the need for strong leadership as a key factor in having dynamic, vibrant congregations.

- 3 **Proposal**

As part of an integrated plan for Ministerial Leadership Development across Canada, we recommend:

- A separate governing (or advisory) board with responsibility to:





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- Maintain a list of all those preparing for pastoral leadership, or in their early years of pastoral leadership;
- Develop an orientation program for new pastors (perhaps with a distinct segment for those with no or limited training in Anabaptist institutions);
- Develop mentorship programs for those in the early years of pastoral leadership;
- Plan (or assist in the planning) of conferences, workshops and seminars for pastors;
- Work with existing educational institutions (i.e., AMBS, Grebel, CMU, Columbia), but not be responsible for them, so as to retain a clear focus on the more narrow task of leadership development;
- Have a clear link with the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership, but neither be responsible to it, nor responsible for it.

## ACTIVE COMMUNICATION PLAN

**1. Proposition.** *Develop an active communication plan with a unified flow between congregations and the integrated body, with effective communication that expresses our vision and mission, enlivens our witness, and encourages and builds up the church--providing information in a timely way, facilitating the exchange of ideas and innovations, allowing space to discuss serious issues, sharing stories of how God is working, forming faith and inspiring mission.*

### **2. Background**

As we follow Jesus and invite others to join us, effective communication is vital. On the one hand, congregations have a critical witness opportunity to those around us, especially during these changing times, and on the other there are and will continue to be challenges within the church that need to be addressed. For both, effective communication is key--for developing and nurturing a common identity and theological orientation, for working together in mission and witness, for sharing our faith and life with one another and with the world.

With technology that links us around the globe, and more active mobile gadgets than the earth's human population, we might think that such communication would be almost automatic. Write it up and send it out. Make a phone call or send a text. Create a video for your website or subscription list.

But effective communication requires more than good technology and getting the word out. Will that email be read in the midst of all the other emails that flood our inboxes? And what is it that we most want to communicate among ourselves as a church body and to share with others? For effective communication, we need to address both the means of communication and the content, both how communications are sent and how they are received and responded to.

### 3. Challenges

- **Physical Distance.** As congregations across Canada, we are sprawled across the country geographically which limits opportunities for personal face-to-face communication. Travel can help, but costs time and money and is not always possible. Technology can help but presents challenges of its own (described below).
- **Social/Cultural Differences.** Besides the physical distance, we also are needing to communicate across different socio-economic situations, languages, cultures, and other differences. Just as it's a long way from Petitcodiac, New Brunswick to Granisle, B.C., it can be quite a distance to communicate from one language to another, from one set of cultural assumptions to another.
- **New Technologies.** Communication today is faster, more visual, with more avenues than ever before. Today it might be Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, tomorrow who knows? It takes time and tech savvy to learn new technologies; it takes wisdom to know how to use them well; and even at the best of times, communication via technology is always mediated communication, without quite the same opportunity for clarity and nuance as sitting down together in the same room.<sup>23</sup>
- **Volume.** Current communications include area church newsletters and weekly emails of announcements and prayer requests; weekly national church announcements and prayer requests; emails and newsletters from mission workers; the monthly *Equipping*; the *Rejoice!* devotional booklet several times a year; the *Canadian Mennonite* every two weeks; *Leader* magazine, *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*; promotional emails from *MennoMedia*—and that's just some of the print and email communications received by congregations! Add in other communications from related church agencies, Facebook and other social media, plus the congregations' own emails, bulletins,

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<sup>23</sup> More detail on the effect of new technologies see *Nurturing Faith, Networking and Resourcing* on p. 7. That section also speaks to communication as it relates to resources for faith formation and nurture,



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newsletters, websites, etc., and the sheer volume of communication is staggering.

- **Content.** What content do we want and need to communicate as a church body? Is it primarily information? Is it primarily for encouraging and building up the body? Is there room for debate and if so where does it most effectively take place? What content best expresses our mission and witness, and invites others to encounter God and follow Jesus?

#### 4. Effective Communication Plan

For effective communication, the Task Force recommends a communications review with the intention to develop an active communication plan. Items for review include:

- streamlining communication from a congregation's point of view with a unified flow of communication from the integrated body;
- the wise deployment of communications technologies to supplement face-to-face meetings;
- consideration for how we communicate with congregations in languages other than English;
- the role of the *Canadian Mennonite*. In what ways can it help us as a church communicate effectively? What are the limitations given its stated mission as "an independent publication"? What is the best communication tool as we move forward?

## FEATURES OF AN INTEGRATED ORGANIZATION

**1. Proposition:** *To integrate the work we do together we envision a simpler and sustainable structure where:*

- *Each congregation is a member of a region to which it sends delegates for annual assemblies for worship, inspiration, setting regional direction, etc.;*
- *Regional leaders meet together regularly (4-5 times per year) for aligning vision, theological identity and programming;*
- *An Executive Minister works with an integrated board to provide spiritual oversight and vision for mission, including development and pursuit of common priorities, and to represent our collective voice in ecumenical relationships and international partnerships.*
- *An integrated identity reflected in name, logo, and web presence;*



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- *An effective communication plan with a unified flow between congregations and the integrated body;*
- *A unified flow of financial resources, with a covenant determining the allocation of regional/national/international initiatives, including consideration of an equalization of resources to make similar programs possible across the regions, and with some opportunity for churches to allocate funds to specific programs;*
- *A covenant to pursue common priorities with room for regional variation, allocation of financial resources, mutual accountability, etc.*
- *Discern and set tangible measures and accountability, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.*

## 2. Division of Roles and Tasks

In a previous report<sup>24</sup> we affirmed the principle that decisions of a program nature be made as close as possible to where the program is carried out – with some tasks better done in a unified manner across the country, and some better done regionally, closer to the congregation. Therefore, we propose the following division of roles and tasks:

- a) At the regional and congregational level, where-ever possible with parallel approaches and standards:
  - Inspiring, resourcing and supporting congregations in mission;
  - Monitoring congregational vitality and connection to resources;
  - Congregational leadership selection, nurture and discipline, including transition into ministry and other initiatives that nurture paid and unpaid leaders;
  - Connecting congregations for mutual support and resourcing;
  - Regional witness (e.g., aboriginal ministries) and church planting;
  - Camping programs;
  - Social justice ministries;
  - Schools;
  - And related.
- b) In a unified manner with regions working together across Canada:
  - Large picture visioning around identity and mission;

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<sup>24</sup> See *God, Mission and a People*, 2015



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- Identifying, where necessary developing, and making available resources (e.g., resource centre) around identity, mission, worship and ethics;
- Facilitating and encouraging congregational networking and mutual resourcing (e.g., via Internet);
- Equalizing resources across the regions as possible and appropriate;
- Supporting regional initiatives, e.g., in camping ministries, schools, etc.;
- Leadership development and developing standards and processes for leadership searches;
- International witness;
- Support services for congregations and regional bodies;
- Ensuring organizational memory and archives;
- Representing the congregations ecumenically and internationally, e.g., Canadian Council of Anabaptist Leaders, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Canadian Council of Churches, Mennonite World Conference;
- And related.

### 3. Working Out Detailed Organizational Arrangements

The simplified, more integrated model we propose is based on feedback received from testing two models across Canada in Winter/Spring 2015.<sup>25</sup> On balance, the best approach in our Canadian context seems one where congregations are members of a regional body, with a caveat that regions together covenant to work together on nation-wide and international ministries so as not to become insular.

To move in that direction, a variety of details remain to be worked through that can only be finalized by direct involvement of leadership from our current area and national church bodies. These include the following:

- **Denominational Name.** A new name (such as Community of Anabaptist Congregations in Canada) and logo might well reflect the new relationships recommended in this report; however, rather than putting too much energy into deciding on a new name, the way we work together is even more important. As well, to simplify legal considerations, we

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<sup>25</sup> Two main models were tested in *God, Mission and a People* – (1) an integrated national conference with dispersed centres of energy, and (2) strong regional conferences working as one on national priorities and agenda. .



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suggest there is no reason why our denominational name needs to be changed at present.

- **Governance.** Regions determine their own governance; and, regions cooperate together on national and international agenda through a **joint board** comprised of moderators from each region plus 3-5 members-at-large appointed jointly. The joint board meet together a minimum of once a year, and senior staff meet more regularly (virtually and in person), for aligning vision, theological identity and programming. For joint board accountability to the larger constituency, we propose all members of regional boards meet once every two years to review and set new directions on:
  - Common priorities as outlined in the covenant;
  - Flow of financial resources;
  - Communication plans, and
  - Such other jointly held matters as arise.
- **Programing and Staffing.** Decisions on programming and staffing will need to be made for current programs to transition into new priorities, and a schedule of related staffing adjustments established.

## TRANSITION

**To prepare transition plans consistent with directions proposed above, and finalize organizational arrangements, we recommend:**

- 1. A Transition Team** of 1-3 constituents with knowledge of and passion for the congregations of the church and experience in organizational change, led by a chair, be appointed conjointly by area and national church moderators on approval of their respective boards.
- 2. The transition process led by the Team** working with 7 senior staff (1 from each area church [presumably the Executive Director] plus 2 from the national church), **prepare the covenant and transition plan** (including details of program transitions, staffing and budgeting) **within 6-12 months** for final approval by our existing area and national boards. The Team will report/be accountable to an *ad hoc* body of 7 persons comprised of Moderators of each Area Church plus Modertor and Assistant Moderator of MC Canada.
- 3. Implementation of the transition plan to take place within 2 years**, along with the necessary **By-law changes to be presented for approval at the area and national assemblies in 2018.**



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It's important to recognize that transitions such as proposed breed uncertainty, perhaps especially for staff, standing committees and the like of our current area church and national bodies. We appreciate the dedication and good work that has been done in the past, and the energies that continue to be invested in the life and ministry of the church. Looking ahead, some directions proposed are a shift in direction from what is in place. Some directions proposed imply certain functions cease. Some directions proposed are new. Altogether these imply that new models of accountability and staff resourcing will be necessary. Some jobs may be lost, others changed. It also is possible that existing staff and/or committees will be instrumental in creatively making the shift, with new structures and new skill sets. To implement these new directions will take great wisdom, care and creativity by all involved, with the Transition Team empowered to lead.

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