



**Mennonite  
Church**  
Canada

Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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## Vision Focus Teams

### Transition Plan of a Congregation

*Recently Steinmann Mennonite Church, Baden ON went through an intentional transition period as it reflected on its facility, program and ministry dreams. This is a conversation between Sue Steiner, a representative of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, and Gladys Bender, chair of the Vision Focus Team at Steinmann, about that process.*

*Gladys, you are the Vision Focus Team leader here at Steinmann's. Please tell us what a Vision Focus Team is.*

Well, several years ago our congregation was a bit like the Israelites wandering in the desert trying to decide what to do about the inadequacies of our facility. At the same time we began reviewing the organizational structure of our church. It became clear that we were not happy about doing business the way we had been. It seemed like we were going in circles. During our intentional transition time under interim leadership we decided to totally reorganize the structure. The council became more of a visionary team that could take time to stand back and look at the big picture, to really take time to discuss the over-arching questions: Who are we? Who are our neighbours? What is God calling us to do?

This meant a change from a Council where ideas and recommendations were often "rubber-stamped." Instead, we now have core teams that are empowered to make many of those decisions.

*Together with the pastors, you have been fostering something you call "holy conversations." Please tell us the purpose of these discussions and how they've happened with the Vision Focus team and congregation the last couple of years.*

The idea originated from a book entitled [Holy Conversations](#) by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann. First, we identified our congregation's strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. With those in mind we searched for the biblical stories that reflected our story:

1. The Israelites wandering in the desert (for 10-20 years in our case, some would say) until they became a nation

2. The stone altar that Joshua built beside the Jordan River to represent where they had come from and what God had done.
3. Parable of the Sower. We are still thinking about how this story will fit into our future in our community - local and global.

From these story-connections we were able to identify some goals. We tested these goals with a focus group and now plan to take them to our core teams and congregation.

Our goals include:

1. Growing leaders (nurturing leadership in people younger than baby boomers, developing a culture of call and the transfer of power)
2. Nurturing conversation around “round tables” that bridges theological differences and “us versus them” divisions. Conversations that foster the hopes and dreams of our church.
3. Building Christian community in a fragmented society. We want to be a model in our community where we foster trust, energy and creativity that flow from our common vision.

“Holy conversation” is born when we can say, What will be different in 1-3 years?

*How is God moving in your midst? Do you have any recent learnings?*

I asked the Vision Focus Team this question at our last meeting. One person said BE careful what you ask for! LOGOS kids (a program of our church) are bringing their friends - up to 44 at a time! Parents are inviting their neighbours.

Another young adult member of the Vision Focus Team told me, “You can just feel it. Just listen to the many stories that people are telling.” People occasionally are asked to share Sunday morning where they have seen evidence of God during the week.

One of our first wild and wonderful ideas was to have a group do an Mennonite Disaster Service project. One of our young girls told her father that she wanted him to help make it happen. She and her dad, together with more than a dozen others, have been on several MDS projects these last few years.

We are learning to use a “small idea” and to grow it. You’ll find the energy where the passion is.

We are hoping to offer sabbaticals for our pastors. After some discussion we realized that this could open up an opportunity to provide a short-term placement for a seminary student, targeting one of our goals – to grow leaders.

In sum, we realized that sometimes things are happening even without our planning. When we become attentive to what is going on we become aware of how God, possibly outside our plans, is working in our midst.

*Gladys, you've been a lay leader for a long time. How are you being changed through these “holy conversations”?*

Well, like many leaders I am inclined to be quite task-oriented - wanting to solve problems immediately when they arise. However, those are not the traits that usually foster a “Holy Conversation.” Attentiveness and active listening are necessary characteristics that we’re all learning. Lean into the winds of discontent rather than always trying to smooth the waters.

I have been energized by our meetings when we discuss where we have seen evidence of God and what it is that God calls us do? In other words, our process involves figuring out the right thing to do or the final outcomes we want to achieve, rather than how we are going to get there.

At Steinmann Mennonite, leadership is a partnership between pastors, the Vision Focus Team and the many other leaders in the congregation. Leading involves staying focused on the “big picture” questions (ends and outcomes). We trust that the means will be figured out by the people on the core teams, committees, task groups, etc. That’s an important shift. Management is “doing things right;” leadership is about doing the right things. Ed White of Alban Institute has said that most congregations are over managed and under led.