



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

Future Directions Task Force Report

God, Mission, and People

A Draft for Conversations and Testing

February 2, 2015

Introduction

The Future Directions Task Force has prepared this overview of *God, Mission and a People* for discussion at Area Church annual gatherings, as well as from other groups and individuals. Feedback from discussions at Area Church meetings and groups will be assembled at the time of discussion and forwarded to the Task Force Chair directly.

Others interested in providing feedback on these documents are invited to send them to:

Aldred Neufeldt, Chair
E-mail address: aneufeld@ucalgary.ca

Future Directions Task Force:

Gerald Gerbrandt, Manitoba
Terry Keller, Ontario
Chad Miller, Alberta
Aldred Neufeldt, Ontario (Chair)
Anita Retzlaff, Saskatchewan
Rebecca Steiner, Manitoba
Ken Warkentin, Manitoba
April Yamasaki, British Columbia

Ex officio:

Hilda Hildebrand, Moderator, MC Canada
Willard Metzger, Executive Director, MC Canada

Background

The Future Directions Task Force (FDTF) was created on the recommendation of the Area Churches by the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada, and reports to both the Area Churches and Mennonite Church Canada. The most immediate concern was a growing reality that current programs are not financially sustainable in the long term. A larger reality noted was that our churches, along with all other denominations, are caught in the immense changes within North America where many young adults, and older as well, have come to view the church as staid and possibly irrelevant. Given these changing times, the FDTF mandate is to discern future directions in regards to two central questions:

- What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21st Century?
- What are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow?



PART I - A Vision for Mission

God created the world, and loves it. God created humans in God's own image, with the freedom to choose whether to trust God or themselves. Invariably humans choose to trust their own wisdom, in the process thoroughly messing up God's wonderful creation. God is pained by this, yet continues to love us and all creation.

Scripture is the story of God's love made real—the mission of God is to reconcile and restore the world into relationship with God and God's good purposes. God chooses the people of Israel to be an instrument for bringing life and blessing to all the peoples on the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). Jesus is the word made flesh (John 1:14), representing God's love for the world in an unprecedented and dramatic way in this story. Through his life, teaching, death and resurrection Jesus announces and inaugurates the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43), and then sends the church into the world, with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), to be witnesses and participants in God's mission of reconciliation.

God intends the church to be a community formed by and for the Kingdom. As part of the Kingdom community, we experience healing and are infused with hope for ourselves and for the world. God intends that the church become a sign, instrument, promise, and foretaste of the kingdom of God¹.

Our denominational Vision Statement responds to this love story:

*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*

Its three lines reflect three core Anabaptist convictions, and point to three intertwined priorities:

Core Convictions²

1. We are called to be **followers of Jesus Christ** – each person is invited and called to be a follower of Jesus, to mold his or her life after that of Jesus Christ, God's supreme revelation.
2. We are called to **live in Christian community** – each association of Jesus Christ followers is a foretaste of the Kingdom, a cell within the Body of Christ, where God's love is made manifest in worship, hospitality, discernment, discipline, and mutual support.
3. We are called to **offer healing and hope** – the church exists to support God's mission, for witnessing to the love of God and serving as outposts of God's Kingdom, working for peace and reconciliation among all, offering healing and hope for the world.

With these three convictions in the background, the following become the practical priorities, each inseparably tied to the other two:

1. Christian Formation

Nurturing and shaping individual followers of Jesus to grow in their relationship to God and the mission of God, and to become dynamic participants in a "Christian community" which actively works at "Christian witness."

2. Christian Community

Nurturing kingdom cells which provide vibrant environments for "Christian formation" of committed



followers of Jesus, who model God's reconciling love in all relationships both within the community and outward, providing "Christian witness" to all around them.

3. Christian Witness

Supporting radically invitational "Christian communities," shaped through "Christian formation" to share God's love for the world in word and deed, a love which challenges the violence, injustice and pride of our day as they model alternative reconciled relationships.

This vision and mission is enormous, and potentially overwhelming. Yet God has promised the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us in this endeavour. We thus can move forward with joy, hope and confidence.

PART II - The Church in our Current Context

The world within which the church exists and does mission is under pressure from forces both near and far. Some are global – the worldwide economic recession of a few years ago impacted disposable income of people, 9/11 and current wars around the world contribute to a growing fear of 'the other'; rapid adoption of smart phones and tablets contribute to change in basic ways people live, study and work. Others forces are closer to home – with more educated and professional people than ever before, and the increased value people give to individual freedom, most expect to have a voice in all aspects of life (religion not excepted). Society is increasingly diverse with a growing multicultural and multifaith reality, along with changing patterns of marriage and family, both of which challenge long-held values.

These and other changes have impacted all Christian denominations in North America. Young adults, as well as their parents and grandparents are increasingly disassociating themselves from what they consider to be a staid and possibly irrelevant institution. Whereas in 1950 weekly church attendance in Canada averaged 60% of the population, by 2005 it had declined to 25%.³ Both Bibby's data and a study supported by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada⁴ show there is less 'brand loyalty' to denominations than before, that there is a polarization between those with an interest in matters of faith and those not, and what people are looking for is not churches, but opportunities to be engaged in ministry. The Canadian context is one where, as theologian Douglas Hall observes: "we ... know we can no longer depend upon convention to bring generation after generation into our congregations."⁵

Not only do such dynamics impact the local congregation, they also weaken denominations and church organizations. Too often congregations feel as if they have to maintain and resource an outside institution instead of feeling supported and encouraged in their own mission and ministry. There is a sense of disconnect with the church-as-institution which seems to have a life of its own. As a result congregations and denominations face the growing reality that current programs are not financially or emotionally sustainable in the long run. Everyone thus is looking for change—not simply rearranging the existing structure, but looking for a new and compelling way to engage one another as the church both within and among congregations. Such data and observations prompt dire warnings on the demise of the church by an array of academics, religious leaders and others.

That said, there is evidence not all is as dire as predicted. Over the past 15 years church participation rates have stabilized.⁶ Although 40% of Canadians may claim not to be religious and never attend church, about 30% participate monthly or more, and 30% once in a while.⁷ Many are looking for opportunities to be engaged in ministry, not necessarily in the church they know. This is a reminder that each new



generation has to choose for itself whether to be a Christian, an emphasis quite at home in the Anabaptist tradition.

We know that times of rapid change and turbulence are troubling and disorienting for people and organizations, the church included. Turbulence also purifies and clarifies – it clarifies the value of what you bring and how best to bring it. The good news is congregations have not been idle. While some remain uncertain about their future, a growing number are experimenting with new ways of being church for our time and context. A small rural church has broadened from its immigrant roots of the 1920s to become a church home for people of diverse backgrounds in its community. A small urban church of similar background redefines its mission to offer healing and hope to ex-prisoners and street people and, in the process, experiments with what it means to commit oneself to being a faithful follower of Jesus and a church member. A large, established congregation partners with an emerging immigrant congregation by providing space and mentorship, and in the process both congregations find new ways of reaching out to neighbours around them. Another larger urban congregation blesses a group from its midst to experiment with new forms of worship and witness, and a new congregation emerges in a downtown art gallery.

These and other examples are 'works in progress', but reveal the possibilities our vision of healing and hope have for our time of suspicion of authority, loneliness, a weariness of war, and other concerns that are deeply felt and widespread. Set against evidence that many also are looking for opportunity to be engaged in meaningful ministries, we have a context where our Anabaptist accents on mutual discernment, community and peace seem relevant and perhaps can become the foundation of a renewed vision for us, a vision which moves us into a new era of growth and mission, impacting the very culture within which our congregations are situated. It is a context where it seems important for us to experiment with how best to express our Christian values to the unique local contexts in which each congregation exists, to experiment with how to be local cells of mission in our time of continuing change.

Part III - From Vision to Practice

Central to the Christian story is the incarnation, the word become flesh, merging in a mysterious manner the divine and the human. Similarly, human participation in the mission of God unites divine love and mission with human action and arrangement. The way this love and mission "become flesh" continuously evolves as the people of God communicates and responds to a changing world. Changing structures are part of this evolving. How, then, do we organize ourselves for God's mission at this time in history and in our context? How do we pursue our Vision and build on our Core Convictions?

As we seek to address these questions, as we pray and wrestle with them, we begin by affirming with Ephesians 4:5-6 that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." At the same time, we recognize that congregations differ from each other in many ways and for many reasons. This has been the case since the very beginning as illustrated in the New Testament letters written to different faith communities, each with their unique characteristics and issues. Then and now there was/ is considerable diversity within and among congregations, perhaps more complex in our era of immense social, cultural, and technological change; yet, the context of the early church contained many dangers and pitfalls ours doesn't have.



Now, as then, the following principles seem important to guide how our church seeks to imagine or reimagine how to pursue God's mission in our time:

1. The congregation is the foundational unit and expression of God's work in the world.

This is not a dramatically new affirmation but rather putting into words what has been implicit in Anabaptist theology previously, e.g., normally individuals are baptized in Christ into membership in congregations, not some amorphous church, whether worldwide or denominational, or agency of the church. This affirmation does not put into question what we have done together in the past, nor the significance of what we will do together in the future. The future health of any organization we develop together in the future will be a factor of the health of the local congregations. The gift of the church from its beginning has been how it models what it means to live in Christian community through our congregations, and how to offer healing and hope to others around them. We have confidence that congregations in our complex and disturbing times have the capacity to discern what word and deed to bring to our affluent world which often represses and denies its suffering.

2. Wider church bodies and program agencies are a complementary expression of God's work in the world, supporting the work of congregations, and extending their witness beyond that possible by a local congregation.⁸

Each individual congregation is an incomplete sign of the body of Christ, and so it must unite with others, pointing to and reflecting the unity of the body of Christ. The local congregation may be the foundational unit, but by itself it is limited in what it can do. It is limited geographically, it is limited in its perspectives (e.g., through racial or social homogeneity), and it inadequately reflects the world wide body of Christ. Even our larger body of congregations is only one small part of the family of God. But it becomes a window into and reflection of that larger body. Conversely, the work we do together in our wider church programs adds richness to the family of God just as it supports and encourages our congregations to reimagine themselves in their mission (e.g., worship, facilities, external focus), as well as to extend the mission of congregations beyond that possible by one congregation alone (e.g., camps, schools).

3. In working together collectively, greater participation and ownership results when decisions are made as close to the delivery of mission as possible. (Subsidiarity)

Localism can limit vision, blocking out the diversity and realities of the larger world. But it also has the potential to empower communities to act and take ownership. While larger structures and organizations are important and valuable, wherever possible decisions should be made close to the ground, where the action takes place.

4. It is critical for congregations to unite with each other in covenant as a way of pointing to and reflect the unity of the body of Christ.

Individualism and localism are current fashions. To affirm the primacy of the local congregation does not imply the self-sufficiency of local congregations. Indeed, excessive congregationalism easily undermines the witness of the one church in the world today. The unity of the body of Christ is not a human achievement but a gift of God. This unity also becomes more real when the diversity of the larger church enters into a dialogue with the tendencies of a local congregation to become fairly homogenous and narrow in outlook. For the church to live up to its Vision of providing healing



and hope in a way that is sustainable, any part of the church from congregation through larger denominational bodies, cannot be considered in isolation from the other. If injury is done to one part, it hurts the whole. If one part is enjoying great blessings, it is a blessing for the whole. Covenanting and identifying with each points to this unity and becomes part of the church's witness to God in the world. In short, there are both practical and symbolic reasons for uniting together, including to:

- resource congregations, inspiring, provoking and assisting them to more effectively direct their focus on formation, community and witness so as to become cells for mission;
- offer programs which individual congregations are unable to do on their own such as camps, schools, leadership development, international witness and others; and,
- representing one distinctive family in relationship to the larger body of Christ, Anabaptist and beyond.

Part IV - The Significance of Leadership

In times of change, leaders gifted in discerning and communicating direction become increasingly significant. That is as much the case for the church as other organizations, on the congregational level as well as the larger level. Such an emphasis may challenge the way the phrase "priesthood of all believers" is at times interpreted, almost as a kind of divine sanction of democracy within the church. The biblical story, however, consistently expects the people of God to have leaders who guide them in the right direction.

Leadership is essential, and the church of tomorrow needs leaders that are biblically and theologically grounded, and responsive to each congregation's unique context for mission—not to do it all or direct it all, but to serve as example and catalyst, to mobilize and provide leadership. We can no longer rely solely on the strong, sometimes autocratic, leadership of the first half of the 20th century, nor the solo (or even multi-staff) professionally trained and salaried pastors of the last half of the 20th century. A way of imagining leadership is needed 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.

Such partnerships would form leadership teams in congregations, guiding and inspiring the congregation with vision, teaching, preaching, shepherding as the congregation serves as salt and light in a community. They would invite people of varied life experience, work background, and training to be harnessed in the building up of the church. Some might be called into these roles for shorter periods of time, others for life. Our church schools will continue to play a key role in providing theological and leadership preparation, but primary leadership nurture and support will take place while people are in ministry, both of the non-salaried and salaried leaders.

A priority for the larger church must be fostering the development and nurture of such leadership teams within all congregations. Although pastor-congregation relations remain important and sensitive, primary attention might shift to leadership development within the congregation, and in assisting leadership teams become more effective in guiding their congregations in formation, community and witness, i.e., the congregation's mission and reason for being.

If the larger denominational organization is to be responsive to the needs of congregations in



their mission, then these congregational leadership teams need to play a more prominent role in denominational structure and setting of priorities. Conversely, if our denominational structure is to nurture and support congregational leadership teams in their congregation's missional priorities, or support congregations when difficulties arise, then both congregational leadership teams and denominational staff need to culture an open, dynamic and interactive relationship that responds to, preferably anticipates, opportunities and challenges on a timely basis.

PART V - Resourcing Congregations for Mission and Ministry

A similar transformation seems important for how we together resource and support congregations for mission and ministry in these times of change. Since the congregation is the foundational unit, the primary role of the larger grouping is assisting and resourcing congregations in their priorities of formation, community and witness. This isn't limited to developing uniquely Anabaptist resources. Perhaps even more significant in these times of change will be human resources with the wisdom and experience to encourage, inspire and provoke congregations as they (re)imagine themselves for mission, and in providing models and ways in which congregations can resource each other. Specific resourcing strategies we propose follow.

1. Resource Networking and role of Resource Centre

One of our challenges is that no matter how good church-wide curricula and other resources may be, they are inherently limited in how they address specific contexts and needs. Responses from area church gatherings and other conversations indicate that the resources our congregations and leaders use include those created within congregations, by our denomination, and others accessible via internet. It is clear one size does not fit all, and that mass strategies no longer are sufficient in our age of electronic communication technologies and a population more educated than ever before.

Congregations are looking for and can 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. At the same time, there is a strong commitment to seeking resources consistent with our Anabaptist Mennonite perspectives.

These realities suggest a broadened way of thinking about how we conceive of and operationalize Biblical and other faith based information and content resourcing.

- a. First, a networking strategy seems important, linking together gifted people in congregations, area church clusters, our schools and elsewhere who are finding and creating resources for use by congregations and families. Some of these may, in fact, develop mini-resource centres.
- b. Second, we know a centre of energy is needed for networks to survive and thrive. Our existing Resource Centre could be central to this role, supplemented by resource people located elsewhere. Apart from tending to one or more resource networks, key roles of such an expanded and dispersed Resource Centre would include:
 - i. Curating content:
 - o Identifying resources of sound quality,
 - o Consistent with our Anabaptist Mennonite perspectives,



Future Directions Task Force

- o Evaluating them for topic, age-appropriateness, and various other criteria congregations may find helpful in seeking resources for niche purposes,
- o 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, DVDs, 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.

2. Mutual Resourcing Among Individuals/Congregations

The Task Force envisions an open source communication strategy of mutual exchange and partnership with the focus on facilitating mutual resourcing among individuals/congregations.

A focus on individuals/congregations resourcing one another:

- a. Builds on our understanding of the congregation as a foundational unit of the church;
- b. Reinforces our understanding that the larger church is not some "other" entity, but is us working together;
- c. Gives us a wider pool of resourcing than a few resource people scattered across the country;
- d. Makes good use of the many diverse gifts, skills and experiences of pastors and other congregational leaders (e.g. expertise in teaching, biblical knowledge, technology, administration, networking, missional ministries, etc.);
- e. Needs to be a dynamic network not static - e.g., the pastor of a Chinese church in one area might consult with the pastor of a Chinese church across the country on Bible study materials, and partner with a congregation in their own city to address needs of youth that no longer identify with their parents' mother tongue, and have a pulpit exchange with another neighbouring congregation; and,
- f. Means increased engagement for our pastors/leaders/congregations with one another which would strengthen our unity;
- g. Such networks would need at least one dedicated facilitator who could be anywhere in the country. In the early stages, facilitators would likely contribute their time voluntarily. Depending on the network, and its role in the larger denomination, some paid assistance may be needed, either supported by the Resource Centre Network or, perhaps, a pastor or lay leader contracted for a number of hours/week to facilitate such mutual resourcing.



Future Directions Task Force

Two potential avenues for such mutual resourcing are:

- a. *Affinity Networks* between individuals/congregations with particular interests, needs, or issues to share ideas, experiences, find solutions.) Twitter chats, Facebook groups, Google hangouts and other technology could be used to network individuals and congregations in Canada and beyond. The North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship and Mennonite Creation Care Network are examples of existing affinity networks.
- b. *Congregational Clusters* – Our pastors and congregations have a lot to offer one another in mentoring new pastors, incubating emerging churches, resourcing one another, and offering on-going mutual support. Existing pastoral clusters in some areas already offer personal/pastoral support. Congregational clusters hold the promise of having a more active role in supporting each other in mission and worship, discerning resources that might be helpful for nurturing faith, and so on.

Congregations 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. The larger church as “a congregation of congregations” can help to tend this by highlighting stories, people and communities who are living into their congregational calling and dreams.

The Task Force acknowledges that more work needs to be done on the following:

1. Resourcing emerging congregations. Congregational resourcing should not serve only current congregations, but new, emerging ones, whether they take on a traditional format, or have a dramatically new design. Some of this might happen naturally as congregations resource each other, but could also include financial resources for such congregations on a diminishing scale as they become more established.
2. Resourcing for leadership development. Since a major part of leadership development takes place within the congregations, resourcing congregations must include help in raising, nurturing, and developing leaders.
3. Resourcing for international witness. Encouraging and nurturing congregations around international witness so that they engage globally, is an important part of resourcing congregations.
4. Anabaptist conviction and identity. The resourcing of congregations from the multiple sources will always be framed by and promote Anabaptist conviction and identity.

The Task Force also affirms the important contribution the following make in resourcing congregations and fostering Anabaptist conviction and identity, even as they also are programs on behalf of the congregations with distinctive missions that includes leadership development and witness beyond the congregation:

- Church schools at all levels, primary and secondary schools, as well as post secondary schools (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Canadian Mennonite University, Columbia Bible College, Conrad Grebel University College);
- Global or international witness
- Camping ministries;



Future Directions Task Force

- Publishing of curriculum and other core resource materials.

More work needs to be done in how these various arms of the church collaborate more closely with each other, in inspiring Anabaptist identity and in leadership development. Further work is also needed on how global mission intersects with a congregation's mission, on how congregations are inspired to reimagine ourselves.

PART VI - Potential Organizational Arrangements

There is continuing evidence that existing programs and structures are unsustainable. The Task Force has consistently heard that our changing context requires significant change, not simply rearranging the programs and organizations we have. This is not to question the intent or goodness of work in past or current programs and organizations. It simply means new ways need to be found if we are to align with God's mission of healing and hope in our current context. Given the foundational role of the congregation, we are persuaded that how we organize ourselves at this time in history needs to more directly encourage and support congregations as mission centers while at the same time opening new space for work we do together as a people (denomination) in the world. The Task Force is persuaded that a fully integrated model has the most potential to increase our effectiveness in mission. This will also generate necessary cost savings and contribute to increased sustainability. Below we outline two possible arrangements.

1. Options.

The Task Force considered three broad options:

1. to revise and refine the current two-level model with national and area church continuing as separate entities;
2. a fully integrated model which, in turn, could take one of two forms
 - a. A national church, with dispersed centres of energy; and
 - b. Area/regional churches working as one on national agenda.

In addition it identified a number of considerations which could fit into any of the models.

The Task Force ruled out the 1st option for reasons already mentioned. It does not lead to an integrated, simpler, sounder and financially sustainable organization of the kind needed for our times. We thus present two fully integrated models, along with structural and programmatic suggestions that can be incorporated in each.

2. Common Elements of Two Proposed Models.

The Task Force proposes that the following become part of both models:

1. A single, unified "brand" (name, logo) and web site, presumably with regional pages, with congregations encouraged to have web sites based on the unified brand;
2. A common resource networking and resource centre strategy (as per Part V);
3. A unified flow of information between the larger church and the local congregation, i.e., a congregation receives information from only one place;
4. A unified flow of finances to the larger church, i.e., congregations send funds to only one place;



Future Directions Task Force

5. An executive minister (bishop? overseer?) with responsibility for leadership in spiritual oversight and vision for mission;
6. A “*Congregation of Ministerial Leadership*” – a body of all those who are members of congregational ministerial leadership teams, perhaps along with representatives from schools of the church. It meets regularly (perhaps biennially) for fellowship, mutual support and counsel, and study of ethical and theological issues. A body of this nature enables congregational leaders to have a more prominent role in denominational structures and setting of priorities (as per Part IV).

The Task Force also recommends that formation of an arms-length Support Services Agency be investigated. Such an agency might provide consultation and support services to congregations and salaried staff on a variety of matters including:

- human resources (e.g., hiring processes and procedures, contract discussions, conflict resolution between salaried staff and the congregation)
- governance (i.e., providing consulting services for congregations on how most effectively to organize and make decisions, particularly in times of difficulty)
- legal matters (e.g. CRA regulations)
- finances (managing a pension plan for all staff within MC Canada)
- information and communication technology advice and support

Such an agency might draw on experience, or even be formed by, groups that already have some of these components in service of the church such as Everance, Mennonite Foundation, Peace Works, ARC Ministries and others.

3. Division of Roles and Tasks

We have said it’s important for decisions of a program nature to be made as close as possible to where the program is carried out, while recognizing that some tasks are better done in a unified manner across the country, and some are better done regionally, closer to the congregation.

Therefore, whichever governance model is adopted, we suggest the following division of roles and tasks:

- a. At the regional and congregational level, where possible with parallel approaches and standards:
 - inspiring, resourcing and supporting congregations in mission, e.g., encouraging congregations to experiment in witness ministries)
 - monitoring congregational vitality and connection to resources
 - congregational leadership selection, nurture and discipline, including transition into ministry and other initiatives that nurture salaried and non-salaried leaders
 - connecting congregations for mutual support and resourcing
 - regional witness (e.g., aboriginal ministries) and church planting
 - camping programs
 - social justice ministries
 - schools



Future Directions Task Force

- b. In a unified manner across Canada the following (Note: other than international witness, these are essentially supportive of programming done in congregations or by the regions, or are representational in nature):
 - large picture visioning around identity and mission
 - 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 and resourcing regional staff, e.g., in camping ministry
 - developing standards and processes for leadership and leadership searches
 - international witness
 - support services for congregations and regional bodies
 - organizational memory and archives
 - representing the congregations ecumenically and internationally, e.g., Mennonite World Conference

4. Model A – An integrated national conference/church, with dispersed centres of energy

1. Governance structure
 - a. Each congregation is a member of the national conference/church, with the 235 congregations across Canada owning it.
 - b. Representatives of each congregation meet biennially for times of worship, setting vision and direction, and elections to a national Board.
 - c. It is led by a Board formed by a combination of individuals elected at assembly along with representatives from groups such as the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership, educational institutions, other constituency groups, and at large (e.g. MC USA structure).
 - d. Each regional 'centre of energy' has an advisory body formally part of and accountable to the one national conference/church, but with considerable autonomy on regional matters within a commonly agreed to approach to congregational support and mission.
2. Finances

All congregational donations to the larger church are integrated, with work and budget plans determining how funds are allocated, what portion is used for national agenda and what is allocated to dispersed centres for local programming.
3. Programming

The national organization determines what programming is done in a unified manner (e.g., large picture visioning, Mennonite World Conference, international witness, etc.), what is done via regional centres of energy (e.g., fostering congregational partnerships, schools, camps, etc.), and what is the prerogative of congregational groupings (e.g., camps, schools, etc.).



Future Directions Task Force

4. Staff and Related Human Resources
 - a. A dispersed leadership team model of executive staffing (cf. MC USA model), led by an executive minister (bishop? overseer?) with responsibility for leadership in spiritual oversight and in developing and implementing a common missional vision by and on behalf of the whole body.
 - b. Congregational Resource Ministers (1 per 15 – 20 congregations) dispersed across Canada to nurture and support congregational ministerial leadership teams be effective in guiding their congregations in formation, community and witness, linking congregations to resources and to other congregations with like interests, documenting and disseminating the learning that takes place when congregations try new ways of being church, discerning when outside support might be helpful, celebrating times of joy, and such other supports as seem important. Congregational resource ministers might also develop particular types of ministry expertise for sharing between and across areas.
 - c. Resource Networking and Resource Centre as per Part V.
 - d. Others as determined to address program and missional priorities.
 - e. NOTE: personnel of camps and church schools typically would be employed by separate church sponsored organizations as now is largely the case. Financial support from the conference might well be provided for particular missional purposes.
5. Assemblies
 - a. Canadian Assemblies held biennially for times of unified worship, setting vision and direction, and decision-making.
 - b. Regional Assemblies held annually for unified worship and encouraging and supporting existing and emerging congregations in their missions.
 - c. The Congregation of Ministerial Leadership would meet regularly (perhaps biennially) for fellowship, mutual support and counsel, and study.

5. Model B – Strong regional conferences/churches, which work as one on national priorities and agenda

In this model regional conferences/churches are the primary building blocks. The Task Force does not recommend that current Area Churches simply become these regional bodies – in part because of the significant inequality among them (in terms of size, financial resources, geography, etc.), but even more so because current Area Churches programming is as challenged by our changing times as programming at the Canada level. Both structure and programming bears rethinking.

For Model B to be viable, some economies of scale are required for similar services to be available to all congregations. Towards that end, the Task Force recommends that three regions be established: British Columbia, Prairie (AB, SK and MB), and Eastern, each with a new structure.

1. Governance structure
 - a. Each congregation is a member of a regional conference/church, with the congregations of the region owning it.
 - b. Representatives of congregations meet annually in their regions for times of worship, setting vision and direction, and elections to a regional Board – national assemblies may be planned as needed;



Future Directions Task Force

- c. Each regional conference/church is led by a Board formed by a combination of individuals elected at assembly along with representatives from groups such as pastors, educational institutions, other constituency groups.
 - d. The Regions work together on large picture visioning around identity and mission, and on national agenda (as described earlier). Additional consideration is needed on how such cooperation is best governed and administered. Too much governance, and the risk is we develop yet again a two-tier structure. Not enough governance attention, and the national/international agenda is at risk of being lost and, eventually, Regions could go their separate ways.
2. Finances

All congregational donations to the larger church are directed to the regional bodies, with a formula determining how these resources are allocated between regional programming and national/international agenda (cf. MCC Canada), with some consideration given to equalizing resources and services across the regions as possible and appropriate.
3. Programming

Regional bodies address those functions most appropriate to local/regional decision making (as described above); share information with the other regions on joys and concerns, successes and failures in pursuing our common vision and mission.

Working as one, the regions together address and work at the large picture issues, providing input and guidance to the national resource centre, and other functions identified above as essential national level issues.
4. Staff
 - a. Most staff are employees of the regional conferences/churches.
 - b. Core regional staff for congregational resourcing and other roles determined in each Region (a dispersed model of staffing is recommend).
 - c. Resource Network and the resource centre of energy staff would be national, reporting to the national leadership body to maintain a strong, common identity and resource exchange capability.
 - d. The regions together select a person to be their executive minister (bishop? overseer?), with responsibility for leadership in spiritual oversight and in developing and implementing a common missional vision by and on behalf of the whole body, working with Regions in promoting and supporting implementation of the vision on an agreed to strategic plan, serve as representative of the whole body at national and international meetings where such representation is important. Such a person would be appointed for a single term of 5 to 7 years, non-renewable.
 - e. The executive minister (overseer?) serves as the ex officio moderator of the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership.
5. Assemblies
 - a. Regional assemblies take place regularly for worship, unity building, setting vision and direction, and decision making.



Future Directions Task Force

- b. National assemblies could be organized for worship, unity building, study and celebration.
- c. The Congregation of Ministerial Leadership would meet regularly (perhaps biennially) for fellowship, mutual support and counsel, and study.

6. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Models

Every organizational model has both strengths to build on and weaknesses to guard against.

- In Model A the main strength is its suitability for pursuing a common vision and expression of faith across the whole of our body. This model lends itself to more easily seeing and reducing unnecessary duplication and, perhaps paradoxically, may be more able to support congregations distant from other clusters of congregations. If this Model is selected, safeguard needs to be included to protect the ability of the regions to work at local agenda since the overall governance is centralized.
- In Model B the main strength is its sensitivity to regional differences and nuances in how programming and mission may be carried out. Advantages are that this model may be easier to imagine and transition into and, if adopted, those in elected positions may feel closer to and be known by congregations. If this Model is selected, safeguard needs to be included to protect the ability of the church to work at national and international agenda in that the natural momentum is toward regional interests. In the absence of some binding covenant, the unity of the whole body is at risk of coming apart over time.

Part VII - Conclusion

More work on how we organize ourselves for mission and support will be done following receipt of feedback on these proposals and options at the 2015 annual Area Church meetings and from other parts of our church body. With greater clarity on our collectively preferred model of organizing ourselves in an integrated, simpler, sounder way, the Task Force will be in a position to give critical attention to:

- Costing out the preferred model and how greater administrative efficiencies, cost savings, and sustainability will be achieved; and,
- how we work at being church together beyond local congregations, as identified at the conclusion of Part V.

One final comment. Irrespective of the organizational model adopted, it is likely that a Transition Coordinator will be required to move our existing organizations into a new arrangement.

We Invite your prayers of support and comments.

Holy Spirit, inspire us with wisdom, clarity, creativity, and courage. Work in us, in our congregations and wider church that we might more effectively follow Jesus, extend that call to others, and grow as communities of grace, joy and peace. May we be open to the challenges and new opportunities before us, as we seek to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We offer you our continued prayers in the name of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who is God with us. Amen.

Appendix Comparing Two Models of Governance, Staffing and Programming

	Model A - Unified	Model B - Regional
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Congregation a member of national conference/church. ○ Congregation reps meet biennially for worship, set direction, provide input, elect national board. ○ National board sets broad vision and strategy plus manages programs for common good of all. ○ Advisory bodies tailor vision and strategy across the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Congregation a member of regional conference/church (BC, Prairie, Eastern). ○ Congregation reps meet annually for worship, set direction, provide input, elect regional board. ○ Regional boards set direction for regions, manage programs. ○ Regions together set broad vision and manage programs common to all.
Governing Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Bd of those elected at nat'l assemblies plus reps from constituency groups. ○ Advisory bodies set up to support and advise dispersed staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regional Bds of those elected at reg'l assemblies plus reps from constituency groups. ○ A national body put together by Regions for national agenda.
Congregation of Ministerial Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comprised of congregational leadership teams plus church school representatives. ○ Meet biennially for study, mutual support/counsel and fellowship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comprised of congregational leadership teams plus church school representatives. ○ Meet biennially for study, mutual support/counsel and fellowship.
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Congregational funding to national body. ○ Majority spent in support of congregations in regions (e.g. 60/40). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Congregational funding to regional body. ○ Covenant re: distribution for regional vs. national programs.
Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roles and tasks divided into those at congregational/regional levels and those of the unified whole across Canada and beyond (see Part VI.3 of <i>God, Mission and People</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roles and tasks divided into those at congregational/regional levels and those of the unified whole across Canada and beyond (see Part VI.3 of <i>God, Mission and People</i>).
Leadership and Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A national executive minister (overseer) and leadership team working in a dispersed model. ○ Congregational resource ministers dispersed across Canada to support congregations. ○ Resource networking and resource centers of energy. ○ Others as determined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regions determine staffing for programs in their areas including congregational resourcing (dispersed model proposed). ○ Regions together select national executive minister (overseer). ○ Resource networking and resource centers of energy. ○ Others as determined.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Model A (Unified)

Strengths: (1) suitability for pursuing a common vision and expression of faith across the whole; (2) lends itself to seeing and reducing unnecessary duplication and, perhaps paradoxically, to support congregations distant from other clusters of congregations.

Weaknesses: If selected, safeguards need to protect the ability of regions to work at local agenda.

Model B (Regional)

Strengths: (1) sensitivity to regional differences and nuances in how programming and mission may be carried out; (2) may be easier to imagine and transition into and, perhaps, those in elected positions may feel closer to and be known by congregations.

Weaknesses: If selected, safeguards need to protect national and international agenda as the natural momentum is toward regional interests. In the absence of some binding covenant, the unity of the whole body is at risk of coming apart over time.

Endnotes:

¹ At various points this draft statement is influenced by a document produced by Mennonite Church USA called, "Our Purposeful Plan," released in February, 2014. Much of this paragraph comes directly from that document.

² In his booklet *What is an Anabaptist Christian* Palmer Becker speaks of these three as: 1) Jesus is the center of our faith, 2) Community is the center of our lives, 3) Reconciliation is the center of our work.

³ Data from Reginald Bibby (2012). *A New Day: The Resilience and Restructuring of Religion in Canada*, available on line from Project Canada.com. This summarizes data from both 'evangelical' and 'mainline' churches in Canada presented in his 2011 book *Beyond the Gods and Back*.

⁴ *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to Church*, a study by J Penner Associates (2011), sponsored by Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Varsity Christian Fellowship and others. A copy is available at hemorrhagingfaith.com.

⁵ Douglas John Hall, *The future of the church: Critical remembrance as entrée to hope*. The Kenneth Cousland Lecture, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, 16 October 2013, p. 8.

⁶ Bibby (2011, 2012), *Op. Cit.*

⁷ These averages mask data that show 'mainline churches' and the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec have been much more heavily affected than Protestant Evangelicals (including Mennonites).

⁸ The "Our Purposeful Plan" document of MC USA suggests the larger church supports the ministry of the congregation by providing the following (p. 17):

- a sense of identity and belonging that transcends the local context;
- ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations;
- educational resources and other means of discipleship;
- encouragement during difficult times in congregational life;
- broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of mission in the world;
- support for calling, training, and sustaining congregational leaders;
- ways to keep communal vision and memory alive and refreshed;
- avenues to cooperate with groups on projects in mission or relief;
- outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues;
- a shared public voice when broad consultation is needed in order to speak well.