

1 **Report of Working Group on Vision and Identity of a National Church**

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3 We fully endorse the MC Canada Vision, Statement of Identity and Purpose, and Priorities:

4 ***Vision statement of the Mennonite Church***

5 God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ  
6 and, by the power of the Holy Spirit  
7 to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace  
8 so that God’s healing and hope  
9 flow through us to the world.

10 ***Statement of Identity and Purpose***

- 11 • God calls, equips and sends the church to engage the world with the
- 12 reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 13 • We are a community of disciples of Jesus, a part of the Body of Christ,
- 14 covenanted together as congregations, area churches, and a national church
- 15 body.
- 16 • Gratefully responding to God’s initiatives and empowered by the Holy Spirit,
- 17 we commit ourselves and our resources to calling, equipping and sending the
- 18 church to engage the world with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ.

19 ***Our three priorities:***

- 20 • Form a people of God
- 21 • Become a global church
- 22 • Grow leaders for the church

23 We consider this to be an excellent basis on which to conceptualize a strong national church  
24 identity.

25  
26 ***I. Why is a nation-wide church identity important?***

27  
28 ***1. Unity lies at the heart of Jesus’ prayer for the church***

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30 We have reminded ourselves that the hard and exciting work of becoming one in  
31 Christ amidst the diversity of theology, culture, race, and geography is not *our* vision  
32 or project, but God’s. We are responding to Jesus’ prayer for the church’s unity (John  
33 17), and to Paul’s vision of the unity of the body (1 Corinthians 12-13; Ephesians 2,  
34 4). Our shared identity rests in our communion with Christ.

35

1           2. *The “local” is never the whole, just as “national” cannot be the whole*

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3           While there is strong biblical support for stressing the importance of local  
4 congregations (for example, Paul’s letters to specific congregations in Corinth and  
5 Thessalonica), biblically the body of Christ extends far beyond the local context (for  
6 example, Acts, or letters such as Ephesians, Colossians, or 1 Peter). Being church  
7 together across the country thus nurtures our core identity as an Anabaptist family that  
8 is part of the “cosmic” body of Christ.

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10          Thus, in view both of the Future Directions narrative which places congregations “at  
11 the centre of the mission and worship of the church” (Interim Report p.6), and of the  
12 ongoing vulnerability of national unity in relation to the BFC process, we believe it is  
13 necessary to stress that the body of Christ is larger than the congregation. In the  
14 language of the Addendum to the FDTF Report approved in Saskatoon in 2016,  
15 congregations are “cells” of this body. That body extends beyond the Mennonite  
16 Church, and certainly beyond the borders of Canada (e.g., MWC, the global  
17 ecumenical church). But the church we are together across our country is both a test of  
18 and testimony to our unity in Christ, helping us to more fully become part of the global  
19 church.

20  
21          The Working Group struggled with “national” and the way it relates to the church. The  
22 body of Christ does not recognize national or political borders. Whereas we do not  
23 have the wisdom to propose changes to “Mennonite Church Canada” as a name, we  
24 wish to draw attention to the tension between “national church” and the larger “body  
25 of Christ,” which should be kept in mind in any proposed name change.

26  
27           3. *We can both do and be more together than we can on our own*

28  
29          A nation-wide church calls us to put into practice the communion (*koinōnia*) that binds  
30 us together in the body of Christ, even if, or especially when, it would be easier to go it  
31 on our own. Having a nation-wide identity is thus about so much more than what we  
32 can’t do on our own.

33  
34           4. *We need more, not less, of the whole to care for and strengthen the part*

35  
36          Just as the national church needs strong and vibrant local congregations and supportive  
37 area churches, so congregations need the experience of the larger body and its  
38 diversity in order to strengthen a sense of shared mission, witness, call to discipleship,  
39 and mutual support. Members of congregations need to have the experience of the  
40 larger church in order to view their own life more fully as part of the body of Christ.  
41 These are Anabaptist convictions we need to hold and nurture together, but also to  
42 share with the wider body of the church beyond the Mennonite community.

43  
44           5. *Being a nation-wide church provides us with a very specific opportunity to witness to*

1 *the unity of the Spirit and the peace of Christ*  
2

3 Canadian geography, history, and cultural diversity present real challenges to identity  
4 and shared experience for Canadians. That is the case also for the Mennonite Church  
5 in Canada, spread as we are across many provinces and regions, clustered in ways that  
6 easily isolate congregations and area churches from each other. There are competing  
7 centres of Mennonite life, reflective of diverse histories and traditional identities.  
8 Diversity of language, history, ethnicity, theology, class, and culture further test our  
9 unity. The body of Christ is a school of hospitality, of “welcoming each other as Christ  
10 welcomes us.” Unity in Christ calls us to witness within the political and social reality  
11 of Canada to a Spirit-given unity that breaks down walls and distances. Being together  
12 in a nation-wide faith community can help us grow in cultural, spiritual, and ecclesial  
13 intelligence and sensitivity.  
14

15 6. *Being a nation-wide community of faith will enable us to witness and work more*  
16 *effectively in a world torn by conflict and war*  
17

18 Whereas our witness at the congregational level with regard to violence, injustice, and  
19 conflict, is critically important, a larger national voice is more effective when speaking  
20 to issues which involve our country as a whole, such as peace, war, refugee crises,  
21 aboriginal rights, etc.  
22

23 In short, we need a strong national church and identity -

- 24 ● because faithfulness to the Scriptures demands it
- 25 ● because we need each other with all our diversity
- 26 ● because we need each other to witness to the unity of the Spirit brought about by  
27 God through Jesus Christ  
28

29  
30 **II. *What do we need to realize a “strong national denomination” (Addendum #3)?***  
31

32 (Specific suggestions are offered in the Appendix)  
33

34 1. *A deep sense of what the church is and what it means to be part of it*  
35

36 There is great urgency to find fresh ways to articulate what it means to be connected to  
37 and grow as the body of Christ. The church is the living body of Christ, a covenanted  
38 community of faith, called to participation in God’s mission. That conviction lies at  
39 the heart of Anabaptism. MC Canada’s vision, identity, and purpose statement  
40 articulates it well. We need to deepen our appreciation for the vision and let it shape  
41 our imagination as congregations, inspiring the creativity and commitment to having it  
42 “catch fire” in persons and congregations across the country so that we share a vision  
43 for what it means to be church to and with each other across Canada.  
44

- 1           2. *An Anabaptist vision that is biblically grounded, comprehensive, transformative, and*  
2           *able to nurture unity.*

3  
4           Historically, “Anabaptism” is characterized by faithfulness to Scripture,  
5           transformation by the Spirit, and following Jesus in everyday life. The church is  
6           understood to be a community of disciples who witness to Christ in word and deed,  
7           including in contexts of violence and injustice. Such a vision, shared across the  
8           country, will bind us together across many of the divides that estrange us from each  
9           other. Keeping this triune focus can allow us to be accountable to each other. Persons  
10          and congregations with a passion for social peace and justice will not let us forget that  
11          that passion grows out of the love of God for this world. Evangelically-minded  
12          Anabaptist persons and congregations will not let us forget that reconciliation between  
13          us and God is God’s ultimate act of peacemaking. The church is to be a body that  
14          unifies these emphases in its life and witness.

- 15  
16          3. *Practical means to develop and nurture a sense of what it means to be the church*  
17          *together across Canada*

18  
19          Being church *together* is core to what it means to be church. We need practical ways--  
20          events, resources, structures--to strengthen a shared identity as a nation-wide  
21          community of faith.

- 22  
23          4. *Opportunities to connect with each other across the country—person-to-person,*  
24          *congregation-to-congregation*

25  
26          To have a strong national church and identity requires that people have occasions to  
27          share and hear each other’s stories, including beyond the more familiar circle of the  
28          area church. Distance can easily lead to misunderstanding, estrangement, and division.  
29          We need real experiences of each other to truly appreciate each other's faith.

- 30  
31          5. *Meaningful input into the national church reality by congregations and their members*

32  
33          For the national level of church life to help form congregations requires practical and  
34          structural ways in which members and congregations experience themselves to be  
35          essential parts of one whole. Members need to be fully engaged participants in vital  
36          decisions and events of the national church. They need to feel needed by the larger  
37          church body. The proposed annual meetings of the ministerial leaders and the  
38          gatherings for worship and discernment meeting on alternate years are a step in that  
39          direction.

- 40  
41          6. *Institutions and structures that nurture and sustain a nation-wide identity*

42  
43          Institutions and structures appropriate and complementary to a national church identity  
44          and life help enable, nurture, and empower what we do together, and thus strengthen

1 who we are together. They are where we put into practice our covenants, where we  
2 struggle with and also support each other within the unity of the Spirit.

3  
4 *7. Shared resources*

5  
6 Hymnals, curricula, resource persons, resource centre, schools, etc., help forge such a  
7 shared Anabaptist identity and orientation. These resources are key to a strong national  
8 communion. Technology is making it easy to access resources from beyond the  
9 Mennonite family of faith, even to ignore or exclude Mennonite resources, which can  
10 lead to a loss of shared experience, and thus to a loss of shared identity.

11  
12 *8. Support for ministerial leadership*

13  
14 Area churches vary greatly in the resources they have for their ministerial leadership  
15 (finding pastors, human resource issues). We need a national level of church to  
16 coordinate these across the regions, advocating especially for those area churches with  
17 fewer resources.

18  
19 *9. Help in times of conflict*

20  
21 Conflicts arise within area churches and between area churches. We need a national  
22 level church identity to know that we belong together through thick and thin, and we  
23 need a national church structure and personnel that has the capacity to intervene, help  
24 interpret, reconcile, provide pastoral accompaniment. This is especially important  
25 given the disparity of resources between area churches.

26  
27 *10. Commitment from area churches*

28  
29 For a nation-wide communion to be viable, it will be critically important that area  
30 churches devote money, staff, and time to nurturing the sense of the church beyond the  
31 area church. Only so will congregations be motivated and committed to offer their  
32 persons, time, and money to make it possible.

33  
34 ***III. Assets and Strengths***

35  
36 *1. God loves the church*

37  
38 “If God is for us, who (what) can be against us?!” It is God who calls us into  
39 peoplehood. The church is ultimately God’s project. And God has provided skills and  
40 imagination and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit, to help the church survive and  
41 thrive, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

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2. *We love the church*

Our love of God and our desire to follow Jesus grounds our love for the church. There are countless members of congregations, pastors, and church leaders, at all levels of the church, who are passionate about the church, who pray for the church, work for and in it tirelessly and sacrificially, who will stick with the church through all of the challenges and changes to come. Their commitment will express itself in support, affirmation, but also in caution, counsel, and criticism. The Emerging Voices Initiative shows that this is true across the demographic spectrum.

3. *We are a church with a strong sense of family*

Whereas long histories and traditions have, at times, made it difficult to integrate newcomers into our community of faith, “being family” is highly valued among us, and a source of strength in times of upheaval and change. With God’s help we are learning to live into God’s dream of a diverse family from different nations coming together, learning to love, struggle, and discern together midst disagreement and diversity.

3. *We are a community with a shared history*

It is a distinct asset for being a nation-wide community of faith to have shared histories, whether they go back to Anabaptist beginnings, or to more recent times of migration, displacement, or integration. Histories are shared memories that have shaped a shared, if by now richly multicultural, identity as Mennonites in Canada.

4. *We share worship resources that nurture Anabaptist identity*

Our participation together in larger church structures, both national and bi-national, has brought greatly valued resources into congregational life (e.g., hymnals, curricula, gifted persons able to minister across regions), as well as an excellent and much-used resource centre. These have been indispensable for nurturing a shared identity of what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus, to live out the peace of Christ, both in the world and in the congregation.

5. *Global Anabaptist community*

We are growing in our appreciation of being part of the global church (e.g., MWC). We are learning to both give and receive from the world-wide church, which is helping us to humbly unlearn old habits of superiority and control. We are coming to see ourselves as one part of a global Anabaptist community, which is one part of the global body of Christ. We see this consciousness being an important asset for being a nation-wide church.

1           6. *Strong heritage of peacemaking and witness*  
2

3           We value that our tradition has made peace and peacemaking essential to our life and  
4           witness in our world. We see it as a God-given asset, both as a witness that draws  
5           new people to Anabaptist expressions of faith, and as an indispensable strength when  
6           we struggle together on highly divisive issues, including the restructuring of the  
7           national church. It can give us the patience for the time it takes to discern the will of  
8           God through Scripture, prayer, and deliberation (e.g., the BFC process).  
9

10 **IV. *Vulnerabilities and Challenges***  
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12           We wish to identify a number of factors in the proposed restructuring that we see as  
13           significant vulnerabilities and thus as challenges to forging a strong national church and  
14           identity.  
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16           1. *Individualism and lack of commitment/covenant*  
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18           We lament the loss of a “culture of commitment.” The church is up against strong  
19           headwinds of individualism and impatience with diversity. Persons are leaving their  
20           congregation very easily, or participating as long and as frequently as it serves their  
21           need. Congregations can be “individualistic” as well, too quickly breaking their  
22           covenants with others. Area churches are unlikely to be immune to these forces in  
23           relation to each other.  
24

25           2. *The narrative that prioritizes the congregation as the “centre”*  
26

27           The Interim Report gives priority to the congregation, and speaks of the national  
28           church mostly as a means to do “what we can’t do on our own.” This stress will make  
29           it very difficult to nurture a sense of why we need a national level of church that goes  
30           beyond an instrumental purpose. The loss of a “culture of commitment” can affect  
31           how congregations relate to the larger church. Such “congregational individualism”  
32           will weaken a larger identity. We should be concerned not to allow the national level  
33           of church to morph from living organism into a functional structure/ bureaucracy,  
34           however small or large. That is not enough, we think, to create and sustain an identity  
35           as a national family of faith. Can the narrative be changed to stress that congregations  
36           are “cells” of a larger whole? The Addendum did that, but the Interim Report does  
37           not.  
38

39           3. *“Area-church congregationalism”*  
40

41           This point expands on the former. A congregational church polity has always had  
42           difficulty articulating a meaning of church that extends beyond the congregation. It  
43           has led to a culture of congregational autonomy in serious tension with “being church  
44           together,” which we see as core to a national identity. We are concerned, further, that

1 the present structure could lead to a kind of “area church-congregationalism” that will  
2 make it all the more difficult to nurture and even maintain a sense of belonging to  
3 each other beyond regional lines. We are thus concerned with the option being  
4 presented to call the new national reality a “conference” rather than “church.”  
5

6 4. *A pared-down skeleton of a national office and staff*  
7

8 We think that the proposed office and staff structure can make it difficult to facilitate  
9 and nurture what it takes for members in congregations to first develop, and then  
10 deepen, a sense of identification with a nation-wide church body. The Future  
11 Directions process was precipitated by a loss of such a sense and its fiscal  
12 consequences. Are we trying to make a stronger national denomination/church with  
13 yet fewer resources? Relatedly, will there be enough investment of time, money, and  
14 personnel, if the impetus for national efforts depends on the agreement of all area  
15 churches, each of which has its own hands full and budgets typically struggling to be  
16 met?  
17

18 5. *The absence of direct congregational say in the national church*  
19

20 The absence in the proposed structure of having congregations directly engaged in the  
21 national church decision-making will make it difficult to nurture a national identity.  
22 Will it be enough for congregations to feel their voice is heard if it is channeled only  
23 through area church staff and a small number of delegates? In the first few years there  
24 will still be persons who live out of a memory of the old relationships. But the new  
25 structure cannot rely on old reflexes. We are thus concerned that, as that generation  
26 passes, and as memories of greater interaction and shared decision-making fade, the  
27 proposed structure is not strong enough to nurture and sustain a sense of national  
28 identity. This has repercussions in turn for the capacity of the national church to  
29 nurture an Anabaptist identity in congregations, one of the stated objectives of why  
30 we need a national church.  
31

32 6. *Diversity of size and strength of Area Churches*  
33

34 Area churches are very diverse in size and thus in representation in the new structure.  
35 Members and congregations have very different senses of having depended on the  
36 national church and its staff in the past. Is the potential for a sense of abandonment by  
37 congregations in the smaller area churches being taken seriously structurally and  
38 programmatically? We are concerned, too, that smaller area churches will be  
39 dominated by the larger, better resourced, area churches. Will the national level of  
40 church structure have the capacity to be a helpful resource when disparities become  
41 problems?  
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1           7. *Theological diversity and polarization*  
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3           Mennonites are very diverse theologically. We read the Bible differently; we treat  
4           doctrines/confessions differently. What makes this challenging for a national identity  
5           is that some of these differences are especially marked along “old” Mennonite/ “new”  
6           Mennonite lines, borders, and identities. Impressions and stereotypes of the church  
7           are a challenge not only regarding how “outsiders” view the church, but how we  
8           view each other: old vs new, traditional vs “emerging” or “experimental,”  
9           “liberal/inclusive” vs “traditional/evangelical/ fundamentalistic,” “Anabaptist” vs  
10          “Evangelical,” etc. Canadian geography, and the way we as Mennonites are spread  
11          across this land, can exacerbate these differences. When this diversity also creates  
12          tensions between area churches, will there be sufficient capacity at the national level  
13          to help forge a shared sense of identity?  
14

15          8. *Diversity in congregational pastoral leadership*  
16

17          The old structure, with AMBS at the centre of leadership development, has given  
18          way, first, to dispersal of leadership training across Canada (CBC, CMU, CGUC, and  
19          to a shrinking degree AMBS), and, second, to the hiring of pastors not trained in  
20          Mennonite schools and thus not always in tune with Anabaptist perspectives on  
21          discipleship, peace, and the value of the broader Mennonite community. This  
22          represents a major challenge for a strong national church identity.  
23

24          9. *Lack of awareness in congregations of the impact of the larger church on*  
25          *congregational life*  
26

27          There is a lack of appreciation for how much the larger Mennonite church structures  
28          and resources have played a role in enriching congregational life. These have all been  
29          essential for a shared Anabaptist identity. If the emphasis falls on the local  
30          congregation, and secondly on the area church, with the national church level  
31          removed even further from the congregation, will congregations seek out the national  
32          level resources? The pull of alternative resources is already very strong.  
33

34          ***Conclusion***  
35

36          We submit this report with full awareness that ultimately the future of the church,  
37          including a Canada-wide church, rests in the hands of its creator and sustainer. It is God  
38          who in love reconciles us in the Christ who is our peace, fashioning us together into one  
39          body. We follow Jesus together, empowered through the Spirit. That is what the church is  
40          at its core. While we can do much good and much damage, the church is ultimately not  
41          our creation, but God’s. With that in mind we submit this report with the prayer that God  
42          will grant the Transition Team and its staff all the wisdom, insight, and courage required  
43          for this task ahead.

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1 **APPENDIX – What do we need?**  
2 **(Specific suggestions from the National Identity Working Group)**  
3

4 **I. We need a deep sense of what the church is and what it means to be part**  
5 **of the living body of Christ.**

6 **a. A FRESH ARTICULATION OF OUR SHARED VISION.**

7 While we fully endorse the existing vision, a crisp new articulation can help the  
8 vision take on deepened meaning and refreshed understanding. This may  
9 include a new tag line such as “good to be church with you.”

10  
11 **b. A NAME THAT EMPHASIZES THAT WE ARE A CHURCH AND PART OF THE BODY**  
12 **OF CHRIST TOGETHER.** Words are powerful and help to define us. Even in the  
13 process of defining a different configuration of how we are organized, it is  
14 important to remember that we are a church. The use of the term ‘national  
15 church’ suggests a functional bureaucracy. Our name must reflect our identity as  
16 believers in Jesus Christ.

17  
18 **c. A SHARED BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING.**

19 Studying the Bible together is key in shaping our shared identity. Some  
20 important themes/texts to consider include: Ephesians 2 - unity in Christ is not  
21 uniformity; Micah 4 – all nations meeting on the mountain of God; covenant  
22 renewal; Acts 17 – sharing faith with our neighbours.

23  
24 **d. A TIME TO LAMENT AND TO RE-COVENANT.**

25 In this liminal period a service of lament may help us to grieve what is being left  
26 behind in the restructuring. A covenant service could celebrate that we are in  
27 this together. This could be used at the October meeting, at area church  
28 meetings and/or with individual congregations

29  
30 **II. We need to develop and nurture a sense of what it means to be the**  
31 **church together across Canada. This includes opportunities and occasions**  
32 **to connect with each other across the country. Person to person,**  
33 **congregation to congregation, area church to area church.**

34  
35 **a. CLEAR COMMUNICATION**

- 36 i. **Visuals** to use in worship or in banner form that highlight our common  
37 priorities, for example Witness, Education.  
38 ii. Regular **blog** updates or words of inspiration from the executive  
39 officer/pastor.  
40 iii. Use of **online technologies to help us connect.** An online book club. A  
41 book study where people meet online to read and pray together. A

- 1 weekly Bible study for those using lectionary resources.
- 2 iv. **Posting of minutes** of significant decisions/discussion of meetings of
- 3 leaders/executives/councils for both the area churches and MC Canada.
- 4 v. **Canadian Mennonite to continue**
- 5 Some form of joint communication is critical in communicating what is
- 6 happening across the country.
- 7 vi. **Story sharing** pages on the main website. Each congregation across the
- 8 country could contribute at least one story, blog, sermon or worship
- 9 resource a year.
- 10 vii. **Comprehensive Listing** of available podcasts, sermons, blogs from
- 11 pastors of our congregations across the country.
- 12

13 b. **PURPOSEFUL MEETINGS**

- 14 i. **Biannual gatherings for worship and study**, held in conjunction with one
- 15 of the schools (eg. CBC, CMU, CGUC) in its area, around a topic or theme
- 16 developed with the congregation of Ministerial Leaders. Resources from
- 17 all the schools, including AMBS, could be used to enhance the learning
- 18 opportunities. Workshops could include instruction on practical helps
- 19 like worship leading, speaking, pastoral visits etc. Meetings to be tied to
- 20 annual delegate sessions.
- 21 ii. **Congregation of Ministerial Leaders meetings** held on alternate years in
- 22 one of the smaller regions not covered by the schools (Alberta,
- 23 Saskatchewan, remote MCEC). Annual delegate sessions would be tied to
- 24 these sessions.
- 25 iii. **Activities for children and youth** to be included in the assemblies. This
- 26 could include a service work camp, an athletic tournament, songfest, etc.
- 27 iv. **Intergenerational Missions initiatives** that could bring together people
- 28 from across regional lines to work together at a designated project each
- 29 summer. Could partner with MDS, or local initiatives.
- 30

31 c. **TEACHING FOR GROWTH**

- 32 i. Create **opportunities to worship and study** together
- 33 ii. **Practical teaching for strengthening congregations** is needed. This could
- 34 include: worship leading, song leading, teaching Sunday School,
- 35 preaching, leading Bible studies, visitation, connecting with neighbours,
- 36 etc. Teaching could take place at assemblies, via Webinars, Via podcasts
- 37 with a feedback mechanism, via Google hangout, Zoom, via portable
- 38 courses from the schools, through a formal or informal local, in-person
- 39 mentorship arrangement, etc,
- 40 1. This teaching could utilize teachers from AMBS, CMU, CGUC, or
- 41 CBC

- 1                   iii. **Shared resources.** This is vital for us. This includes the new hymnal  
2                   project, Commonword, worship resources like Leader magazine, Sunday  
3                   School curriculum.
- 4                   iv. **A Bible study** that all congregations could study in the same year. We  
5                   suggest beginning with a focus on what it means to be church - perhaps a  
6                   study of Ephesians.
- 7                   v. **Promotion of resources** offered by church schools for workshops,  
8                   portable courses, etc.

9  
10           d. **NURTURING IDENTITY**

- 11                   i. An annual **intentional personal connection** between MC Canada staff  
12                   and/or area church leadership and each local congregation to foster two-  
13                   way communication and inclusion. Regular face to face visits as possible  
14                   would help put a face to the broader community. We recommend a  
15                   rotation so that all congregations get visits at a reasonable interval.
- 16                   ii. **Twinning** congregations to form relationships and share resources and  
17                   ideas. This could happen in person or through internet connections. This  
18                   could involve assigning pen pals, joint youth meetings via google  
19                   hangout, joint mission projects etc.
- 20                   iii. Encouraging **Exploration in Ministry exchanges.**
  - 21                           1. Persons exploring ministry go to a congregation outside their  
22                           region for 1-3 months as a ministry intern.
- 23                   iv. **Opportunities for youth** to learn to know each other. This could include  
24                   summer work camps related to assemblies, a mission project,  
25                   congregational youth exchanges. It is important to encourage the  
26                   building of relationships with youth who are not attending the church  
27                   related schools through sports or the arts or adventure.
- 28                   v. **Encouraging of intergenerational activities** like potluck suppers where  
29                   youth and seniors are paired to sit together. Conversation starter-  
30                   questions/story prompts would be provided. This could be in local  
31                   congregations or in broader church settings.
- 32                   vi. **Summer Great Trek:** Provide 4 young adults with train passes and a  
33                   mandate to meet with as many congregations as possible and set up a  
34                   blog with stories and pictures of their travels and interactions
- 35                   vii. **A travelling history exhibit.** (An example of this is from Switzerland –  
36                   Contact Tom Yoder Neufeld.) A collection of stories and displays that  
37                   tells the stories of each congregation and highlights what they are doing.  
38                   A person or couple would travel with this exhibit, tell the stories and  
39                   show the displays to people across the country.
- 40                   viii. **A travelling art exhibit** that showcases the identity, uniqueness and  
41                   belonging of each congregation through its contribution. Visually we

1 then can see the beauty of diversity. (e.g., *All Beings Confluence* exhibit)

2 ix. **Celebrate music making.**

- 3 1. Have choir or worship bands tour a section of Canada each year to  
4 visit area churches and/or congregations. This special music  
5 group could be formed from representatives from the different  
6 schools or from volunteers from different areas.  
7 2. Encourage hymn singing events. Celebrate our global identity  
8 through music making.  
9

10 **III. We need healthy structures and designated staff positions that nurture  
11 and sustain the Mennonite Church in Canada.**

- 12 a. **INTENTIONAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE** representing a diversity of age, gender,  
13 ethnicity, and region in the structures of interactions across the country.  
14 b. **STAFFING:**  
15 i. A staff person who **tends to and fosters the opportunities for connecting**  
16 with one another across the country,  
17 ii. A staff person (pastor?) who will **connect with each congregation** in  
18 some form at least annually, and visiting all congregations regularly as  
19 possible (every 3 or 5 years?).  
20 iii. A staff person tasked with **overseeing controversial issues** – helping  
21 foster conversations, listening to perceptions, working to avoid positions  
22 becoming entrenched by default.  
23 iv. **A person who can give attention and assistance to our identity**  
24 **formation as a Mennonite people in Canada.** This includes tending to  
25 the relationship between the area churches and the cross- Canada church  
26 relationships.  
27 v. A person to oversee and develop the **website and media communication**  
28 as well as initiate the collection of stories and the listing of available  
29 blogs/podcasts.  
30 vi. **Support for ministerial leadership.** A pastor responsible to network with  
31 regional church conference ministers. To help with connecting pastors  
32 who are looking for churches with churches who are looking for pastors.  
33 To help with credential guidelines and matters of accountability and  
34 conflict.  
35 vii. A person who can **formulate and articulate statements on our behalf** to  
36 one another, to our Mennonite Church USA sisters, in MWC, in  
37 ecumenical settings and to provincial and federal governments.  
38 viii. **Practical employment Assistance** in setting pastor salary guidelines and  
39 insurance/pension planning.  
40 c. **ARCHIVES:** We need a place and a person to ensure appropriate records are kept  
41 securely for future generations: Demographic records; Faith development issue  
42 documentation; Statements of Faith; Policy decisions; Historical records; Family

1 records; etc.

- 2 d. **CONTINUATION OF FUNDS** such as Company of 1000 in assisting those pursuing  
3 seminary education.
- 4 e. **THE NURTURE OF PARTNERSHIPS** with other organizations who may already be  
5 doing something we are interested in doing. We don't have to do it all alone.
- 6 f. **SUPPORT AND PROMOTION OF OUR CHURCH SCHOOLS.** This includes Canadian  
7 Mennonite University, Conrad Grebel University College, Columbia Bible College,  
8 Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and the area Mennonite high schools.  
9 i. **Encourage** schools to form connections with each other across the  
10 country.

11  
12 **IV. Meaningful input into the national church reality by congregations and**  
13 **their members**

- 14 a. **AN INPUT MECHANISM:** Structured ways for all congregations to give feedback  
15 on critical issues of the day, such as the Future Directions Task Force  
16 recommendations or Being a Faithful Church.
- 17 b. **DELEGATE selection** including input from congregations on delegate selection,  
18 including people from different congregations as delegates and, if possible,  
19 including someone from each congregation over time.
- 20 c. **CROSS REGIONAL SUPPORT GROUPS** for each area of priority. This could be via  
21 video conferencing, to provide for support, counsel and feedback for staff (like  
22 previous councils).
- 23 d. **FEEDBACK MECHANISM:** Area Church leadership will need to help individual  
24 congregations feel heard and connected to joint ministry with other  
25 congregations across the country.
- 26 e. **INTENTIONAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE** representing a diversity of age, gender,  
27 ethnicity, and region in the structures of interactions across the country.  
28 (repeated for emphasis)

29  
30 **V. We need the commitment of healthy area churches to have a growing**  
31 **nation-wide church.**

- 32 a. **PURPOSEFUL ATTENTION** to listening to each congregation and fostering a  
33 strong relationship with the area church on a regular basis.  
34 i. **Mentoring** or walking along side new congregations joining the area  
35 church – helping them feel like a part of the family and understand  
36 commitment expectations and feel their questions/concerns are heard.
- 37 b. **AREA CHURCH STAFF**  
38 i. Tasked with attending to national identity and connections.  
39 ii. Tasked to help congregations prepare for and navigate the transition to  
40 the new structure
- 41 c. **A DESIGNATED OBSERVER** appointed by each area church to attend the annual

1 meetings of other area churches and report back to their own area. This will  
2 help to cross fertilize and to share ideas and initiatives.

3 d. **THE COMMITMENT OF LOCAL CHURCHES**

4 i. To financially support the area and nation-wide church.

5 ii. To send delegates from their congregation to attend area church  
6 meetings. (Area church to send delegates to the Canadian delegate  
7 sessions.)

8 iii. To send their pastor to Ministerial study conferences.

9 e. **CLEAR AGREEMENTS** between the area churches regarding connectedness –  
10 within each area and with other area churches  
11

12 **VI. We expect and acknowledge respectful conflict that can help us grow.**

13 a. **EXPECT CONFLICT.** There will be conflict, perhaps within area churches, perhaps  
14 between area churches. We need to prepare for it and provide links to resource  
15 people who can help us listen to one another and learn.

16 b. **TO FIND WAYS TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATIONS** across the country  
17 especially given the diversity of opinion. To talk about being church together  
18 especially when we don't agree (or feel like being church together).

19 c. An **ONGOING DISCERNMENT MECHANISM** or listening body – to tend to the  
20 difficult conversations around issues on which we do not agree, and the  
21 emotions that they arouse. Listening and prayer needs to happen across belief  
22 lines to foster unity in the midst of diversity and keep one or another position  
23 from being 'cast in stone" (ethical, theological, emotional work)

24 d. **CREATE CONSTRUCTIVE SPACES** for people to express and deal with emotions  
25 that rise with contentious questions (like around the BFC decision) - eg. Listening  
26 Circles around person/relationship focused questions from a trained mediator.

27 e. Have **TRAINING AND RESOURCES** available so individuals/congregations/area  
28 churches can learn to facilitate healthy conversations.  
29

30 **We need to continue to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to speak to us**  
31 **through scripture on what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ and to**  
32 **be formed as the people of God.**  
33

34 Identity Working Group Members: Debbie Baergen (chair), Ruth Boehm, Ernie Epp, Marilyn  
35 Houser Hamm, Wendy Janzen, Renata Klassen, Chad Miller, Waldimar Neufeld, Jon Nofziger,  
36 Joon Park, Madeleine Wichert, Tom Yoder Neufeld  
37  
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