

Listening and Redesign Proposal

Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference

For delegate action June 14-16, 2007

Conference asked us (the Listening and Redesign Team) to listen to a variety of people in our conference and to use what we heard from these people to answer three questions¹:

1. Where have we come from?
2. Where are we going?
3. How will we get there?

----- **Where have we come from?** -----

We began our listening at the 2005 Conference Assembly at Yellow Creek Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. We asked participants to tell us what they valued in conference—what had excited or energized them. We found eight prominent themes: worship, prayer, mission, connectedness, diversity, conflict, leadership development, and youth/children. We shared the themes with conference participants in a time of prayer and asked for God’s guidance.

We then thought about what voices we might not be hearing and made attempts to listen to those voices. For example, we listened to persons who had complaints to offer. We also listened to our conference ministry staff, representatives from Bethany Christian Schools and Amigo Centre, and representatives of our neighboring Mennonite Church USA conferences.

----- **Where are we going?** -----

During the 2006 delegate cluster meetings, we shifted our listening to the second question (Where are we going?) We asked congregations to tell us what they felt God was calling them to do in the next three to five years. We also asked what gifts they had to offer and what resources they needed. It was exciting to see how these conversations stimulated some thinking about how congregations can support each other in ministry.

At the 2006 Conference Assembly in Engadine, Michigan, we described the results of the cluster meeting conversations. Table groups responded. Again, we sensed the power of the Spirit as vigorous discussion occurred at many tables. On the last day, we shifted the focus of the questions from the congregational to the conference level and asked what the participants thought God might be calling Indiana-Michigan Conference to do in the next three to five years.

From these responses we identified the following values to guide our team’s work:

- following Jesus
- evangelism/mission
- peace and justice
- anti-racism
- stewardship of the earth
- community
- Anabaptist heritage

¹ These are questions used in the reFocusing process and we acknowledge the influence that reFocusing had on shaping the Executive Committee’s charge to us.

49 We drafted a vision statement and offered the statement to participants in cluster meetings from
50 February to March 2007. In response to that counsel, we propose that Indiana-Michigan
51 Mennonite Conference continue using “Vision, Healing and Hope” as our vision statement:
52

53 ***God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow***
54 ***as communities of grace and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to***
55 ***the world.***
56

57 In addition, we propose the following mission statement for the conference:
58

59 ***Joyfully following Jesus, we will cultivate a missional imagination in every congregation.***
60

61 (These statements apply to the conference structure as a whole; congregations are free to
62 develop their own vision and mission statements.)
63

64 **----- How will we get there? -----**
65

66 With a proposed vision in place, we used what we heard from our listening to look at ways to
67 turn the vision into reality.
68

69 Our proposed answer to the question “How will we get there?” includes both affirmation of some
70 **current** elements and some **new** ideas. Labels (current / new) will help identify each element of
71 our proposal, although, in fact, many elements are a mix of current and new.
72

73 First, we identified specific tasks for our conference:
74

- 75 ▪ communicate the vision and invite others to participate
 - 76 ▪ gather people and congregations to help accomplish the vision
 - 77 ▪ develop, support, and credential leaders to accomplish the vision
 - 78 ▪ foster relationships and accountability between congregations
 - 79 ▪ promote sharing between congregations
 - 80 ▪ nurture connections between people, congregations, denominational offices, and church
81 agencies
- 82

83 Next, we looked at what we need in order to accomplish the tasks. We need (1) congregations,
84 (2) an organization, (3) layers of relationships, (4) leadership groups, and (5) staff.
85

86 **(1) Congregations** (current)
87

88 We see the life of the conference being in congregations.
89

90 For example, if congregations plant churches, there will be churches planted – if they don’t,
91 there will not. If congregations work at social justice issues, there will be work done, if they
92 don’t, there will not.
93

94 If the life is in the congregations, then congregations are ultimately responsible for their own
95 health. A congregation’s choices for accountability and connectedness, however, affect the
96 kinds of support a congregation has in accomplishing its mission and dealing with difficulties.
97
98
99

100 (2) Organization

101
102 To accomplish our conference’s vision, the conference nurtures connections between
103 congregations. Conference is like a trellis that supports a vine of relationships. With support,
104 the vine grows strong. God’s gifts flow through relationships as congregations share resources
105 and bear fruit.

106
107 **We heard a strong call for more relating between congregations for prayer, worship,**
108 **resource-sharing and other creative missional endeavors.** Given this new call, what kind of
109 organization (trellis) do we need?

110
111 We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of various types. For example, a **centralized**
112 organization has the advantage of a strong center but weak edges, while a **decentralized**
113 organization has the advantage of stronger relationships around the edges but more effort
114 needed to communicate back and forth. A **maximal** organization has a place for everything (a
115 committee for each issue or task), while a **minimal** structure has the advantage of flexibility.

116
117 Every structure has some advantages and disadvantages. Because we live in a time of rapid
118 change and because we heard such a strong call for improved relationships between
119 congregations, we believe **that we need an organization that will emphasize relationships**
120 **and that will be more flexible and less centralized.**

121 (3) Layers of Relationships

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123
124 Accountability is a key component of relationships. How will our conference encourage
125 accountability in faith and practice?

126
127 Layer #1 -- a congregation’s relationship to conference (new)

128
129 A congregation will choose a channel for accountability and will clearly identify that choice
130 to their Conference Minister. Choices include some current channels of accountability and
131 some new possibilities:

- 132
- 133 ▪ overseer (current)
 - 134 ▪ area council (current)
 - 135 ▪ a direct relationship with the Conference Minister (current)
 - 136
 - 137 ▪ **mission cells**, if constituted mainly of IN-MI congregations, could be channels
138 for formal accountability. For example, several congregations might join together
139 to plant a new congregation, or to work together at a new ministry. (new)
 - 140
 - 141 ▪ **affinity groups** with a shared concern or interest may form and dissolve as
142 needed around issues such as a new worship space, peace and justice, Christian
143 education, or stewardship. If organized for a time-limited task, the group would
144 likely not become a channel for accountability. However, longer term groups,
145 maybe organized around churches working in urban centers, or distant from
146 Mennonite centers, might develop stronger levels of accountability. (new)
 - 147

148
149 Congregations may explore these connections and staff assist in building
150 connections. *WeLink* and the conference website may be channels for those looking
for such connections.

151 Layer #2 -- geographic clusters (current)

152
153 Pastors, lay leaders, and delegates meet once each year in geographic clusters for
154 conversation and prayer. The clusters prepare for the Conference Assembly to introduce
155 issues and build momentum. Staff, the conference moderator, and local volunteers help
156 organize the meetings.

157
158 Layer #3 -- conference assembly (current)

159
160 Conference members meet annually to engage in worship and fellowship, to hear reports,
161 conduct business, and elect officers. We recognize the importance of structured and
162 unstructured conversations around tables during delegate sessions and at meals. We
163 suggest care be given to protect these times.

164
165 We propose gathering with our sister conferences—Central District, Illinois and Ohio—in
166 the Great Lakes region, once every four (4) years with a focus on worship and to identify
167 and address important issues that emerge in our congregations, communities, and nation.

168
169 Layer #4 -- connections beyond conference (current)

170
171 We are a conference of 81 congregations in Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee.
172 We will collaborate with our sister conferences—Central District, Illinois and Ohio—in the
173 Great Lakes area. We are a member of Mennonite Church USA, which in turn connects
174 us to the global church through mission agencies and Mennonite World Conference.

175
176 **(4) Leadership Teams**

177
178 **Ministry Credentialing Teams (MCT)** - 3 teams (North - Central - South) (new)

179 Attend to the well-being of pastor-congregation relationships. Interview and credential pastors.

- 180 ▪ carry responsibility for ongoing review of ministerial behavior
- 181 ▪ carry responsibility for any questions about continuing education requirements for
- 182 credentialed leaders in the conference
- 183 ▪ relate to the region's Conference Minister

184
185 **Leadership Enhancement Team (LET)** (new)

186 Attends to development of pastors and lay leaders

- 187 ▪ emphasizes leadership growth by building on the strength of what is already happening
- 188 with reFocusing, Journey, mission cells and overseer training
- 189 ▪ conference staff orient this group and work with them to add other processes according
- 190 to the conference's articulated vision

191
192 **Missional Leadership Team (MLT)** – 7 members (new)

193 Nurtures our overall life together. MLT members will be nominated by the Gifts Discernment
194 Committee and affirmed by the delegate body. GDC will nominate people with leadership gifts
195 who are committed to the vision and mission of conference as articulated above. Some training
196 may be needed to help MLT members learn to focus on the big picture.

- 197 ▪ team consists of seven (7) members with a balance of the diversity in conference
- 198 (geography, gender, age, race, theological perspective, etc.), but no specific seat on the
- 199 MLT will represent any particular group
- 200 ▪ meets three times a year to set the overall direction while trusting the details to the staff
- 201 ▪ led by the Moderator
- 202 ▪ Moderator and Moderator-elect are included in the seven members.

203 **Advisory Council (AC)** (new)

204 We propose a gathering of representatives to carefully consider issues suggested by MLT. The
205 issues concern the mission and vitality of conference. This group is similar to the Constituency
206 Leaders Council at the denominational level and is chaired by the Moderator-Elect.

- 207 ▪ consists of two (2) persons from each of the seven clusters, one (1) person representing
- 208 African-American interests, one (1) person representing Hispanic interests, one (1)
- 209 representative each from Bethany Christian Schools and Amigo Centre, and any number
- 210 of people with interests or gifts in areas of justice/peace, nurture, service and evangelism
- 211 ▪ creates a place for potential leaders to test the waters at a conference level
- 212 ▪ meets twice a year to discuss one or two issues each meeting
- 213 ▪ MLT receives the council of this group and benefits from the AC's larger size and variety.

214

215 **Stewardship and Finance Team (ST)** (current)

- 216 ▪ works to support strong stewardship throughout the conference and to develop
- 217 congregational capacity
- 218 ▪ assists the treasurer with management of conference financial assets and financial
- 219 planning
- 220 ▪ may use consultants to assist with resource development

221

222 **Gifts Discernment Committee (GDC)** (current)

- 223 ▪ identifies persons to serve on such bodies as the MLT, AC, LET, etc.
- 224 ▪ may also create a database of persons with particular gifts who can be called on for
- 225 shorter work assignments or task forces

226

227 **Additional Volunteers** (current and new)

- 228 ▪ includes persons already helping with conference tasks
- 229 ▪ recruit technology volunteers to maintain web-based networking opportunities such as a
- 230 conference-wide list of congregational gifts and resources that can be available to other
- 231 congregations, video-conferencing opportunities across wide geographical expanse, and
- 232 participation in MennoSource (an online resource network of Mennonite Church USA).
- 233 Task groups with new ideas can continue to enhance use of this area

234

235 **(5) Staff**

236

237 We propose to maintain our current staff size of 6.3 FTE. In order to nurture improved
238 relationships, we propose dispersing conference ministers into three regions and adjusting job
239 descriptions.

240

241 **3 Conference Ministers** – .5 FTE (North); 1 FTE (Central); .5 FTE (South) (new)

242

- 243 ▪ operate out of regional offices to provide closer contact with constituency. The
- 244 underlying values are:
 - 245 ○ decentralization
 - 246 ○ more “face” time with pastors and congregations
 - 247 ○ a better understanding of the missional opportunities and challenges of
 - 248 congregations in a wide variety of settings
- 249 ▪ appointed by the Missional Leadership Team, affirmed by the delegate body
- 250 ▪ relate primarily to the Missional Leadership Team, Lead Conference Minister,
- 251 Ministry Credentialing Teams, and Leadership Enhancement Team
- 252 ▪ attend to leadership development and accountability with Ministry Credentialing
- 253 Teams

- 254 ▪ work with the Leadership Enhancement Team to assess, develop, and deliver
- 255 programming to congregations
- 256 ▪ connect congregations for mission and accountability through area councils, affinity
- 257 groups, mission cells, etc.
- 258 ▪ help pastors and congregations access personnel and resources of IN-MI
- 259 Conference and Mennonite Church USA

260
261 **Conference Minister of Youth and Young Adults** – .5 FTE (current, but new relationships)

- 262 ▪ appointed by the Missional Leadership Team, affirmed by the delegate body
- 263 ▪ could work from any regional office
- 264 ▪ relate primarily to the Missional Leadership Team, Lead Conference Minister, Ministry
- 265 Credentialing Teams, and Leadership Enhancement Team
- 266 ▪ provide pastoral leadership for youth pastors and sponsors
- 267 ▪ connects youth and leaders with available resources. Works with Conference Resource
- 268 Advocate to use technology (i.e. “Mennonite My Space,” downloadable devotions,
- 269 mp3s, resource links, etc.) to create space and access for youth and sponsors to
- 270 interact with each other

271
272 **Lead Conference Minister** – 1 FTE (new)

- 273 ▪ will probably operate from the central office
- 274 ▪ appointed by the Missional Leadership Team and affirmed by delegate body
- 275 ▪ relates primarily to Missional Leadership Team and other conference staff; supervised
- 276 by Missional Leadership Team
- 277 ▪ develops vision with Missional Leadership Team and implements the vision with the
- 278 help of other conference staff
- 279 ▪ primary articulator of the vision
- 280 ▪ coordinator, and supervisor of the work done by other conference staff and volunteers
- 281 ▪ provides significant leadership, along with the moderator, in organizing and leading
- 282 cluster meetings and Conference Assembly
- 283 ▪ serves as liaison to Mennonite Church USA and Constituency Leaders Council

284
285 **Conference Resource Advocate** – volunteer (current)

286 Our conference recently created this volunteer position in response to a request from our
287 denomination. The Conference Resource Advocate helps our conference and congregations to
288 access denominational resources. We propose that the Advocate also helps current staff with
289 information technology that impacts youth ministry and with intra-/inter-conference
290 communication. We recognize that additional we may need additional staff in the future.

291
292 **Keeper of the Vision** – contracted (new)

293 This will be a contracted position in which a qualified person will meet with Conference leaders
294 and staff to “hold up a mirror” and assist them in reflecting together about how their work
295 supports the conference vision.

296
297 **Support Staff** (current)

298 Office positions, including Administrative/Office Coordinator, Communication Coordinator,
299 Secretary/Receptionist, and Bookkeeper/Webmaster will stay as they are for the time being.
300 We recognize that the increasing use of technology and the proposed regional offices will bring
301 changes in the interrelationships and ways of working for these staff, but do not yet have a clear
302 sense of how this will affect the office positions.

303
304

305 **Summary of Proposed FTEs:**

306		
307	Lead Conference Minister	1.0
308	Northern Regional Minister	0.5
309	Central Regional Minister	1.0
310	Southern Regional Minister	0.5
311	Minister of Youth and Young Adults	0.5
312	Support Staff:	
313	Office Coordinator	1.0
314	Communication Coordinator	0.5
315	Secretary/Receptionist	0.8
316	Bookkeeper/Webmaster	<u>0.5</u>
317	Total:	6.3
318		
319		

320 **Next Steps**

321 If delegates accept this proposal, Executive Committee will be responsible for implementation.
322 They may choose to name an implementation team to help with reorienting our thinking,
323 shaping job descriptions, proposing bylaw revisions, and working out other details.

326 **L& R Team Members and Consultant:**

327 Martha Yoder Maust - Chairperson
328 Lydie Assefa
329 Brent Eash
330 Dan Miller
331 Tim Miller
332 Rolando Sosa
333 Vic Stoltzfus
334 Sherm Kauffman – Staff
335 Don Garber – Recording Secretary
336 Gil Rendle – Senior Consultant with Alban Institute