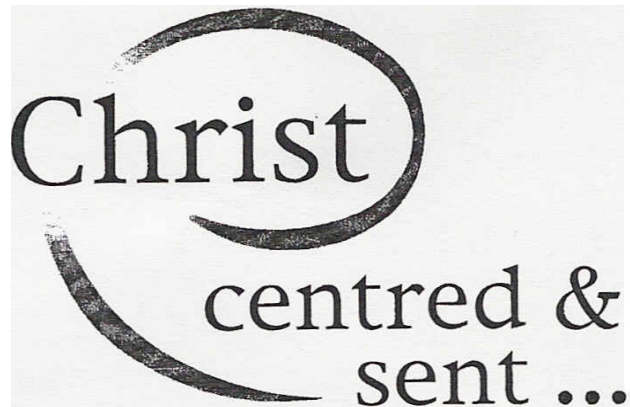


STARTER KIT FOR 'DOING THE VISION!'



This guide is intended as a resource for congregations wishing to explore our shared vision.

Christ Centred and Sent..., our Vision for 2010, outlines our shared purposes and dreams as a family of churches. This was developed through the grassroots participation of hundreds of our people. Though this enunciates the ways we want to prioritise our shared energies as a family of churches, none of these dreams can be realised except to the degree to which local congregations embrace and embody them.

This Starter Kit is intended as a tool for assisting churches to explore how they might point themselves toward these dreams within their own congregational life, how we might realise this vision as a family of churches.

1. A Preaching and Teaching Outline

Note that this is but a sketch of some themes that can be developed for either a Sunday School unit, or a preaching series.

The Kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14ff)

Jesus' ministry begins by announcing that God's rule was "at hand." What might that mean, then and now?

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7, selections)

This sermon was an important part of the early church's catechism for new believers. According to these chapters, what does it look like when people recognise God's rule?

Follow Me (Mark 1:16-20 and some of the 20 other references to this phrase)

Jesus' favourite invitation in Matthew, Mark and Luke was "follow me." Develop this with a word study (some 20 examples in the first three gospels), follow a selection of very different persons to whom Jesus issued this invitation, or explore various aspects of Jesus' example, dimensions that we are challenged to "follow." You may wish to compare specific calls to "follow me" with the "believe in me" invitations more common in John's Gospel.

Let this Mind Be In You (Philippians 2:5-11)

This is but one among many examples of the apostles referring back to Christ's life, ministry and example in order to inspire and inform our lifestyles. One can do interesting studies of this passage itself, and/or think in terms of the various parts of the body, and the ways each part is to grow in Christ likeness.

The Church as Christ's Body (Ephesians 4:1-16)

The church itself (not just individual members) is to grow in Christ likeness, toward maturity and fullness. A careful study of this passage may help channel our congregational energies toward this purpose. The "church as Christ's body" is a rich and frequent image in the New Testament. As suggested above, the New Testament allusions to various parts of the body can help us organise some of our teachings about Christ like living.

2. Tools for Assessing and Improving our Life and Witness

The following tools and approaches are but a few among many that may be useful for helping congregations assess, understand or improve their congregational life and witness. Note that the conference minister, Pastoral Leadership Commission and their Congregational Life Resources Team can help congregations benefit from these tools by helping them locate further information, or identify appropriate approaches and resource persons.

As Churches

- a. **“To the Measure of the Full Stature of Christ...”** (Ephesians 4:13) The Scriptures call us to a high standard for our life together, nothing less than Christ likeness. Take advantage of materials and workshops on such subjects as “difficult conversations”, “governance”, “listening”, “safe places” and “decision making”. **Behavioural Covenants** are simply a way of making explicit the “holy manners” which govern our lives together. Gil Rendle’s Behavioral Covenants in Congregations (Alban, 1999) explains how putting these values on the table parallels the New Testament’s emphasis (up to 40 or 50% of some epistles) on the ways we live together, ways markedly different from those tolerated in secular society.
- b. **Various Congregational Assessment Tools** are available to help congregations understand and respond to key features of their life together. The **Congregational Life Cycle** tool, for example, describes our growth toward maturity, the tendency then to begin a decline unless the congregation chooses strategies that move it back toward youthful energy and purpose. By listening to descriptions of the various stages, congregational leaders note where they see the congregation and then explore approaches to renewal appropriate for that stage. **Church Size and Style** materials begin with the assumption that different sized churches need to work toward somewhat similar goals in size appropriate ways. Rather than sabotaging our size back to our comfort zone, this approach helps identify and inform new ways of working. Consider arranging for a **Welcome Audit**, some unknown strangers visiting your church and letting you know what factors welcome and exclude them.

And in Relationships

- c. **Community Assessment Tools** can help congregations understand and re-engage their communities. The **Vibrant Rural Churches Project** has been working with a number of our smaller congregations, using such means as windshield surveys and community listening workshops. Project directors Naomi Unger (dnunger@sasktel.net) and Eric Olfert (eric@mcsask.ca) are open to sharing their approaches and learnings with interested congregations. We commend small groups volunteering with local organisations (e.g. foodbank, hostel), or taking an urban plunge (e.g. MCC Saskatchewan’s CHALO.) This helps us to learn by doing and to build bridges. **Asset Mapping** is a way of focusing our attention on the gifts and opportunities available within our churches and communities. By naming and then combining these assets, new possibilities for actions emerge.
- d. **Become more a Great Commission people.** These words (Matthew 28:18-20) were not just intended for some early disciples, early Anabaptist radicals, or contemporary “professional” Christians. It is our commission. **Find ways to publicly name, support and celebrate the ministries of the people of your congregation**, people “sent” into their “families, workplaces, neighbourhoods and larger communities as salt and light”. Bill Easum’s Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere by Anyone (Abingdon, 1995) popularises this call. Melody Davis’s Why Didn’t I Just Raise Radishes: Finding God in the Ordinary, (Herald, 1994) features short vignettes from everyday life. MEDA’s Marketplace offers many helpful articles. Former Bethlehem Steel executive William E. Diehl has written several helpful books on the “Monday Connection”. His Ministry in Daily Life: a practical guide for congregations (Alban, 1996) offers many helpful suggestions, including an extensive appendix of resources (books, courses, magazines). Further helpful resources can be found online, by Googling “Ministry in Daily Life”, combing several denominational and parachurch websites, such as the Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship site (www.ivmdl.org) and a site for “Christians in the marketplace” (www.scruples.org). **Sharing the Faith.** Though our Anabaptist faith forebears were noted for their ability to take any subject of conversation (politics, the popular church, war, marriage, business) and move toward a

call to “follow Jesus”, we have become “the Quiet in the Land”. Help one another recapture this ability through retelling stories about Anabaptist and contemporary witnesses, and through classes and workshops on articulating our faith. Among helpful resources are articles such as J. Nelson Kraybill’s “Four Spiritual Truths” (Canadian Mennonite, January 26, 2004 available on the web), and books such as C.S. Lewis’s classic Mere Christianity (1952) and Brian McLaren’s Finding Faith (Zondervan, 1999 – helpful for contemporary quests.)

3. “Face the challenges and opportunities posed by an environment of diversity and change.”

One constant in our world is change. And the church of Jesus Christ, “the same yesterday, today and forever”, frequently needs to choose between fossilising language and forms appropriate to yesteryear, and finding newer expressions to express our faith clearly in our current context. The Roman church had no monopoly on “church latin”; we substitute worship wars! The following may help us become more responsive to our changing context.

Careful listening to our neighbours, to our younger friends and to sociologists of religion like Reginald Bibby (Fragmented Gods, Restless Gods, and Restless Churches) can help us understand the changing world emerging around us. Mary K. Sellon’s Redeveloping the Congregation: A How to for Lasting Change (Alban, 2002) urges congregations to be deliberate about including those younger or outside voices in our leadership or discernment circles. Invite their creativity and imagination.

Listen and enlist their voices in “generous worship”. Church consultant Lyle Schaller reminds us that if a generation does not hear its (musical) voice, it concludes that it is not really welcome. Some churches provide occasional or regular services featuring particular music forms. Others have prepared descriptive charts or tables to help song leaders become deliberate about blending “generations” or types of music. Karen Bocklund McLean has prepared a theological grid, in her case Lutheran, for evaluating the theological content of classic, gospel and contemporary songs (New Harmonies: Choosing Contemporary Music for Worship [Alban, 1998]) Paraphrasing Brian McLaren, one of our pastors has called for a more “Generous Worship.”

Seek to understand and appreciate that emotional roller coaster journey from the time a change is announced until we embrace the new. Gilbert Rendle’s Leading in a Time of Change (Alban, 1998) and, from a business management perspective, William Bridges’ Managing Transitions (Addison-Wesley, 1991) offer helpful description and counsel. Further helps for navigating change can be obtained through the Congregational Life Resources Team, through occasional workshops and through books such as Mary Sellon’s Redeveloping the Congregation (Alban, 2002)

4. Connecting “As sister churches”.

Our province, country and world divide people according to their location, occupation or other circumstances. In Christ, “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17) for, despite our differences, we “are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28).

Get to know our provincial faith family. Take advantage of our Touring Mission Fests, pastor and congregation exchanges. Encourage members to visit these churches while on vacation. A couple pairs of urban, small town and rural have decided to substitute a “church exchange” for the proposed pastoral exchange. One large city church initiated deeper connections with a rural congregation hard hit by agricultural challenges; members of both congregations still speak about a particularly powerful session of listening and encouragement. There are also important gifts ‘out there’ in our congregations that we need to be sharing with each other. This could include sharing speakers on specific topics, music and drama (Simply Superb’s Wheatbelt Parables and Pleasant Point’s Dinner Theatre come immediately to mind), but also important personal and congregational stories that we need to share with each other.

“Alongside Christians of other traditions, we share in God’s mission to our world.” The local ministerial may be a helpful means of joining with local churches of other denominations in worship and in service to your community. Through Mennonite Church Canada, we (like the Salvation Army) join hands with both Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and Canadian Council of Churches; there are helpful resources available from both organisations. Within the larger Christian

family, there are many further resources for study and ministry. The Alban Institute (www.alban.org) is on the forefront for research and publications (including videos) concerning congregational life. Two American web sites with online resources are the Center for Parish Development in Chicago (www.missionalchurch.org) and the Indianapolis Center for Congregations (www.centerforcongregations.org).

We are also part of a **much larger global family of faith**. Become acquainted with our Anabaptist brothers and sisters from around the world through the World of Witness prayer directory, through such video series as Cloud of Witnesses, such publications as the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Courier, and through such books as the MWC initiated book by Tim Lind and Pakisa Tshimika, Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith (Good, 2003). Eric Olfert serves us as Witness Partnership Facilitator in Saskatchewan, and is available to assist your congregation in thinking through and exploring possibilities for meaningful and mutually enriching partnerships 'across the street and around the world'.

5. Footnote Ferreting

The footnotes can be used for further study. You may choose to work through one of these resource areas, or you may choose to start with a given section, and dip into some "biblical", "Anabaptist" and "fellow traveller" resources for that theme.

Berean Bible Study:

"They welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so..." Acts 17:11

You are encouraged to work your way through the Vision, examining each of these twenty plus Scripture references within their larger Scriptural contexts..

Include as well a study of Jesus' repeated invitation, "Follow me".

Growing from our Roots

Footnotes #3, #4, #6 # 7 point us toward key Anabaptist themes, leaders and stories. This Vision starts the same place that our Anabaptist faith forebears did – with a call to be Christ centred and with a conviction that the church has been called to live out that Christ

life together. We learn from their commitment to sharing Christ with neighbours near and far.

C. Arnold Snyder's recent book, Following in the Footsteps of Christ (2004), explores the spirituality of our Anabaptist forebears. Many groups have already studied Snyder's much shorter summary of Anabaptist themes, From Anabaptist Seed (1999). Videos and DVDs on Anabaptist themes are available through www.mennomedia.org or may be borrowed through Mennonite Church Canada in Winnipeg (www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/home).

Brief biographies of Hans Denck and Menno Simons are available both in paperback collections (e.g. Hans-Jurgen Goertz, Profiles of the Radical Reformers) and on the net. Simply Google in their names and notice how much interesting material is readily available. Several inspiring stories are retold in Cornelia Lehn's children's book, Peace Be With You (1980) and in the ten session youth curriculum, Adventures with the Anabaptists (Faith & Life, 2002. This can be borrowed through MC Canada Resources). Further stories are available in C. Arnold Snyder's Profiles of Anabaptist Women (1996).

Two websites with both historical and contemporary Anabaptist thinking are the British Anabaptist network (www.anabaptistnetwork.com) and Mennonite Media's Third Way Café (www.thirdway.com).

Growing Alongside Fellow Travellers

Footnotes #7, #11 and #14 remind us that we as Mennonites do not travel this road alone. Meet some of our fellow travellers, people who inspire us by their seeking to follow Christ's radical example. Many of these materials may be found through the net.

The Imitation of Christ (the ancient classic written about 1420, attributed to Thomas a Kempis) is readily available in paperback, as well as on the web.

Stories about St Francis and the early Franciscans are likewise readily available on the web, as well as in popular paperbacks.

Clarence Jordan's Cottonpatch paraphrases (gospels and epistles) reflect his interracial community's commitment to peace, justice and racial harmony. The Koinonia Partners website (www.koinoniapartners.org) offers helpful history and contemporary reflection.

In 2001, Time dubbed Stanley Hauerwas, a "very Anabaptist Methodist", "America's best theologian". In Resident Aliens,

Peaceable Kingdom and many articles, this “thorn in the side of Christian complacency” argues that Jesus meant for us to actually follow these radical teachings.

Missional church thinking has inspired many to return to the life and ministry of Jesus as our key source of information about what God is wanting to do in our world. In addition to our Mennonite materials, many other denominations and thinkers are offering helpful reflections on God’s intentions for the contemporary church. The Missional Church Travel Kit available through Mennonite Church Canada (www.mennonitechurch.ca), includes children’s and worship resources and a six session curriculum, Discover Anew: What God Calls Us to Do. Google “missional church” to find yet more resources, including those from the Mennonite Church USA Mennonite Mission Network..

The Emerging Church dialogue has likewise cast its focus back toward Jesus and the early church. Voices calling us toward a new appreciation of the radical message of Jesus for our “post modern” age include Brian McLaren (e.g. A New Kind of Christian, A Generous Orthodoxy), Leonard Sweet (e.g. SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millenium Culture), and Steve Chalke (e.g. The Lost Message of Jesus). Further writings can be accessed through websites such as www.emergingchurch.org, www.emergentvillage.com, and Brian McLaren’s website, www.anewkindofchristian.com.

Ray Aldred and others from the Aboriginal Christian community are offering us some helpful perspectives on what it might mean to live out this faith in conversation with our Aboriginal neighbours. Ray who works with My People International (www.mypeoplecanada.net) was part of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Aboriginal Ministries Council which prepared their Aboriginal Task Force Resource Kit (available for \$10.00 through www.evangelicalfellowship.ca). Mennonite Church Canada’s Co-Directors for Native Ministry, Neill and Edith Von Gunten, may be reached at nativeministry@mennonitechurch.ca or 204-888-6781. Intotemak (Ojibway for “My Friends) magazine is available from Mennonite Church Canada. Contact our conference Ministries Commission for further ideas on how you can become involved.

6. Some Further Resources

Naomi Unger and Eric Olfert, Being a Vibrant Church: Our Learnings from our Small, Rural Congregations. This four session discussion guide offers the congregational self reflection questions used in this study project, and the learnings from this 2003-2004 study project. This material is available on our website (www.mcsask.ca) as will be various updates. Eric and Naomi are currently helping several congregations explore new ways to connect with their communities and have been sharing this helpful process in other conferences.

Norm Voth, Rooted in the Centre, Living on the Edge (Mennonite Church Manitoba, 2005). This six session study guide is designed for congregations wishing to become more missional in their context. This booklet, complete with a Leaders Supplement, is available from Mennonite Church Manitoba, 200-600 Shaffesbury Blvd., Winnipeg MB R3P 2J1 (204-896-1616). Cost \$5 with a minimum of 5 copies.