

“CHRIST CENTRED AND SENT ...”
OUR VISION FOR 2010
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan
Final Draft October 22, 2005

Foreword

As a people, we have sensed with the King James translator that “where there is no vision, the people perish.”(Proverbs 29:18)

We have benefited from past vision, and from vision within the larger church. As an area conference of Mennonite Church Canada, we continue to affirm and build within the vision of the North American Mennonite Church:

“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 can flow through us to the world.”

In recent years, our people have sensed that we as MC Sask also need our own current clearer vision. In 2002, the delegates mandated our leadership “to form an empowering and inspiring vision for ministry”. In the spring of 2003, the Conference Minister and Envisioning Team were asked to lead the conference in this quest.

The Vibrant Rural Churches Project (launched 2003) and congregational studies of From Anabaptist Seed (2004) proved to be inspirational background for Regional and Leadership Focus Groups. In the fall of 2004, Envisioning Team members met with over a hundred representatives from 32 of our 37 congregations in these 9 Focus Groups. We are deeply grateful to all those who bathed this effort with their prayers and supported it with their contributions.

As we listened to your many voices, the following picture of our “desired future” began to emerge. At the February 2005 delegate sessions, this draft Vision was adopted in principle. The February 2005 round table delegate discussions and spring 2005 congregational feedback generated diverse suggestions for the Envisioning Team to “prepare and distribute a final draft by the fall of 2005.”

A Vision for Whom?

We present this as a vision for our shared work and identity as a Mennonite people here in Saskatchewan. Alongside our Covenantⁱⁱ, this describes how we understand God to be calling us to walk together. It is intended to inspire, inform and shape our life and work together.

This vision is intended to shape our shared witness. It also invites us as churches to re-examine our lives and priorities, to become more Christ-like congregations, embodying Christ within our larger communities. It focuses our mutual support toward helping one another reach toward this vision of Christian maturity and fruitfulness.

ⁱ from *Joined in Faithfulness*, Recommendation #3

ⁱⁱ This Covenant for Mennonite Church Saskatchewan was adopted and signed by 31 of our congregations February 26, 2005. This Covenant and Vision are in significant senses companion pieces, together describing where God is calling us to go, and how God wants us to work at getting there.

We encourage local congregations to share in this larger common vision and to open themselves to God's further vision for them locally. The Spirit is still moving, granting that our young and our old "see visions" and "dream dreams." (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28)

This Vision

We have presented this vision in fuller form, in a shortened version and then in a phrase. A vision is only as useful as the outcomes it inspires, and for that reason, we also propose a process for regularly translating this vision into action.

The endnotes demonstrate the degree to which this picture reflects our Scriptural foundations and echoes insights from our Anabaptist faith forebears. As a people of the Bible, we look to the Scriptures, understood through the life and ministry of Jesus.

"Christ Centred and Sent ...", our Vision for 2010, calls us forward toward a more Christ-like lifestyle and ministry in our changing settings. It recognises the incredible gifts that God has given us, our rich relationships both as individuals and as a church. Through this process, we have become convinced that God is calling us into some new relationships and toward some new intentionality as local churches and as a conference. This vision echoes a key Anabaptist emphasis, that in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus we have the clearest description of God's will for us as a church.

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PICTURING THIS FUTURE

Our dream is that by 2010 we will have opened ourselves to God and to one another so that we may describe our emerging life and ministry together as follows:

Christ Centred

God has spoken and is still speaking to us in Jesus Christ, empowering us by the Holy Spirit to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”¹ In our worship, we praise God and celebrate Christ’s hope filled presence in our world. God has called us to follow² Jesus, to learn from him how to be his body and how to relate to our neighbours. Like our Anabaptist faith forebears³, we are learning that “No one can know Christ except by following him, and no one can follow him except by knowing him.”⁴

As Churches

God has called us to be Christ’s body⁵, a “people of God’s peace”⁶. The model and measure for our life together is the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus⁷. This body transcends boundaries of background, age, race, class or gender, for we are now “one in Christ Jesus.”⁸ Locally, as sister churches, and as a congregation of congregations, we “bear one another’s burdens”⁹, offering each other encouragement, resources and perspectives to refocus and revitalise our congregational life and ministries. We face the challenges and opportunities posed by an environment of diversity and change. With courage and purpose, we seek gospel ways to navigate these changes and to work with our differences, confident in Christ in whom “all things hold together.”¹⁰ Shaped and gifted by our Anabaptist faith, alongside Christians of other traditions, we share in God’s mission to our world¹¹.

And In Relationships

God, through Christ, has invited us into growing relationships with our saving God, with one another and with our neighbours¹². God has called us to a clearer identity in Christ, our eyes focused to see Christ active in our world. Within our changing urban, rural and bedroom communities, important opportunities come through our personal and group relationships. God has sent us into our families, workplaces, neighbourhoods and larger communities as salt and light¹³, to live out God’s love and to express Christ more fully in deed and word. God is also nudging us toward cultivating new relationships across the street and around the world, including friendships with our Aboriginal neighbours¹⁴. Our churches have accepted their biblical mandate to equip¹⁵ and to send us into our world as “ambassadors for Christ”¹⁶. As we follow the Great Commandment¹⁷ and Great Commission¹⁸, we seek to grow together “to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”¹⁹

FOCUSING THIS PICTURE

As we begin to get this picture into focus, some features begin to stand out...

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we respond to God's love in Christ by

Being Christ Centred

Keeping Christ as our centre, we worship and we learn from him how to be his body, living in relationship with our neighbours.

As Churches

As Christ's body, a people of God's peace from diverse life situations, we look to Jesus as our model and measure. We support one another as we seek renewal, facing our challenges and opportunities with courage and purpose. We join other Christians in God's mission to our world.

And In Relationships

Through Christ, we have been called into growing relationships with our saving God, with one another and with our neighbours. These relationships are the context into which God sends us as "ambassadors for Christ". By following the Great Commandment and Great Commission, we seek to grow together toward "the full stature of Christ."

THROUGH THE VIEWFINDER

If we were to label what we see in miniature through the viewfinder, we might call it...

Christ Centred and Sent ...

GETTING INTO POSITION

We recognise that we are not yet into "proper position" for this picture. But we have confidence in The Divine Photographer who will be working among us, forming us into the picture He wants.

In order to translate this vision into manageable steps toward action, we propose that Mennonite Church Saskatchewan leadership adopt annual practices²⁰ such as the following:

- a) Each fall, the General Council, Executive and Commissions hold a joint meeting to brainstorm and establish some goals, both annual and longer term, which will move us toward this vision.
- b) The Commissions then meet (probably the same day, same place) to begin developing specific action plans toward meeting those goals.
- c) These action plans would be the basis of an Annual Action Plan, compiled by the Executive for presentation at the Annual Delegate Session.
- d) Each Commission's annual report would highlight their efforts relating to this Action Plan.
- e) The Executive would meet with Commissions on a rotating schedule to review their plans and efforts.
- f) We propose that the Executive lead us in revisiting this vision, not sooner than three nor more than five years from the time it is implemented.

Endnotes

These endnotes are intended as a resource for further study, pointing readers toward our biblical foundations, our Anabaptist roots as well as other resources for further study.

¹ Ephesians 4:15; see also Hebrews 1:1-2

² Jesus' most common verb for invitation in the Gospels, echoed in 1 Peter 2:21 etc.

³ Whether we might consider ourselves "chosen", "convinced" or "born" into this faith family, we are inspired by the Anabaptist conviction that we draw our core instruction on how to order our lives as individuals and churches from the life and ministry of Jesus. The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) is a contemporary description of faith growing out of this orientation.

⁴ Early Anabaptist Hans Denck, ca.1500-1527.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27 and many other passages.

⁶ Menno Simons' description of his peace-minded Anabaptist people has been adapted as hymn #407 (HWB), "We are people of God's peace." For the rich biblical peace and reconciliation theme, see 2 Corinthians 5:18, Romans 14:19, Ephesians 2:17 etc.

⁷ Note how the apostles point to Christ's life and ministry as they urge early churches toward more Christlike life and perseverance (e.g. Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 2:18-25). The apostle yearned that "Christ be formed in" us. (Galatians 4:19) This emphasis, so important among Anabaptist reformers, has inspired other renewal movements such as the earlier Franciscans and contemporary "Missional Church" and "Emerging Church" conversations.

⁸ Galatians 3:28

⁹ Galatians 6:2

¹⁰ Colossians 1:17

¹¹ Note the wealth of biblical imagery describing God's purposes for us as a church. We are considered "co-workers with Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:9; Luke 10:21 etc.). We are "God's garden" (1 Corinthians 3:9 Amplified and Contemporary English Versions; Clarence Jordan often used the phrase "demonstration plot"). We are "a colony of heaven" (Philippians 3:20, Moffatt translation; see also Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony Nashville, 1989). Our Confession of Faith, Article 24, and Missional church materials remind us that we are to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign.

¹² The Gospels record Jesus' words inviting us into relationship with Himself (frequently using the verbs "follow" and "believe"). The epistles call us to grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18), to grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15). Biblically, we cannot speak of any of these relationships (with God, with one another, with our neighbours and enemies) in total isolation from the others (eg.1 John 1:7-11). God graciously offers us salvation and shalom, a growing wholeness in all these relationships.

¹³ Matthew 5:13-14

¹⁴ Regional Focus Groups mentioned our Aboriginal or First Nations neighbours over 20 times, and frequently commented on our needing to work at building meaningful relationships with them. The operative word here is "including."

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:12

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:20

¹⁷ Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34

¹⁸ Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:13

²⁰ The intent is to focus our annual and longer term efforts toward this vision. Though the sample outline uses the older "goals and objectives" approach, Executive and facilitators should feel free to choose from among the many helpful tools available (e.g. Appreciative Inquiry, Asset Mapping, etc.). Whichever approach is used, we seek information, direction, actions and feedback parallel (or superior) to what we would obtain through this "goals and objectives" discipline.