

Franconia Conference Leadership EQUIPPING Strategy

Equipping Leaders to **Empower** Others to **Embrace** God's Mission

What is the significance of the focus on “equipping?”

FMC has been increasingly building its conference ministry approach around an “equipping” strategy. Over the past several years, this has led to more of a teaming style of leadership, drawing on the strengths of different people on the conference ministry team to bring one or more leaders alongside a congregation's conference minister to maximize working with gifts, strengths, and expertise available. This has also included drawing on unique gifts and experience of other pastors, denominational leaders, and outside consultants.

How have oversight strategies changed before?

Several significant shifts have occurred, including the somewhat dramatic shift in 1971 from a small group of “Bishops” to a larger group of “Overseers.” The era of bishops served FMC very well for many decades, yet over time a shift to overseers was a needed corrective for changing realities in the church. Since overseers were mostly people who were active pastors who were adding this to their congregational assignments, it became increasingly difficult to meet needs. So in 2000 another shift occurred when a smaller group of “Conference Ministers” worked as a team to provide leadership and support for congregations and their leaders.

What is “equipping?”

“**Equipping**” is leading with a bias toward intentionally investing in the spiritual, professional, relational, and emotional growth of both credentialed and lay leaders, through personal and group experiences, as well as formal programs of training in order to increase leadership capacity. In a congregation with a pastor and lay leaders focused on equipping, congregational members are empowered to do the ministry of the church, exercising the full range of gifts that God makes available to the body.

What are the implications for my congregation in the years ahead?

One way that FMC congregations relate to each other is in geographical “clusters.” This will continue to be valuable, particularly for some clusters, yet increasingly congregations have been focusing around various “affinities.” Affinities include congregational size, stage in a congregational life cycle, or other common factors. Alban Institute and other ecumenical leadership bodies consistently note that congregational size is the single largest factor for addressing the equipping needs of leaders of congregations.

The equipping direction that follows simply builds on the current conference ministry model, while in some ways adding elements of the previous overseer model. Each congregation would have an official contact person or liaison, while having additional relationships based on their needs during a given year or stage. But instead of each conference minister doing all things for one congregation, the focus would shift to the congregation's needs for the next stage of its ministry. People and resources would

then be applied as needed to help the congregation reach its goals. In order to do this, conference staff would “multiply” themselves by coaching small teams that would focus on specific conference ministry functions. These staffing teams would employ combinations of salaried and volunteer staff to focus on specific areas of conference ministry, especially pastoral search process, pastor/congregational evaluation process, and conflict transformation.

Along with this, congregations would be encouraged to join learning community groups, matched with other congregations with similar needs and goals. Similarly, leaders could be matched with other leaders who have similar interests for equipping (e.g., balancing challenges of bi-vocational ministry, leading a multi-staff team, leading a congregation through transition, developing lay leaders, etc.). Matching grants would be available to help pastors obtain additional training and resources. Significant connections would also be made possible by technology that would allow each congregation and conference related organization to connect by live video to each other, to the Conference Center, to Mennonite seminaries and other equipping opportunities.

How would this look for a specific congregation?

Although this would vary with each congregation and its stage on the journey, the following steps would be identified:

1. Understand the congregation and its context: What is the unique identity, mission/purpose, and specific vision of what God has for this congregation?
2. Assess current leadership as related to the context and need of the congregation: What are the strengths and improvement opportunities of the current leaders as it relates to moving the congregation forward?
3. Determine leadership equipping needs: Come to an agreement with leaders on what type of resourcing or changes will be required (mentoring, coaching, training, restructuring, etc.) and over what period of time.
4. Assessment of equipping effort: Have we met the agreed upon equipping needs of the leaders? Did we do what we said we would do? Is there anything else?
5. Progress report: What went well? What's different? Is there “growth” and equipping happening? What (if any) changes are needed? Is there genuine openness to missional movement? If not, why not?