

Franconia Mennonite Conference
Vision and Finance Plan Team Recommendations

November 10, 2007

Executive Summary

We believe Franconia Mennonite Conference has no shortage of financial or human resources to do what God is calling us to do. What we have is a shortage of connecting the vision of what God is calling us to do with the resources God has given us.

The Vision and Finance Plan Team (hereafter, VFP Team) was called into being by the Franconia Conference Board to seek greater alignment in Franconia Mennonite Conference's use of historic resources to respond to the call for contextual and contemporary ministry. In exploring that assignment, the VFP Team has been reminded of the legacy of God's goodness and generosity with us in the past, the changes in the world that challenge us, and God's invitation to us to respond as a conference with vision, goals, and strategies that speak to the great needs and possibilities of today. We believe passionately that the "E³ Vision" (...*equipping leaders to empower others to embrace God's mission...*) is the sound and sustainable vision God has given us for this time. We have set goals that envision our churches and ministries becoming more fully what God has called them to be, and becoming better at what God invites them to do. We embraced a strategy that expands the traditional view of "credentials" and gives not just our ministers, but also conference related ministries (hereafter, CRM), new initiatives, and congregations a means of validation and support to respond in more effective ways to missional opportunities. We devised a matrix of activities to envision the implementation of a vision to equip, strategies that empower, and goals that embrace God's call to us. Finally, we offer a series of recommendations regarding real estate, finances, and human resources that seek to build and maintain a cohesive leadership team, create organizational clarity, over-communicate organizational clarity, and reinforce organizational clarity throughout the conference systems.

Introduction

The Franconia Mennonite Conference Board established a Vision and Finance Plan Team (hereafter, "VFP") in the aftermath of discussions that took place in Conference Assembly Scattered and Gathered in late 2005. While the presenting element which led to the formation of the VFP Team related to decisions about the future of Conference-owned Indian Creek Road Farm near Harleysville, PA, (hereafter, "the Farm"); the real work of the VFP Team has been in attempting to understand the complexities of the Franconia Mennonite Conference financial environment, and how the vision, goals, and strategies of Franconia Conference find greater alignment increasing the Conference's capacity to engage in significant and transformational ministry collaborating with member congregations, partners-in-mission, and conference related ministries.

In short, our task has been to seek greater alignment in the use of historic resources in meeting the call for greater contemporary and contextual ministry.

Christ the Center

This we believe:

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1. Central to the entire visioning and listening process has been the need to reaffirm the centrality of Jesus Christ in the life and witness of Franconia Mennonite Conference.
2. The conference does not exist to hold real estate, nor does it exist to serve its membership per se though it may do both of these things. Franconia Mennonite Conference is its membership, called into being by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus Christ wherever he might lead, connecting and equipping congregations, ministries, leaders and initiatives as embodiments of the witness of Christ.
3. At the core of the Franconia Mennonite Conference is an unshakeable core conviction that all of Jesus matters to everyone, everywhere.
4. Through the decision to follow Christ daily in life, Franconia Mennonite Conference has been given gifts of human and financial resources sufficient to the tasks God is calling the conference to perform.

God has entrusted Franconia Mennonite Conference with a legacy of history and resources, and a new era of diversity and searching. This legacy and this new era call us anew to a God honoring stewardship, faithful to Christ, while being sustained through a Christ-shaped identity as a Jesus-led community of peace-building disciples, celebrative of the surprises that Christ brings into our midst through the work of the Holy Spirit. Franconia Mennonite Conference is uniquely called by the Holy Spirit to value relationships, articulate vision, and embrace values that are intercultural, missional, and formational in nature.

In short, our call has been to remember with gratitude the goodness and generosity God has shown us through Christ in the midst of the great possibilities and needs of the world and to respond with vision, goals, and strategies that further God's mission of reconciling all of creation.

The E³ Vision

The VFP Team strongly endorses the E³ vision: Franconia Mennonite Conference equips leaders to empower others to embrace God's mission. Changes within our communities and the increasing

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connectivity of the world compel us to think in fresh ways about the vision of being a regional area conference within the Mennonite Church USA.

We find ourselves shifting toward a more global and urban expression of the Way of Christ that is both local and contextual. This challenges us to welcome and incorporate diversity of perspective, culture and experience. We find ourselves shifting from a conference gathered for fellowship, to a conference asked to catalyze for mission and witness. This challenges us to perceive and measure the value of being conference in new ways. We find ourselves shifting from an era of relative stability and cooperation to a season where churches struggle with the demands of institutional survival in a changing culture and inward gazing self-sufficiency that doesn't look beyond the needs and possibilities of localized congregational life. This challenges us to discern and implement new ways of being the church together.

We affirm the previous work accomplished by the Conference Board and Staff to develop and bring life to this vision. We bring to the end of our work a deep conviction that this vision is in fact God's unique call to Franconia Mennonite Conference for today and for the season of ministry ahead that our conference is now entering.

In short, we believe E³ is a sound and sustainable vision for an area conference in Mennonite Church USA.

“More/Better” Goals

The strategy to which Franconia Mennonite Conference has been called by God needs to be understood through specific, attainable, and measurable goals. The vision of equipping to empower for embracing lends itself to a serious focus on outcomes that increase the capacity of the Franconia Mennonite Conference to welcome diversity, be a catalyst, and assist all parts of the conference to be more discerning. The following goals should be understood as outcomes of the implementation of the E³ vision and thus, the conference should increase its capacity over the next years to:

Equip more and better leaders. Increasing the number of women, men, people of color, and young adults who respond to God's call to serve various ministries as pastors, missionaries, administrators, evangelists, teachers, poets, leaders, designers, and managers, among others, is not simply a numerical goal. Attention must be paid to the type of leader developed. Are they savvy about ministry in a transcultural environment? Do their fundamental ministry activities align with God's Mission in the world? Do they have a passion for Biblically faithful, holistic evangelism? Will

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they develop the capacity to grow spiritually and adapt intellectually, rooted in an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, to the world as it is becoming? A measurement of this goal would be continued healthy length of tenure for pastors in congregations with less short-term unintentional pastoral leadership turnover. A second measurement of more and better leaders would include the following three outcomes.

Equip more and better churches. Franconia Mennonite Conference should place a premium on creating and implementing strategies of church planting that fit the context of the communities in which we live. Planting churches alone, however, will not reach the world with the good news of Jesus. Existing congregations need to fine tune their ministries, embrace strategies to learn and be transformed in the midst of conflict, and work together to clarify purposes in such a way that they become evangelistic by becoming magnetic and invitational. Measurements of this goal include an increase in the number of member congregations and partners-in-mission, and a reduction in debilitating conflicts within member congregations.

Equip more and better disciples. All congregations within Franconia Mennonite Conference should be characterized by a position of evangelism, invitation, and hospitality that belief in Christ, manifested as discipleship within the church community, may flourish. The conference needs to be about equipping congregations to increase their capacity to relate to, invite, welcome, and incorporate those who are not yet followers of Christ, into an explicitly Anabaptist-Mennonite faith frame of reference. Measurements of this goal would include increased numbers of persons across the age range in service through church-related initiatives, young adults serving in leadership roles, and increased numbers of new followers of Jesus attending Franconia Mennonite Conference congregations.

Equip more and better connections. Franconia Mennonite Conference and our member congregations, partners-in-mission, and conference related ministries are neither a single island, nor even a cluster of self-sufficient islands, isolated from the rest of the Body of Christ. We need closer connections with one another, healthy connections to other MC USA ministries, stronger connections to constituent parts of Mennonite World Conference, and broadened ecumenical relationships. This will be measurable in increased involvements in congregations with local, regional, and global initiatives.

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In short, Franconia Mennonite Conference should place its energies on equipping congregations, partners in mission, and conference related ministries to be “more and better” tomorrow than they are today.

Credentialing and covenanting strategy

In Mennonite Church USA, area conferences such as Franconia Mennonite Conference have existed mainly to shape pastoral identity through the granting of credentials such as licensing and ordination. The historic role of area conferences has been to install new pastors, ordain pastors, participate in pastoral reviews, engage in conflict management when pastors and congregations face difficulty and assist in searching for new pastors, especially when the conflict management failed. For Franconia Conference, there is the added reality and implication of having a mission agency/board and identity now embedded within the Conference structure.

Expanding on this historic role of credentialing and sustaining pastors, the Franconia Mennonite Conference should embrace a broader understanding of credentialing to include covenanting, validation and acceptance of people, organizations, projects, and learning communities. This credentialing and covenanting strategy would work to create solidarity of identity in congregations, among pastors, and in conference related ministries. Specifically, the Franconia Mennonite Conference would issue four types of credentials:

1. **Credentialing Ministers** – the current practice of licensing and ordination would continue with a more deliberate process of continuing education expectations developed in consultation with pastors following generally understood denomination-wide practices of credentialing while recognizing local and contextual development and nuance.
2. **Covenanting with Conference Related Ministries** – continued development of the relationship between Franconia Mennonite Conference and the many related ministries that have sprung from within the Franconia Mennonite Conference community. Multiple levels of relationships may be considered, and first-fruits contributions of cash and/or in-kind services would continue to be negotiated.
3. **Covenanting with Missional Initiatives** – conference staff would redirect their resources and invest considerable time and energy in catalyzing congregations, partners-in-mission, and conference related ministries to develop and implement missional initiatives that have alignment with God’s mission, are financially transparent, and have long-term sustainability and/or enduring impact.

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4. **Covenanting with Congregations in Community** – conference staff would create various learning communities with Franconia Mennonite Conference congregations, and others, around issues that relate to the health, witness and missional well-being of congregations.

In short, Franconia Mennonite Conference should employ a strategy to validate and support not just ministers, but also covenanting with CRMs, missional initiatives, partners and congregations for increased effectiveness, accountability and relationality in mission and witness.

SEE MATRIX AT THE END OF DOCUMENT FOR MORE INFORMATION

Critical Pathways for Alignment of Vision and Finances

To recap: Franconia Mennonite Conference is in the midst of a season of transition which calls us to remember how Jesus Christ is to be the center of Conference life. To that end, we have reconfirmed a vision of a conference that exists to equip for mission; we have embraced goals that call us as congregations and as a conference to be “more and better” tomorrow than we are today; and, we have adopted a strategy of credentialing and covenanting toward openness, accountability and hospitality in fulfilling God’s mission. The question remains: How does Franconia Mennonite Conference get from our present reality to the envisioned future? The VFP Team makes the following recommendations that should provide a route from here to there...

1. **Real Estate Recommendations** – these recommendations are offered to solidify the financial base of the conference and focus the leadership of the conference on the leadership of ministry, rather than the management of property.
 - a. **Souderton Center Recommendations**
 - i. Franconia Mennonite Conference Office should relocate and downsize its square footage within the Souderton Center, allowing for the possibility of a nationally recognized retailer to become the end-cap store, and shrinking the Conference’s financial outlay for office space.
 - ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference should enter into marketing and management agreement(s) with an outside firm to provide greater visibility to the Center and maximize the Center’s potential to attract and retain strong clients.
 - b. **Indian Creek Road Farm Recommendations**
 - i. Franconia Mennonite Conference moves to sell a development easement on part or all of the Indian Creek Road Farm’s acreage (This is based on the

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assumption that development easement dollars can be allocated to other operational purposes within Franconia Mennonite Conference). This development easement assures preservation of the farm in the long-term as open space minimizing development beyond agricultural usage.

ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference uses funds from the development easement to pay down with the desire to pay off the mortgage on the Souderton Center (The ability to pay off the mortgage rests on a combination of factors including how many acres are sold into the development easement, and at what rate the easement is sold for per acre).

iii. Franconia Mennonite Conference should further divest itself from management of the Indian Creek Road Farm by leasing or through the possible sale of the Farm to an outside group(s) to develop sustainable creation-care oriented ministries that recognize the nature of the preserved open space of the land and may or may not become a Conference Related Ministry.

2. **Financial Recommendations** – these recommendations are being made to create a clearer understanding within the Franconia constituency about how funds are generated and allocated.

a. Franconia Mennonite Conference Budgeting Process Recommendations

i. Franconia Mennonite Conference assumes a stable annual operating budget of \$1.0-\$1.25 million for the foreseeable future, with approximately 75% of the budget earmarked for missional/ministerial leadership, and approximately 25% of the budget earmarked for the support services, and a varying amount to support properly credentialed projects (see below).

ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference creates a three-tier budget structure, consisting of:

1. Missional/Ministerial Leadership Budget – conference ministry leadership financed by offering plate funds, and business services revenue
2. Support Services Budget – conference infrastructure financed totally by funds generated through the implementation of real estate recommendations

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3. Missional Initiatives Budget – a new section to the income and expense budget made up of initiatives that have been covenanted with or through the Conference-financed by special sources of income and contribution.

3. Human Resources Recommendations

- a. Focus on building and maintaining a cohesive leadership team – Franconia Mennonite Conference needs to provide for staffing that has a single and clear executive; additional staffing for finance and communication; specialized staff to implement various credentialing and covenanting activities; and regionalized pastoral support and oversight of congregations, all of whom are in sync with the vision, strategy, and goals of the Conference.
 - b. Focus on organizational clarity through mission initiative development – Franconia Mennonite Conference staff should be empowered to serve in more of a project development and brokering approach to equipping for mission, including the development of, subject to appropriate oversight, the criteria for credentialing and covenanting. Organizational clarity will include clear paths to access funding and resources that can help to implement newly covenanted initiatives to ensure broad access for Conference leaders, congregations, ministries and partners
 - c. Focus on the over-communication of organizational clarity – Franconia Mennonite Conference staff should create narrative coherence by developing and implementing a common communication strategy that keeps staff working within a unified message and presentation about Franconia Mennonite Conference systems and priorities that can be repeated, that is simple, and that is communicated in multiple mediums.
- 4. Review**
- a. These recommendations should be reviewed annually by the Conference Board for compliance and adjusted accordingly.
 - b. A more extensive review of the implementation of these recommendations and an evaluation of their successful accomplishment of the specified outcomes should be undertaken, beginning on or about January 1, 2011, and completed in time for reporting to the Franconia Conference Assembly in the fall of 2011.

Outcomes

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If implemented in their entirety, the vision, goals, strategy, and action recommendations should provide for:

1. A stable, well-aligned financial environment that our membership is eager to support, with all support services met through related business activities at Souderton Center and Indian Creek Road Farm.
2. A narrative coherence measured by stable donated dollars and increased initiative-related dollars for covenanted missional initiatives.
3. An increase in credentialed pastoral, congregational and conference related ministry leaders from previously under-represented communities: women, people of color, and young adults.
4. An increase in CRM related collaboration with Franconia Conference, measured by increase in the exchange of first-fruits giving and documentable services.
5. An increase in partnerships that have high missional value, financial transparency, and sustainability.

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A Matrix for Evaluation

One way to visualize the direction of Franconia Mennonite Conference if this vision, these goals, and this strategy are embraced is as follows:

Equipping Strategies and Goals	Empowering by credentialing ministers	Empowering by covenanting with ministries	Empowering by covenanting with missional initiatives	Empowering by covenanting with congregations
Embracing More & Better Leaders – healthy pastoral tenures	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops minimum standards for ordination and collaborates with Pastors to create increased continuing education standards	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops a learning community for training CRM leadership and assisting in forming a strong Anabaptist identity. CRM executives may offer leadership in Franconia Mennonite Conference based learning communities	Franconia Mennonite Conference creates venues to train pastors and other urban leaders in developing proposals for funding which have met standards for missional alignment, financial transparency, and sustainability	Franconia Mennonite Conference creates greater opportunities for coaching and collegial relationships among pastors in learning community environment
Embracing More & Better Disciples – increased young adult participation and increased numbers of new Christians in conference related congregations	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops training venues to assist pastors to engage in evangelism that is authentically Anabaptist, and in relating to and involving the gifts of young adults	Franconia Mennonite Conference works with CRMs to identify talent among young adults and new Christians	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides spaces for young adults and new Christians to develop and implement various missional experiments	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides leadership incubation opportunities with young adults and new Christians
Embracing More & Better Churches -- increased number of congregations becoming members of Franconia Conference and fewer debilitating church conflicts	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops training and coaching strategies that identify, release, and support new church planters, and trains pastors to assess church health and lead necessary systems changes for increased church health	Franconia Mennonite Conference brings CRM and congregations together for information sharing and learning exchanges	Franconia Mennonite Conference prioritizes projects that include new church development or demonstrate increased church health	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides opportunities for congregations to develop and cultivate relationships with one another
Embracing More & Better Connections -- increased congregational missional initiatives locally, regionally, and globally	Franconia Mennonite Conference collaborates with pastors to identify and resource increased missional partnerships	Franconia Mennonite Conference assists CRMs in making connections with various additional partners	Franconia Mennonite Conference brokers international and local initiatives that build connections with the world, recognizing possibilities and needs	Franconia Mennonite Conference encourages congregations to engage in mission, “from everywhere to everywhere...”