

## Transitional Period Plan Phase Two: February–April

**College Mennonite Church    February 10, 2008**

Gary Martin, Transitional Lead Pastor

### *Process Status Report*

<u>Congregation's Tasks</u>	December	January	February	March	April	May
come to terms with history		*****	*	*	*	*
clarify current identity					*****	*
connect with IMMC/MCUSA	*	*	*	*	*	*
establish an energizing/congregationally owned vision						
evaluate current structure/revise as needed						
prepare for new leadership						

### Transitional Lead Pastor's Tasks

join the system		*****	*	*		
analyze congregation as a system		*****	*	*	*	*
focus/lead the process					*****	
connect with IMMC/MCUSA	*	*	*	*	*	*
exit and evaluate						

### *Visitation and Questionnaire Project December-January*

- 180 individuals visited: half in current leadership roles; half randomly selected from those not in current leadership roles
- 159 additional forms were returned by individuals not visited
- 339 total responses: I read each response/entered data; completed Feb. 5.
- Tom Meyers (in consultation with Del Good) provided histograms & cross tabulations
- I am in the process of analyzing the results of this non-scientific research.

#### Initial Observations:

1. The excellent response ratio indicates broad based concern for CMC's future. I believe it is valid to allow the results to represent the congregation: stakeholders are those who responded.
2. Age (essentially, of those 18 & above): 80+ (24%); 65+ (63%); 50+ (91%)  
The (responses) from the youngest categories: 17 and under (3); 18-34 (14); 35-49 (14)
3. Length of attending: 25+ years (50%); 15+ years (64%); 4 years or less (10%).
4. Formal Education: at least 1 year of college (95%); at least 1 year of graduate school (57%)
5. CMC's greatest strength: people resources (21%); caring (14%); music (12%)
6. The congregation has a limited understanding of the biblical concept of spiritual gifts.
7. Am I using my gift in or through CMC? Yes (60%); Somewhat (20%); No (20%)
8. If I could change one thing? more under 40 folk (20%); nothing (11%); preaching (7%)

A cursory (and minimally poetic) conclusion: **College Mennonite Church is:**

**gifted, professional, and globally connected;  
caring, traditional, and getting old.**

***Coming to Terms With History: “Re-membering CMC” January 19***

Approximately 70 individuals in current leadership roles devoted four hours to reflect on CMC’s history: accomplishments, shortcomings, experiences and consequent emotional agenda. The last three remain unexamined in most congregations. The goal was to determine any unresolved issues or conflicts that might hinder healthy vision work in 2008.

I believe the event achieved its objectives. We acknowledged points of pain, confusion or unhealthy functioning over the 104 years of history.

Three identified items involved specific events:

1. *1991-94 Building Project.* Unfinished emotional agenda among a small minority appears to focus more on critique of the decision making process. I will note here that it is very difficult for a congregation to pursue such a project without some residual complaints regarding the process.
2. *1973-74 Assembly Mennonite gestational conversation and birth.* This was a painful experience for those involved. My assessment: while both sides were primarily well intentioned in their efforts, some participants on both sides communicated in ways that resulted in pain, brokenness and alienation. Emotional residue remains for some to this day. Several perspectives missing in the congregation at the time regarding church planting would have likely reduced or eliminated the tensions at the time: a) the biblical motive for church planting is to increase potential for fishing for people--making new disciples; b) congregations plant new churches best by sending out their best leaders; c) church planting is a natural result of healthy congregations.
3. At least *three pastoral transitions* were noted as being difficult for both pastors and varying numbers of members.

When asked at the end of the meeting on Jan. 19, the majority seemed reluctant to recommend further reconciliation work in any of the above concerns. On February 5, the Church Board noted that with the limited time we have had to reflect, it would be better to not make conclusions about what needs to be done, but rather simply observe that there does not seem to be much interest in dealing with these items now.

Additional items identified relate to ongoing concerns of identity, polity and specific issues.

4. There is a lack of clarity regarding current congregational identity. For the first 60 years CMC was the church component of Goshen College. Since the 1960s there has been a slow movement away from that identity: intentional at times, but for the most part by default. This shift, in addition to the growing influx of senior citizens from a wide variety of congregations and geographic locations has resulted in identity confusion: we knew who we were back then, but who are we today?.
5. The congregation’s relationship with Indiana Michigan Mennonite Conference has been unclear at times, and strained at specific points throughout our history: e.g. closing Goshen College in 1923-4, and women in leadership. This dynamic affects our relationship with MCUSA.
6. The women in leadership issue at CMC may not be resolved.
7. Decision making & conflict transformation in a large church needs attention.
8. Balancing and integrating head (cognitive) and heart (emotional) process in congregational life is needed.
9. The role of the Holy Spirit in congregational life needs to be strengthened.

Next steps in coming to terms with history

I believe identity (#4) is the greatest unresolved issue for CMC to deal with in coming to terms with history. Items #1-3 (building project, Assembly, pastoral transitions) have been the most painful, but steps toward healing began Jan. 19 by simply getting them out in the open. As we come to greater agreement on what the church is, and clarity on CMC's identity, we will likely find greater resolution of #2 & #3. As we eventually evaluate our structure, we will likely find greater resolution of #1. Now that they have been named, we can be more cognizant of when the unresolved pain is influencing how some of us think about the future—and help each other recognize it.

Number 5-9 will likely be addressed in ongoing transitional period processes. I recommend working specifically at reconciliation when that issue is being addressed—if it appears to still be needed at that point. A worship service focused on letting go and moving on will likely be scheduled at some point in the future. That would be a time to name specifically these areas of pain, and to forgive and be forgiven.

***Observations 71 days into the Transition Period***

1. CMC has done and is doing significant Kingdom ministry: internal, local community, global
2. CMC has phenomenal resources in its people, connections, building and material possessions.
3. Many CMC members give generously of their resources: finances, volunteer hours, gifts and skills.
4. While CMC has regional church size and programming variety, unlike most regional churches CMC draws from a very narrow geographic area.
5. Large churches need to be different in some areas of congregational life. Small church thinking can be seen in various aspects of CMC life. While it likely continues because of many new members come from small churches, there is evidence of it among long term members as well.
6. There has been a tendency over the years to address challenges/problems by adding a program, commission, committee, task force, or more staff.
7. The current structure and other factors make even small changes difficult. Change is normal in large, healthy, growing congregations. When change within the official system is thwarted, independent efforts result. Many such efforts are good, but they tend not to be working together toward a common purpose.
8. Worship attendance has been in steady decline for 10 years. Seeds for such decline are usually sown in previous decades of growth and perceived “success.” Reversing this direction is complex and is best addressed through looking at the very basic building blocks of congregational life: ministry, leadership, governance and authority.

### *Immediate Recommendations*

General areas to address to increase our faithfulness as Jesus' disciples, that can begin immediately, i.e. not wait for identity and vision processes:

1. A new approach to allocating people resources—the discernment of
  - passion (the God given heartfelt desire that compels us to make a difference for the Kingdom of God—**where** you minister)
  - spiritual gift (a special ability given by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God's design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ—**what** you do)
  - personal style (person or task focused; structured or unstructured: **how** you minister)
  - calling: the above three intersect to determine your specific role in or through the congregation.

The Pastoral Team is committed to pursuing this direction.
2. Give priority to the gathered worship experience.
  - improve planning process
  - teaching: what worship is and why we worship
  - promote: in newsletter, web, newspapers
3. Upgrade/Expand technology use to an appropriate level for a large church: office, communication, record keeping, publicity, making resources available, broadcast to Greencroft.
4. Inspire God's people with biblical teaching re God's vision for the church.
5. Focus on clarify congregational identity

### *Specific Events*

#### **Life Plus Teaching Sessions:**

February 20: "Clarifying Our Identity" Visitation & Questionnaire Project Report will be presented in greater detail, and interpreted

March 27: Discerning Ministry Passion

April ?: Discerning Spiritual Gifts

April ?: Discerning Personal Style and Calling

#### **Sunday Worship Services:**

Lent (February 10-March 16): "Drawn into the Heart of Jesus"  
objective: spiritual renewal

March 30-April 20: A biblical framework for understanding the church

March 30: Worship: Our relationship with God

April 6: Community Life: Our relationships within the Body of Christ

April 13: Outreach: Our relationships beyond the Body of Christ

April 20: Discipling: formation for all three relationships

#### **Combined Adult Sunday School Classes:**

April 6, 13, 20 in depth teaching on the above four worship themes