Mission and Identity Report: Discerning the Mind of Christ in Conservative Mennonite Conference

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Introduction

This past spring, Brian Hershberger, CMC Executive Director, approached us about the possibility of clarifying and articulating the identity of CMC in preparation for the possibility of a renaming/rebranding process. In creating a proposal for CMC to consider, we suggested an assessment that considers both the mission of CMC as well as its identity. More than anything else, we noted, such a process will attempt to listen to the mind of Christ in regard to these questions.

We suggested that identity-related questions should include:
- What did God birth at CMC’s beginning—and what has He done over time—that remains critical to who CMC is called to be today?
- What has become identified with CMC over the years that needs to be discarded in order to become more closely aligned with the identity that is in God’s heart for CMC?
- What does CMC need to do differently to become more fully aligned with its identity in Christ?

We also indicated that mission related questions would be:
- For what purposes did CMC emerge from the heart of God “for the sake of the world that God so loved” and for what purposes does CMC continue to exist for the sake of a “world that God loves still?”
- What is the trajectory from where and to whom CMC was sent at its beginning and where and to whom God is sending CMC today and into the future?

To answer these questions we proposed a conference-wide survey as well as listening sessions at the annual conference in Greenwood, Delaware in August, 2016. In both of these, we asked questions about CMC’s mission and identity, as well as that of its agencies—RBC and RMM.

With the leaders of CMC, RBC, and RMM, we also discerned several scriptures that would guide our process including:

John 17:13-19: 13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by [a] the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

I Corinthians 3:1-11: 3 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow
Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Matthew 9:35-10:16: Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. ‘Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

The current report reflects the responses of 1282 respondents from eighty-three (74.8%) of the 111 congregations in Conservative Mennonite Conference. Both the response from members and from congregations is quite strong.1 The report also includes responses from two days of

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1 The response from Naumburg Mennonite Church was exceptional, with 279 individuals (21.8 percent of the total sample) completing the questionnaire. Naumburg members are different in some respects from the CMC sample as a whole. For example, Naumburg members are more likely to have grown up in a CMC home, less likely to have experience in a non-Anabaptist congregation, are more interested in their congregation embracing an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective, are more likely to see their congregation as a typical CMC congregation, more
listening sessions with nearly 200 individuals that we conducted at the annual CMC
conference—listening sessions of pastors, women, young adults, intercessors, apostles, and
board members of CMC, RBC, and RMM.

Demographic Information

Demographic information about the Conservative Mennonite Conference sample of respondents
includes:

- Fifty-two percent (51.8) are men and 48.2 percent are women.
- The average age of respondents is 50.9 years. Twenty-two (22.1) percent are between the
  ages of 18-35 years, 26.1 percent between 36-50 years, 31.8 percent between 51-65 years,
  and 20.0 percent 66 years of age or older.
- Eighty-six percent (85.6) are married, 8.5 percent are single, 1.7 percent are separated or
  divorced, and 4.1 percent are widowed.
- Seven percent (7.3) have not completed high school, 34.2 percent have a high school
diploma as their highest level of education, 31.0 percent have some level of education
beyond high school but not a Bachelor’s degree, and 27.5 percent have at least a
Bachelor’s degree (10.7 percent a Master’s degree or higher). There are significant
differences in education between members and pastors, with 83.1 percent of CMC pastors
having some level of college education and with 46.1 percent having a Bachelor’s degree
or higher (27.0 percent have at least a Master’s degree).
- Eight percent (8.3) or respondents to the CMC questionnaire serve in pastoral roles, 15.1
percent have congregational leadership positions but are not pastors, and 76.6 percent
completed the survey as members of their congregation.
- Twenty-four percent (23.9) of respondents attended Rosedale Bible College/Institute and
5.4 percent are graduates of RBC. Both pastors (39.3%) and current congregational
leaders (38.3%) are more likely to have attended RBC than are members as a whole. In
addition, 14.6 percent of pastors graduated from RBC as compared to 8.0 percent of
congregational leaders and 4.1 percent of members.
- Three percent (2.6) of respondents participated in RMM’s REACH program, 6.0 percent
participated in City Challenge, 6.6 percent in Voluntary Service, 3.3 percent were long-
term workers with RMM, 6.2 percent have served on an RMM Support Team, 29.6
percent have contributed financially to RMM, 9.9 percent give regularly on behalf of an
RMM worker, 25.8 percent pray regularly for an RMM worker, and 7.6 percent have
participated in RMM fundraising.

likely to identify with an Anabaptist/Mennonite identity, are less likely to have graduated from RBC, and are more
likely to be female and to have lower educational levels. Naumburg members are no different than other CMC
respondents in terms of age, length of time a Christian, how often they participate in activities of the congregation,
or on identification with being Evangelical or not. This report will be based on all of the 1282 respondents, but from
time to time we will report results excluding Naumburg—but we will always note when and why we are doing so.
Eighty percent of respondents have been a Christian for twenty or more years, with fewer than five percent becoming Christians in the last ten years and less than two percent coming to Christ within the past five years. The sample is composed of largely long-time Christians.

Respondents are highly engaged in their congregations, with more than one-third (33.8%) participating more than once a week and 91.8 percent participating at least once a week. There are few marginal respondents in this profile of CMC members.

Fifty-two percent (51.8) of CMC respondents grew up on a home where one or both parents were attenders of a CMC congregation—while for 48.2 percent their parents did not attend a CMC congregation. Forty-one percent (40.5) attended a congregation for six months or more that was not Mennonite/Anabaptist. The fact that just over one-half of respondents are “cradle” CMCers likely reflects the growth of CMC over the last two decades as new congregations have joined its ranks.

Not surprisingly, not growing up in a CMC home is related to the likelihood of participating in a non-Anabaptist congregation at some point in one’s life. Among those who did not grow up in a CMC home, 54.6 percent have attended a congregation that was not Mennonite/Anabaptist. Among those for whom both parents attended a CMC congregation, only 26.6 percent of respondents have attended a non-Anabaptist congregation for six months or longer. That is, if one’s parents attended a CMC congregation, he/she is much less likely to have ever attended a non-Anabaptist congregation.

For 50.7 percent of CMC respondents, a Mennonite/Anabaptist perspective is very important, while it is somewhat important for 34.0 percent of respondents. Fifteen percent (15.3) state that such a perspective is not important (10.9% percent “not very” and 4.4% “not important at all”). The percentage of respondents who support a Mennonite/Anabaptist perspective is quite high—nearly 85 percent.

A majority—71.5 percent—of respondents believe that their affiliation with CMC is helpful to the fulfillment of their congregation’s mission, as compared to 25.5 percent who say the affiliation is irrelevant and just 3.0 percent who believe the affiliation is detrimental. Individuals for whom both parents were members of CMC are most likely to say that an affiliation with CMC is helpful (76.4%) followed by those for whom neither parent attended a CMC congregation when the respondent was a child (66.9%). Interestingly, those for whom one parent only attended a CMC congregation are least likely to say that a CMC affiliation is helpful, most likely to say it is irrelevant, and most likely to say that it is detrimental. In addition, whether one attended a non-Anabaptist congregation for at least six months or not did not make any difference in one’s view of the value of a CMC affiliation for one’s mission.

Respondents ages 36-50 are least likely to agree that an affiliation with CMC is helpful, most likely to agree that it is irrelevant, and along with those 18-35 most likely to agree that is detrimental (these differences by age are statistically significant). There was no difference by age or marital status in view of the value of a CMC affiliation. However, there is a significant
difference by educational level—with those having no more than a high school diploma and
those with a Bachelor’s degree or equivalent being least likely to say that a CMC affiliation is
helpful for the congregation’s mission and most likely to say that it is irrelevant.

As we step back a bit, several questions emerge: Why are those with only one parent in CMC
when the respondent was a child least likely to see CMC as helpful to the mission? Why are
those 36-50 years old less supportive of CMC, and why those with only a high school diploma or
a Bachelor’s degree? On the other hand, overall support for CMC is high in this question and
particularly high among those who had both parents in CMC and among other educational levels.

When asked how “typical” their congregation is relative to other CMC congregations, most
agreed that it is at least somewhat typical—only 13.0 percent said their congregation is not
typical at all. At least one person from each of 44 congregations indicated that their
congregation was not typical of CMC, but in only 14 congregations did 50 percent or more say
the same (and in six of these congregations only one individual responded to the questionnaire).

By and large, respondents to the questionnaire are more likely than not to see themselves typical
of CMC congregations. Responses to this question do not seem to indicate serious distance
between members and CMC. This clarity is further revealed in responses to a question that asked
about the characteristics that most often come to mind when the respondent considers a “typical”
CMC congregation.

- Eighty-nine percent (89.1) pointed to “sound Biblical teaching.”
- Seventy-four percent (73.7) noted “mission-minded.”
- Fifty-one percent (51.2) said “spiritually vibrant.”
- Forty-four percent identified “cultural non-conformity.”
- Twenty-two percent (21.6) checked “plain dress.”
- Fifteen percent (14.9) suggested other characteristics.

These responses reveal that CMC members believe that CMC holds to Biblical teaching and that
CMC is engaged in mission, or at least that mission is important to CMC. There is less
unanimity in responses to the other characteristics and clearly some disagreement about the
spiritual vibrancy, non-conformity, and importance of plain dress within CMC congregations.
Indeed, of the 14.9 percent who responded “other,” this disagreement or lack of clarity is
reinforced with some respondents feeling very positively about CMC, others identifying
concerns, and some rather cynical in their descriptions of CMC.

Responses to this question do suggest that CMC has some work to do in defining how it relates
to the broader culture and in strengthening the spiritual life and vibrancy of its congregations.
Qualities of CMC Congregations

Respondents were given six qualities of congregations and asked to indicate their agreement as to whether these characteristics represent their congregation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities of a Congregation</th>
<th>Percent who agreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readily welcomes new persons to the congregation</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively shares Christ in the local community</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equips members to live out God’s mission to the world</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a clear sense of mission and purpose</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets the physical and social needs of the local community</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates a sense of belonging for all persons</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members were most likely to agree (two categories of agreement combined) that CMC congregations readily welcome new persons (90.3%), followed by “actively shares Christ in the local community” (85.8%) and “equips members to live out God’s mission” (84.4%). Eighty percent (80.3) agree that their congregation has a clear sense of mission and purpose, 76.1 percent that it meets the physical and social needs of the local community, and 73.4 percent that their congregation creates a sense of belonging.

The greatest difference among these categories is between welcoming new persons and creating a sense of belonging—this gap needs to be addressed if CMC congregations are going to effectively live out the mission that God has for them. It is easy to welcome but much more difficult to create a culture of belonging. But without such a culture, those who are so readily welcomed initially will rarely stay. The difference between being welcoming and belonging is often typical of congregations and is an important cultural challenge for CMC leadership to work on: How might the conference as a whole become known for nurturing a belonging culture? This would be an adaptive challenge for a conference that has been known for its non-conformity and separation from the world. What risks might the leadership face in creating “belonging” congregations? What benefits might be attained?

Congregational and Personal Mission

A second set of questions asked about personal engagement in mission, and the results are typical of most individuals and congregations, with the personal measures are at odds with the general beliefs about the congregation’s overall effectiveness at mission just discussed above. The following table shows the percentages of those who do the respective activity once a month or more:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent who do so at least monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pray by name for at least one unchurched person</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have casual conversations with your neighbors</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about your faith with someone who is not a church attender</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in civic and community activities</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in ministries that focus on the physical and social needs of your local community</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Invite unchurched persons to join you at your congregation 10.1
Invite unchurched persons into your home or out to lunch/coffee, etc. 19.1

Of these activities, members are most likely to pray for one unchurched person by name (72.6%) and to have casual conversations with neighbors (63.0%). They are least likely to invite unchurched persons to join them at their church (10.1%) or to invite unchurched persons to their home or out to eat (19.1%). Relatively few regularly engage in civic and community activities (29.5%) or participate in ministries in their local community (24.8%).

We are struck by how few CMC respondents regularly invite unchurched folks to church or into their homes or out to a restaurant, and these findings point to the lack of energy given to sustain relationships with folks in the local community. In addition, engagement in ministries and in civic and community events is rather minimal. These percentages are probably not surprising, given CMC’s historic concern for non-conformity and separation from the world. But these findings also illustrate why creating a sense of belonging is so difficult, particularly in the case of folks who come to church from the local community—they simply do not have sufficient relationships to support a strong sense of belonging. An adaptive challenge for CMC congregations will be identifying ways to more intentionally engage in their local communities to illustrate to those communities their care and compassion for those communities.

**Faith Practices**

Eighty-four (84.4) percent of respondents pray daily, 43.9 percent read or study the Bible daily, and 65.0 percent are in a small group that meets several times a month or more. Seventy-six percent (76.4) of respondents give 10 percent or more of their household income to church or charitable causes.

**The Broader Culture and Theological Identity**

CMC members responded to a set of statements that are measures of engagement with the broader culture, including several that have been important to Anabaptists in particular.

- Fifty-eight percent (58.1) disagree—both categories of disagreement—that it is okay for Christians to fight in a war.
- Forty-seven percent (47.1) disagree that it is okay for Christians to file a lawsuit.
- Thirty-nine percent (39.4) disagree that the government should use the death penalty for serious crimes.
- Thirty-seven percent (37.0) disagree that it is okay for Christians to have a concealed carry (to legally to carry a concealed weapon).
- Thirty-one percent (31.0) agree that it is okay for Christians to participate in public protests.
- Fourteen percent (14.3) disagree that it is okay for Christians to run for political office.
- Six percent (5.7) disagree that it is okay for Christians to vote in government elections.

Of all these items, respondents are most supportive of voting (87.1% support), running for political office (66.5% support), and carrying a concealed weapon (42.1% support). Respondents
are least supportive (or most likely to disagree with) Christians fighting in a war (58.1%) and Christians filing a lawsuit (47.1%).

For all but the question of voting (7.3% “not sure”), there were relatively high percentages of folks who are not sure about these items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okay to fight in a war</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to have a concealed carry</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to run for political office</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government use of death penalty</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to file a lawsuit</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to participate in public protests</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These “not sure” responses suggest quite a bit of ambivalence among CMC members about how and if Christians should engage the broader culture along lines that have been historically opposed by Anabaptists. This variation among CMC members in part accounts for the challenge in defining CMC’s identity.

Interestingly, when faced with words that describe their religious identity, CMC members overwhelming identify as Mennonite/Anabaptist (77.9%), Evangelical (52.3%), Charismatic/Pentecostal (7.8%), Fundamentalist (8.4%), and Other (15.7%). Most commonly repeated “Other” responses included:

- Follower of Jesus, Christ-follower or something similar
- Christian
- Bible-believing or something similar

Some distinguished Anabaptism from being Mennonite and others combined Mennonite with some other identity. But overwhelmingly, the “other” responses had to do with Jesus, the Bible, and being a Christian.

When considering those who identified as Mennonite/Anabaptist and/or Evangelical we find that:

- 9.4 percent define themselves as neither of these terms
- 39.5 percent define themselves as both of these identities
- 38.4 percent identify only as Mennonite/Anabaptist
- 12.8 percent identify only as Evangelical

So interestingly, while there is quite a bit of ambivalence around key indicators of Anabaptism, members of CMC overwhelmingly self-identify as Mennonite/Anabaptist. This fact will likely make the clarification of identity easier if leaders do so in an Anabaptist direction. And doing so will likely not be as challenging as it would have been had members overwhelming chosen the Evangelical or Fundamentalist labels. Clearly, CMC members are expecting CMC to remain Anabaptist.
Moral Behaviors

When presented with a list of additional moral behaviors, respondents were asked whether these are never acceptable, sometimes acceptable, or always acceptable.

Ninety percent or more agreed the following are never acceptable:
- Cohabitation before marriage (96.6%)
- Use of illegal drugs (96.6%)
- Premarital sexual intercourse (97.3%)
- Homosexual relations (98.1%)
- Viewing pornography (98.4%)
- Euthanasia (93.1%)
- Abortion (95.1%)

Behaviors that fewer than thirty percent said are never acceptable included:
- Divorce (28.0%)
- Unhealthy eating (25.0%)
- High risk/dangerous sports or activities (18.4%)

Among other behaviors, 75.5 percent believe that marriage between a Christian and non-Christian is never acceptable, 41.1 percent that drinking alcohol is never acceptable, 70.6 percent believe tobacco use is never acceptable, 78.4 percent believe gambling is never acceptable, and 83.8 percent believe littering is never acceptable.

CMC members are solidly committed to Biblical understandings of sexuality and marriage, and the conference has the advantage of not being divided on these issues. This unity will be helpful as CMC clarifies its mission and identity, since these issues are contributing to division in many other denominational affiliations throughout the U.S.

Women in Leadership

By and large, respondents to the CMC survey are reticent to support women in formal pastoral roles within a congregation, but open to women using their spiritual gifts in teaching, worship, and to a lesser extent pastoral care and counseling. But no more than one-fourth of respondents are open to women serving as elders, preaching sermons, serving as pastor or lead pastor.

In 25 of 80 congregations, no respondents indicated support for a woman serving as elder of a congregation. In 42 of 80 congregations, no respondents indicated support for a woman being a pastor. In 56 of 80 congregations, no respondents indicated support for a woman being a lead pastor.

There was no difference in support for a woman as pastor between men or women, with 13.9 percent of men supporting women in this role as compared to 12.3 percent of women. There was very little difference by age, with folks 51-65 years old most likely to support females pastors (17.3%) as compared to 13.2 percent of 18-35 year olds, 12.9 percent of 36-50 year olds, and 6.8 percent of those over 65 years of age. Not surprisingly, however, education makes a significant
impact on attitudes about women in leadership, so that 24.4 percent of those with at least a Bachelor’s degree supporting women pastors as compared to 8.8 percent of those without a Bachelor’s degree.

The presence of Naumburg Mennonite Church in the sample makes some difference in this question but does not change the overall narrative about women in formal roles of leadership. Without Naumburg, support for women in leadership increases slightly depending on the leadership role. Nonetheless, the overall story remains the same— one of the distinguishing characteristics of CMC is the continued support for male leadership in formal congregational roles. It is difficult to imagine this changing quickly since there is no difference by age and gender. Only a rapid increase in educational levels is likely to change the level of support for women in leadership.

### Activity for women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent who support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach children</td>
<td>99.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach adults</td>
<td>80.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and lead worship</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral counseling and care</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as elder</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching sermons</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as pastor</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve as lead pastor</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Congregational Health

It is remarkable (see table below) how few respondents see their congregations as being open to change. Beyond this item, respondents tend to see their congregations as accepting of others and with exciting futures ahead of them, but less so that they worship passionately, actively use their gifts, or are unified. In fact, just 13.9 percent strongly agree that their congregations are unified and less than three fourths (71.9%) agree with this statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>% Strongly Agree</th>
<th>% Agree&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readily embraces change</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has exciting future ahead</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>82.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively use gifts</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worships passionately</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts people</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we consider congregational health— both change and unity are the two items that respondents are suggesting their congregations most need to address. Close behind, however, are the use of gifts by members and passionate worship.

<sup>22</sup> Further analysis reveals that this percentage is influenced by Naumburg Mennonite Church where fewer members (22.6%) are open to change as compared to 41.2 percent of other CMC members.

<sup>3</sup> Both categories of agreement combined.
Commitment to the Conservative Mennonite Conference

When asked about their level of commitment to various levels of church, respondents are most committed to their local congregation (74.6% very strongly committed), then to the broader church (40.3% very strongly committed), and finally to the Conservative Mennonite Conference (just 23.3% very strongly committed).

Those for whom both parents attended a CMC congregation are more committed to CMC (26.4% very strongly and 81.1% committed at any level) as compared to those with one parent in CMC (20.0% and 66.7% at any level) and no parent in CMC (20.2% and 72.2% at any level). This finding suggests that the entry of new congregations and members into CMC does not automatically translate into commitment to CMC in the long run. Commitment to CMC cannot be assumed but must be nurtured.

Interestingly, education makes no difference in the level of one’s commitment to CMC but age does. Forty percent (39.9) of those over 65 years of age are very strongly committed to CMC as compared to 28.8 percent of those between 51-65 years of age, 15.7 percent between 36-50 years of age, and 14.9 percent of those 35 years old and younger. In addition, there is an interaction between age and whether both of one’s parents were in CMC or not, with 40.4 percent of those 65 years of age and older whose parents were in CMC being strongly committed to CMC as compared to the strong commitment of just 9.8 percent of those under 36 years of age and whose parents were not part of CMC. The combination of not growing up in CMC and being younger makes commitment to CMC quite low. The loss of older cohorts and the ongoing addition of historically non-CMC congregations is likely to create a commitment problem for CMC unless this is addressed sooner rather than later.

When given a list of concerns about the Conservative Mennonite Conference, respondents indicated greatest concern about:

- The retention of young people in CMC (72.5% are concerned).
- Reaching their surrounding communities for Christ (65.0% are concerned).
- Remaining true to Biblical teaching (62.7 percent are concerned)
- Losing a Mennonite/Anabaptist identity (57.5% are concerned)
- A membership decline in CMC (57.0% are concerned).
- The ability of CMC to develop leaders (53.4% are concerned).
- Struggling to remain focused on its mission (52.1 % are concerned)
- Failing to take the Gospel to the least reached peoples (46.0% are concerned)
- Whether CMC can communicate a culturally relevant Gospel (44.3% are concerned).

It’s not entirely clear whether respondents mean that they are not concerned about an item because it is not important to them, because they are not sure whether CMC is well positioned in regard to that item, or because that item is simply near and dear to their heart, but their responses do give us some measure of where respondents are suggesting that CMC leaders put their energies. If we assume the latter, respondents are asking for the greatest attention to the retention of young people, reaching their local communities, and Biblical orthodoxy. They are suggesting some attention to Mennonite/Anabaptist identity, membership decline, the development of
leaders, and a focus on CMC’s mission. They are least concerned about whether CMC will reach
the least reached peoples or whether it will communicate a culturally relevant Gospel.

In sum—retaining their youth, reaching local communities, and Biblical orthodoxy are the
greatest concerns of respondents. And interestingly, the first two concerns are two of the primary
engines of growth and sustainability of any social group—the third is an increase in birth rates.
Without retaining young people, effective evangelism, and sufficient birth rates—denominations
are bound to plateau and eventually disappear. Perhaps without being conscious of these
prerequisites, respondents are voicing their concerns about these critical issues.

Resources of CMC

When asked about the importance of the resources provided by CMC, respondents ranked the
importance of resources in the following order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources (% Somewhat/Very important)</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training, resourcing and fellowship for pastors and leaders</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avenues to cooperate with other groups on mission and relief projects</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside help when congregations face conflict</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and congregational coaching through CMC’s overseers</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational resources and other means of congregational discipleship</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of identity and belonging that is larger than just the local context</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events…which provide…conference-wide fellowship and networking</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaders (Senior or Associate Pastors) rank five items nearly equally—cooperation on mission
and relief projects, outside help in conflicts, coaching, a larger sense of identity and belonging,
and training, resourcing and fellowship for pastors.

All respondents rank three of the above five most highly—they want CMC to provide training,
resourcing, and fellowship for their pastors, they value avenues to connect on mission and relief
projects, and they value outside help in conflicts. These are areas that are win-win outcomes for
CMC because both members and leaders value them—by focusing on these there is likely to be
most bang for the buck.

The largest differences between all respondents and members are in the areas of identity and
conference-wide fellowship and networking—all respondents are less likely to value these than
are leaders.

While respondents express low levels of commitment to CMC, they clearly see the resourcing
offered by CMC as valuable to their congregations and to their leaders. Three-fourth or more of
all respondents (and more than 85 percent of leaders) identify all of CMC’s resources as being
somewhat or very important.

When asked whether they have experienced an increase, decrease, or no change in the resourcing
offered by CMC over the past five years, members overwhelming responded with no change or
even an increase. The greatest increases are seen in training, resourcing and fellowship for
Pastors (36.0%), educational resources and other means of congregational discipleship (30.2), cooperation on mission and relief projects (29.7%), and leadership and congregational coaching (28.0%). From all appearances, the resources offered by CMC are very much valued and are not seen as diminishing.

When asked to identify the resources of Rosedale Bible College that they most valued, respondents, leaders (Senior or Associate Pastors), and those who did not grow up in CMC offered the following responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource (% value)</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>NCMC&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching in the context of Evangelical Anabaptism</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferable college credit...vibrant environment</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual formation offered in a nurturing community</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs...that offer internship and discipleship</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection with the broader CMC community as a value</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not value any of these</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leaders are much more likely to value the resources of RBC—in fact, CMC pastors are clearly allies of RBC. Those who did not grow up in CMC are not much different from all respondents in the value they place upon RBC resources—so not growing up in CMC does not seem to affect one’s view of RBC. This is good news for CMC—adding new congregations does not appear to be dimming member views of RBC.

At the same time, our belief is that RBC is undervalued by the CMC constituency. Given the concerns about retaining youth and Biblical orthodoxy, RBC is positioned to socialize a new generation of CMC adults (we will address further in our conclusions).

Another group of advocates for RBC are those who attended. When we ask RBC attenders and graduates about the value they place upon RBC resourcing we find that they are overwhelmingly supportive of the resourcing of RBC. And interestingly, this group more than any other sees value in RBC connecting students to the broader CMC community. If CMC wishes to strengthen its members’ commitment to CMC, it would seem that it is to CMC’s benefit to encourage participation in RBC.

When asked about the benefit of Rosedale Mennonite Missions, one benefit or resource in particular jumped out--Programs like Reach and City Challenge (71.7%). Several others clustered second to this one:

- Opportunities to financially support people I know on the mission field (56.8%)
- Opportunities to respond to natural disasters (57.1%)

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<sup>4</sup> Respondents who did not grow up in a CMC congregation.
All other RMM benefits or resources were valued by fewer than 50 percent of respondents:

- Ministry partnership with my congregation in overseas context (48.1%)
- Mission communication and education (43.7%)
- Discipleship making and church planting resources (38.3%)
- Opportunities to help raise funds for missions (38.5%)
- Help for my congregation in developing mission vision (38.5%)
- Opportunities to contribute to general mission offerings (37.8%)
- Missionary prayer guides, etc. (35.4%)
- Opportunities to engage in mission as business (25.3%)

When asked whether their interest in RBC has increased, decreased, or remained the same over the past five years, 14.9 percent stated that their interest had decreased, 17.7 percent that it had increased, and 67.3 percent that it had stayed the same. This means a slight net gain of 2.8 percent for RBC in the past five years. Interestingly, the increase in interest differs dramatically by status—with 36.0 percent of pastors saying their interest in RBC has increased compared to just 16.0 percent of members. There was little difference between cradle CMCers on this question and those who did not grow up in a CMC congregation.

Asked the same question about RMM, 8.6 percent replied that their interest had decreased, 27.4 percent that it had increased, and 64.0 percent that their interest had remained the same, resulting in a net increase in interest of 18.8 percent. As with RBC, pastors are much more likely (40.9%) than members (25.1%) to say that their interest in RMM has increased in the past five years.

Again, there was little difference between folks who grew up in CMC and those who did not. Both sets of questions—about interest in RBC and RMM—suggest that pastors are a key constituency in strengthening interest in these organizations. In addition, the influx of non-CMCers does not seem to be weakening support for these organizations, just as it is not building support either.

Respondents were asked to identify the strength of relationship between CMC and its agencies. Sixty-one (60.9%) percent said the relationship between RBC and CMC was strong, while 33.3 percent were not sure. Sixty-eight (67.9%) percent believe the relationship between RMM and CMC is strong, but 28.5 percent are not sure. Fifty-two (51.8%) percent said they were not sure how the relationships between CMC and its agencies had changed over the past five years, with 28.0 percent identifying no noticeable change, 5.9 percent saying they had drifted further away, and 14.3 percent said they are closer together.

Findings for this question do not suggest that members sense a crisis in the relationships among CMC and its agencies—there is much uncertainty about the relationships but no strong sense that the relationships are diminishing.

In a final comprehensive measure of connection to CMC, respondents were asked: “How connected do you personally feel to Conservative Mennonite Conference and its agencies?” Members responded with 24.5 percent saying not connected at all, 59.9 percent are somewhat connected, and 15.6 percent are very connected.
We conducted a correlation analysis of this question and whether or not one grew up in CMC, and there is a significant positive association between growing up in CMC and one’s level of connectedness to CMC ($r = .14$). Those who grew up in CMC feel more connected to CMC.

**Regional Analysis**

In an effort to measure the effects of region—distance from Rosedale offices as well as number of CMC congregations in the region—on connectedness to CMC, congregations were divided into sixteen regions. The following table shows the number of respondents within each region as well as their responses to several measures of connectedness to CMC. It will be important for CMC leaders to assess the extent to which region impacts a respondent’s connection to CMC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>DE</th>
<th>FL</th>
<th>IN/MI</th>
<th>IN South</th>
<th>IA</th>
<th>KS</th>
<th>KY</th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>MI Upper</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>OH Col.</th>
<th>OH Hart.</th>
<th>OH Other</th>
<th>PA Cent</th>
<th>SW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents attended</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabaptism very important</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation helps mission</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very typical CMC congregation</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Open-ended Questions**

The CMC questionnaire concluded with several open-ended questions:

What do you believe to be God’s purpose for Conservative Mennonite Conference?

Responses to this question were very constructive and positive, and one has the sense that members are calling on CMC to be a stronger center—to resource pastors and leaders, to lead in local and global mission (much emphasis on outreach and evangelism), to connect congregations to one another, offer discipleship training, communicate an Evangelical Anabaptist perspective, offer Biblical teaching, and equip congregations.

One articulate respondent put it this way: “I believe God can use CMC to embody the love of Jesus to the world in a way that holds unashamedly to Biblical faith in the Anabaptist tradition, while being driven by a missionary fervor that compels it to find ways to connect meaningfully to various cultures where members live and serve.”

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*The congregations within each region are listened in Appendix A.*
Another enthusiastically and perhaps prophetically responded: “To be a unified body of individuals and congregations who stand solidly on the Rock of the Word of God, without wavering in our faith in Jesus, encouraging and discipling our children and each other, and reaching out with love and compassion to those around us and in the nations who do not have the hope of Jesus who are sinking in the sands of despair. I believe we are living in days when it isn’t easy to be a Christian, and CMC encourages its own to keep taking up their crosses and following Jesus no matter the cost, and shows a watching world that discipleship is still worth it. I believe that from CMC is arising and will arise a generation of world changers. They are not status quo Christians. They will follow Jesus to the end and will lead many to follow Him. They will overcome by the blood of the Lamb, the Word of their testimony and love not their lives unto death. CMC is putting the wind in their sails and giving them the wings to fly. One day we will look back and say with amazement, ‘The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes!!!’ CMC exists for such a time as this, I have no doubt!”

Quite frankly, three things impressed us about responses to this question:

- The strong optimism and enthusiasm for CMC in a day when most historic denominations are facing cynicism and erosion. Respondents to this question exude with enthusiasm and optimism.
- That mission and outreach, more than any other concern, dominated responses.
- The sense that members are calling for a stronger CMC center.

The low level of commitment that is seen toward CMC relative to the congregation and broader church might be understand not so much as a reality to be accepted but more as a reality that members are desiring to see changed. What would it take for CMC to strengthen itself as a center for its congregations rather than to assume that the centers of all denominations and conferences are necessarily deteriorating and as a result CMC’s must also? CMC is in an enviable position of being a conference of churches that are not currently deeply divided (nor do we see signs of this coming in the near future) and where its education and mission agencies are affirmed by key groups in their constituency.

Can you name one thing that God may be calling Conservative Mennonite Conference to embrace in order to become more faithful in fulfilling its mission?

Three themes emerged from respondents’ answers that connect with recommendations that we will be making in this report:

- Encouragement to change CMC’s name.
- Asking for greater resourcing and education for pastors.
- Emphasizing more local outreach and mission.

Key quotes that pointed to these themes were:

- “Encourage pastors to obtain formal education in Bible studies. RBC used to do some of this, but it seems CMC should be the leader. 2) CMC in conjunction with RMM should provide resources and training on how to reach our immediate communities for Christ.”
- “I wonder if we could add the word ‘Evangelical’ in front of Conservative Mennonite Conference or possibly instead switching to ‘evangelical anabaptist conference.’”
“I know that CMC is very focused on the 10 40 window. However I think CMC should consider equipping missionaries to tell people about Jesus in America. CMC could provide resources for local congregations to minister to the lost in the local community. I know in Sarasota there are many who are lost without Christ.”

Besides these three, many other concerns were mentioned including CMC connecting more strongly to its congregations, strengthening theological commitments, allowing women more freedom in using their gifts, greater openness to the Holy Spirit, greater embrace of change, and remaining and increasing Biblical faithfulness.

Can you name one thing that God may be calling Conservative Mennonite Conference to lay aside in order to become more faithful in fulfilling its mission?

This item produced responses calling for a name change. Many other responses were related to the question of how to engage culture and how CMC engages its own cultural/theological identity. This theme of negotiating culture was the overwhelming focus of comments in this section and likely reflects the long history of negotiating between cultural assimilation and complete separation from the world. How to negotiate the broader culture is very much on respondents’ minds but there is some difference in how they imagine doing so and what it means to do so.

Can you name one thing that God may be calling Conservative Mennonite Conference to retain from its past in order to be more faithful in fulfilling its mission?

Far and away the most often mentioned concern was Biblical faithfulness. Other themes that emerged were related to Anabaptist history and theology, mission and how to engage the culture. In this way, respondents are quite consistent in their responses across questions—they value a conference that remains true to Scripture, that engages in mission, and that is intentional about how it relates to the broader culture.

Is there anything else you would like to say about Conservative Mennonite Conference and its agencies—Rosedale Mennonite Missions and Rosedale Bible College?

This question yielded many responses of appreciation for CMC and its agencies. It also presented an opportunity for folks to express concerns. Many wrote lengthy responses that are certainly worth considering but the responses were quite diverse and many reflect anxieties of Christians living in a changing culture and who are looking to the church for direction and guidance.

Answers to these five questions reflect strong engagement with, interest in, and commitment to CMC, a desire to shape the direction of CMC, and to see CMC thrive. Our sense is that as CMC leads with clarity and decisiveness, conference members and congregations will follow.
While at the annual CMC conference in Greenwood, Delaware, we conducted eight listening sessions with approximately 200 individuals. The following is a summary of those sessions.

Why do you believe that CMC and your agency continue to exist? What is the purpose for which God brought into the world and continues to have you in the world?

CMC

Multiple themes were shared in response to the existence and purpose for CMC. Themes of being a foundation for local churches, a support for pastors and church leaders, provide resources for local congregations, develop leaders, and empower the CMC body to remain biblically grounded were all present. One participant stated, “CMC exists to be a network of churches for support and fellowship with one another of similar values for encouragement to press forward in the Kingdom.” Another respondent shared, “To help build the Kingdom with the tools God has given us that stem from our view of the Scriptures. Our theological bent, largely influenced by our spiritual ancestors bears testimony of the position of God as the creator, Savior, and eternal hope.”

When asked to rate the current success of CMC (scale of 1-10), there was a mix of scores ranging from 2 through 9. One respondent offered a 4 regarding missional outreach: “We’ve always had a strong overseas mission emphasis, but have not done well at advancing the Gospel and planting churches at home.” When referencing the developing healthy of congregations, one individual rated the success at a 3, due to “growing only certain aspects.” This individual expressed concern that holistic development is not occurring, particularly a lack of emphasis on spiritual gifting. Another participated explained his rating of CMC’s commitment to mission, “If we are rating the heart of CMC and its commitment to our mission, I would give a rating of 9 among the leaders. I don’t know about the local churches. If we are rating what actually happens, it would be somewhat lower, may a 7 or so.”

Interestingly, there was very little direct mentioned of RBC and no mention of RMM. Does this perhaps represent some disconnect between the CMC leadership and those of RBC and RMM? There was much mention of support for local congregations, pastors, and leaders, but very little to no mention of support/guidance for RMM and RBC. In several of the later responses, it is noted by leaders of both RMM and RBC a lack of unified vision and guidance from CMC.

RMM

Themes of a strong foundation, a “dream”, discipleship, and evangelism were all apparent in the participants’ responses. There were several mentions of a solid foundation from which RMM is able to continue carrying out its purpose. This foundation is based on Scripture, truth, and the “original dream” that led to the creation of RMM. The word “dream” was used on several occasions, both to describe the “original dream” that led to the existence of RMM, but also to pass the “dream” on to the next generation.

Participants see discipleship as a responsibility of RMM, specifically in equipping CMC churches and members to reach the unchurched. Evangelism and reaching the “lost people
groups” was mentioned repeatedly by groups responding to the question. RMM directly interacts with the unchurched, trains CMC members for interaction with the unchurched, and casts a vision for missions for CMC as a faith body.

There was not much discussion about how to pass on the “original dream” to the next generation. Would creating space for young people to participate within the RMM board of directors be one possibility? It is difficult to pass on a vision if the recipients do not feel ownership and responsibility for the organization reflecting that vision. How can RMM create greater buy-in within young people that they desire to be engaged in carrying on the “original dream”?

RBC

Several themes were identified by members of the RBC executive board in response to their existence as an educational institute. Central to their responses was the idea that RBC exists to train and educate young people to serve both the church (CMC and globally) and the kingdom of God. RBC sees itself as a mechanism for preparing young people to become the next generation of leaders within the church. One board member stated as the purpose: “To prepare this generation to be effective leaders and church workers…and to train and equip this generation to serve His kingdom.” While RBC has a clear understanding of its current purpose, it is less clear that there is an identifiable plan to continuing to achieve its mission and purpose.

Several mentioned the desire for RBC to be relevant in a post-Christian society. “To prepare this generation to be effective leaders and church workers in being engaging and ‘relevant’ in the world,” wrote a board member. Another board member stated, “To be faithful and relevant in a post-Christian environment.” RBC has the potential to provide students with a unique set of both educational and spiritual opportunities to grow and develop personally. These are wonderful gifts that need to be recognized and protected as an integral part of who RBC is. How might RBC be able to better capitalize on its already established programs through development and expansion?

**World Café Responses**

**What has become identified with CMC over the years that needs to be discarded in order to become more closely aligned with the identity that is in God’s heart for CMC? *CMC Leadership Only***

CMC

A dominate theme among the responses is the idea that CMC is perceived by many outside the conference as a “closed group” of conservative Mennonites. In the past it may have been perceived that individuals with a particular last name received superior respect than those with “non-Mennonite” last names. As one person shared, “The Yoders are not more important that the Montgomerys, Tellihos, and Smiths.”

There was a sense among the group that CMC experiences feelings of inferiority relative to Mennonite Church USA and other non-CMC Anabaptist institutions. One group stated, “We are perceived as not having it quite together.” In spite of the feelings of perceived inferiority experienced by those in CMC, it is important to recognize the spiritual heritage that laid the foundation for the conference to continue carrying on the mission and purpose for which it is
Presently, only conservative congregations are growing in the United States. In the midst of the feelings of inferiority, don’t lose sight of the fundamental core values that have led you to where you are today, and will continue to lead you into the future.

Where do you see your agency living out God’s mission to the world?

CMC
Participants see CMC living out God’s mission to the world through the work of both RMM and RBC, specifically with REACH and a Biblical education. Other ways include the discipleship and evangelism by local congregations, a system of relational support and encouragement for church leaders, theological foundation, and through the invitation of people into an authentic biblical community.

RMM
Respondents shared several ways in which they seem RMM living out God’s mission to the world. One way is through CMC and sharing a vision of missions for CMC churches and members. A grouped shared, “We cast vision for CMC churches about Christ’s great commission and invite them to join us in this awesome task.” Another group stated, “Under CMC’s direction, RMM gives opportunities and vision to grow a missional mindset.”

RBC
Respondents overwhelmingly shared that they witness RBC living out God’s mission to the world through the making of disciples, both directly and indirectly through RBC programs and students. The contexts in which these evangelistic actions are seen occurs in both international and domestic arenas. Discipleship that occurs on the campus of RBC is most often experienced in classes, Pathways, chapels, prayer groups, and community service/projects.

Not surprisingly, many of the themes highlighted under this question were also addressed under the note card activity that asked why the organization exists. For example, under both questions there was emphasis on biblically grounded teaching, a focus on missions/outreach, and preparing students to serve the church both domestically and abroad.

Where do you see your agency failing to live out God’s mission to the world? What barriers or challenges are you facing in doing so?

CMC
Participants revealed several themes in the ways that CMC fails to live out God’s mission to the world. One of the themes mentioned is a lack of clarity of vision. Another respondent added by stating, “There is a lack of passion in communicating the conference vision.” It would seem that is a significant issue, if local pastors and congregations sense a lack of passion/clarity over the
conference vision, how will that affect their level of engagement and support? There needs to be “buy-in” to the mission and vision of this conference, and it starts with the CMC leadership. If the leadership lacks vision, how does it expect its local congregations and agencies to effectively engage in God’s mission to the world. This season of transition lends itself as a time to create new energy and focus over the conference’s mission and vision.

Other challenges include, funding conference agencies, a lack of willingness to make sacrifices, and, “not operating in the gifts Jesus commissioned for us.” The idea of struggling to develop spiritual gifts is a recurrent problem that was raised under the note card activity. It is important to pay attention to this theme, particularly in light of the development of pastors and leaders. Fostering space for the growth of spiritual gifts is an important part of the development process for both pastors and leaders at the local congregational level. How does CMC create space that empowers their pastors and leaders to engage in the development of their spiritual gifts?

RMM

The dominant theme shared by participants is a lack of unity and engagement of CMC congregations and members. One group explained, “The history of congregational autonomy/independence is a barrier to fulfilling the mission of the church as a whole. As a metaphor, riding bike in a pack is easier than riding a bike alone.”

RBC

Several themes were raised in response to this question. A primary concern shared by participants is the geographical location of the campus. One respondent stated, “We have a rural oriented mindset trying to engage in an urbanized world.” Others shared that the small size of RBC hinders the impact that the institution is able to create.

It was noted that there is a lack of vision and boldness, coupled with a sense of fear. One person shared about hearing the word fear when discussing RBC. Not surprisingly, it was mentioned that several CMC churches are not interested supporting RBC. A respondent stated, “They don’t invite us or let us in.” Could there be a correlation between a lack of vision and boldness and an absence of support expressed by CMC congregations.

The issue does not appear to be that RBC doesn’t understand their vision and purpose, it seemed evident through earlier responses that the institution’s purpose for existence is clear. The problem lies more in creating greater “buy-in” from CMC congregations, CMC leadership, and perspective students.

Where, if it all, do you experience conflict or competitiveness between the mission of CMC and of your agency? How might the mission of CMC and your agency become more collaborative?

RMM

Overall, many of the comments shared in response to this question portrayed a mix of perceptions regarding the competitiveness or lack of between RMM and CMC. One group stated, “In reality, it seems there is a greater cooperation and understanding to where each agency is headed.” Another group responded, “As CMC has taken the lead role in vision development,
conflict and competitiveness has decreased.” This is something to be applauded and recognized as a positive aspect of the relationships between these agencies. The language in these responses indicates that perhaps cooperation between RMM and CMC didn’t always exist at the level that it does today.

In spite of these positive comments, others shared a need for greater leadership by CMC. For example, some noted competitiveness between RMM and CMC in several areas; financial resources, dissimilar messaging, at times a lack of unified vision, and an absence of encouragement for outreach from CMC to local congregations. Several respondents shared, “Conflict results from a lack of unified vision or overlapping vision (confusing responsibility); if all three agencies can be unified (under CMC) and continue to work together, conflict will decrease.” Others responded by saying, “If CMC office provides top level vision – it provides an avenue for RMM to move forward.”

This “mixed bag” of responses indicates that progress through vision unification has been initiated, but greater vision development is needed. For those within RMM, what would it look for CMC to offer greater leadership and a unified vision for the conference agencies? How can RMM create space for CMC to lead in a way that leads to greater unity between all the conference agencies?

RBC

Through the responses, it is clear that members of RBC’s leadership experience both conflict and competitiveness within the mission of CMC. The competitiveness is portrayed in the relationship with RMM (Reach) and the struggle to recruit young people from the “same small pond”. However, respondents also shared a sense of collaboration with RMM, with the question being raised of “possibly making one agency?” Efforts to collaborate between RBC and RMM have been made in the past through the Bridge program. However, tensions continue to remain. What would it look like to pursue discussion of the possible merger between RMM and RBC? The organizations are targeting a similar audience, each is looking to develop leaders to serve the church both domestically and abroad.

What does CMC and/or your agency need to do differently to become more fully aligned with its identity in Christ?

CMC

When addressing this question, the CMC leadership identified several areas that could become more fully aligned with its identity in Christ. These focal points included, church planting within the United States, building on the strong foundation and heritage, creating space for young leaders, and be more intentional in engaging with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Within these focal points, some expressed specific concerns that need to be addressed. For example, the group shared that the desire for church planting in the United States is present, but there has been a lack of action and intentional effort in engaging these activities. Another example is within maintaining the spiritual foundation and heritage is the need to continually train and inspire new pastors. Connectedly is the need to allow young persons the space to engage in leadership roles that develop their spiritual gifts.
Themes of identity, vision, and cultural relevance were part of the responses shared by participants. The apparent belief among respondents is that the agency’s identity should not be based on tradition or cultural, but rather in Christ. Others shared, “Excessively communicate our identity in Christ and therefore find our purpose.” Another group stated, “Live in the authority of Christ (pray boldly and expect great things from God).” The need for a “compelling vision” and the clarity of identity were raised as a ways to seek greater “buy-in” for engagement with the agency. Several respondents described CMC as a cargo ship, slowly moving in a general direction without much purpose. In contrast, the respondents expressed a desire for CMC to act more as a “spiritual battleship,” fast moving with a clear objective(s).

The theme of cultural relevance was also raised as an aspect of the agency’s identity in Christ. Participants believe the focus should not be on cultural relevance, but recognize that RMM and its missionaries are aliens, not members of today’s culture and society. What does it look like for a missional agency to remain engaged in the culture without focusing on a need for relevance?

Several themes came out of the responses to this question. The first theme is one of engagement, as one respondent stated, “how to live ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world.’” Persons shared a need to engage society for the further advancement of the kingdom of God. One group reflected, “Learn to engage our culture as strangers and pilgrims, not just be strangers and pilgrims.” This is an excellent statement that gets to the heart of what many faith-based organizations struggle with, how does RBC interact in a secular society without compromising our mission and values? What does it look like for RBC to engage the culture as strangers and pilgrims?

A second theme focused on the diversifying of RBC’s board of directors and the key stakeholders. The suggestion was made of inviting women to serve on the board of directors and/or allowing a student(s) to observe the board meetings as methods for engaging with the organization’s entire faith community. A group shared that women may bring a different set of perspectives to the board, providing diversified insight on decisions. The need to invite feedback from a “wide variety of stakeholders” was raised as a possible method to become increase greater engagement with the faith community. For example, allowing space for students, alumni, staff, faculty, and other key stakeholders to be empowered to become more involved in providing feedback to the RBC board of directors. Is there space for diversity on the RBC board of directors?

Where do you find yourself most connecting with the mission and identity of CMC? What excites you about CMC’s mission and identity?

Participants shared themes of connecting most with the mission and identity of CMC through missional and Anabaptist values, discipleship, conference agencies (RMM, RBC, and REACH), and the new church plants. In particular, RBC and REACH were mentioned on several occasions as significant attractions to engaging with CMC in a broader context. Several of the comments were, “RBC is the connecting factor to CMC” and “Lots of outsiders are drawn in by RBC-
REACH. These are huge vehicles of growth.” It is important to recognize the positive feedback
directed towards RBC by the young adults in their responses to this question. In spite of some of
the discouragement experienced by RBC leadership, it is clear there is appreciation and a sense
of connection that many of the young adults feel towards RBC. Yes, RBC may not be where it
needs to be, but it is evident that the institution is having an impact on the lives young adults
both within and outside of the conference.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the young adults connect with CMC over missional and
Anabaptist ideology. The statements “Anabaptist values,” “theological standpoint (peace
position), and “love the mission focus” were used to describe the aspects within CMC’s ideology
that young adults resonate with most. Relatedly is the appreciation for the emphasis placed on
discipleship both within local congregations and conference agencies. One respondent shared,
“CMC and its agencies seem to emphasize discipleship more than other churches I’ve gone to, I
like this.” Again, these points of connection for young adults are important to recognize and be
continually developed and strengthened moving forward. This generation of young adults will be
the next set of leaders within the conference, so that maintaining these points of connection and
engagement is critical to the sustainability of this conference.

Where do you find it difficult to connect with CMC’s mission and identity? What makes
this difficult?

Several key points were addressed by participants when responding to the aspects of CMC’s
mission and identity that are the most difficult to connect with. Participants identified the
absence of a visible mission and vision as a hindrance to their ability to be more engaged in the
conference. One group shared, “There is not a clear vision and mission. If there is, it isn’t cast or
shared.” Another group asked, “What is the mission statement?” As respondents shared, there
seemed to be a sense of frustration over the lack of clarity regarding the mission and vision of
CMC, and the disconnect between CMC as a conference and local congregations. This lack of
clarity over the mission and vision of CMC is a repeated theme that appears to be a problem for
both conference agencies and congregational members. Without a clear mission, young adults
will not feel empowered to engage in the conference because of a sensed lack of purpose and
energy.

Relatedly, respondents shared an absence of awareness about who CMC is and its role as an
agency. For example, a group stated, “You don’t know CMC unless you’re a part of RBC or
RMM.” Another group said, “There is a lack of awareness of what CMC is in individual
churches.” This is an issue similar to the lack of clarity over the mission of CMC in that young
adults, the future of this conference, don’t understand who CMC is unless they are fully engaged
in a conference agency or institution. The expectation cannot be for young adults to actively
engage with an entity that does not clearly communicate its own purpose and desired outcomes.
How can CMC create better lines of communication that provide understanding for it purpose
and desires within local congregations?
As you think about your future, can you imagine remaining a part of a CMC congregation? Why or why not? As you think about your future, can you imagine becoming a leader in CMC, its agencies, or congregations?

Overwhelming, young adults answered “yes” to both of these questions. Many of the positive responses were driven out of an appreciation for the theological beliefs and practices of the conference. Other reasons for remaining a part of a CMC congregation included the sense of community, family ties, location, and historical commitments.

In answering “yes” to the second question, respondents shared similar answers that were focused on “being led” by the Holy Spirit to accept a position in leadership. One young adult shared, “Yes, I could imagine becoming a leader if the opportunity arose and if I felt it was what God was calling me to.” Other young adults stated the CMC’s understanding of the Bible and the Kingdom of God as reasons to consider leadership within the conference.

For the few who were reluctant to respond with “yes” to either of the questions, their reasons included location, lack of opportunities for women in leadership, and a deficiency of diversity within local congregations. One respondent shared, “Not sure, not necessarily sure I see something I want to be a part of, but also not sure I see a better option.” Another person asked, “How do you become a leader?” These statements raise several concerns and questions. How does CMC create “buy-in” for its young adults, eliminating “I’ll stay if there aren’t any better options” mentalities? Additionally, if a young adult desires to become a leader within CMC, are the avenues for exploring those possibilities visible? Perhaps these avenues are clear for persons enrolled in RBC or REACH, but what about for those outside of those programs?

As a young adult, what areas of CMC’s mission and identity (if any) do you particularly resonate with? What do you find difficult to connect with (if anything)?

Areas of CMC’s mission and identity which young adults most readily identify with are Anabaptist values, strong community, and the peace position. Within CMC, young adults find it easier to connect with RBC’s and RMM’s missions, in particular because they identifiable. The groups were able to identify the mission statements for both RBC and RMM, however were unable to identify the mission statement for CMC. One young adult explained, “As a young person I am well versed with RBC and RMM’s mission but CMC’s mission isn’t clear besides being an organization that oversees the church.” This statement received several notes of agreement from participants. This again reiterates the reoccurring theme of a lack of clarity over the mission of CMC, clearly an issue that needs to be addressed. It would be important that as CMC leadership seeks to bring clarity to its mission and vision it requests the input of young adults.

The lack of diversity within the conference is an aspect that has become difficult for the young adults to connect with. As one respondent shared, “At CMC’s annual meetings, the conference is very white even when I know that there is more racial diversity than what is represented at conference. Where are the people from different cultures that RMM reaches?” Other difficult aspects include the absence of discussion and interaction between youth and adults, not enough space provided to discuss difficult topics, and the culture within CMC. How does CMC seek to
address these areas of difficulty? What would it look like to provide structured space for young adults to engage over relevant and challenging topics?

Women

To what extent do you personally feel connected to CMC? Describe reasons for your connection or lack of connection.

For those women who feel the most connected to CMC, much of their connection derives from intentional interaction in conference wide events, conference agencies, and with CMC’s theological beliefs. One woman described the women’s retreats as a source of connection for her to the conference, but also to the other women. Another participant shared, “Those who come to the annual conference seem to be more connected.” Several women mentioned the REACH program as a point of connection for their own congregation.

In contrast, it was evident that several of the participants do not share in the same sense of connection that others have experienced. For example, one of the women stated, “I’m not sure how much of what happens in CMC actually affects the doctrine, practice, or daily life in the individual churches.” Someone else shared, “People feel connected to people, not organizations.”

The lack of connection experienced by a few of the women could be driven by the absence of connection that their own congregation feels to CMC. Are there ways in which CMC is able to foster greater connection with those women who may be on the fringes of the conference?

In what ways, if any, do you sense that the gifts of women are restricted within the context of CMC, its agencies, and congregations?

Overwhelmingly, women shared that they do not experience freedom to express their gifts within the context of CMC, its agencies, and congregations. In particular, women feel inhibited from partaking in leadership roles either in the conference or in a local congregation. As an example, several mentioned there are no females serving on the board for RBC, RMM, or CMC. Additionally, no females serve on the church leadership team as elders, only as the wives of elders. Women who do possess leadership gifts feel restricted and lack a voice. One woman shared, “There is freedom to exercise gifts in an overseas mission setting, but the same things may not be acceptable in N. American churches.”

These comments correlate directly with earlier discussion over the need to diversify the RBC board of directors. This is an opportunity to invite and discern several women to serve on the board of directors for RBC, but also RMM, and possibly CMC. How is CMC as a conference able to create space that empowers women to use their spiritual gifts within the conference, agencies, and local congregations?
In what ways, if any, do you sense that the gifts of women are valued and their use encouraged within the context of CMC, its agencies, and congregations?

In responding to this question, many of the responses shifted away from how women feel valued to ways in which they do not feel valued. One way in which women do feel valued is through the invitation for women to be on conference wide teams focusing on questions of leadership, partnership, and discipleship. Others acknowledged that there has been positive movement towards empowering women to use their gifts in the recent years. Several participants shared feeling greater value from particular agencies within CMC, such as RMM. For example, one woman stated, “I feel leadership gifts are valued at RMM, but in broader CMC I feel that people don’t know how I fit in the system.” This is again reiterates the lack of connection experienced by many women in the conference.

How, if at all, would you like to be more connected with CMC? Do you think your congregation has a desire for a stronger connection to CMC? What might strengthen you or your congregation’s connection to CMC?

In responding to these questions, participants tended to answer only the final question. There were no responses directed towards either how women desire to be more connected with CMC, or if they believe their congregation desires a stronger connection to CMC.

The responses to the third question identified a range of suggestions that may help to strengthen both the women’s and their congregation’s connection to CMC. Women suggested several possible ways that the connection may be strengthened, including greater communication between CMC and local congregations, incorporate CMC into local church names, connect virtually, and intentionally explain the concept of CMC to new church members.

A theme that was repeated several times was the need to make the purpose of CMC known both to new members of CMC congregations and to the congregations themselves. One respondent shared, “Excessively communicate who CMC is to local churches.” Another woman added, “Explain CMC to new members so that there is a better understanding of what they are joining in a broader sense.” Again, these themes of improving communication between CMC and local congregations are ones that have been reiterated throughout the listening sessions.

Prayer Intercessors

The following are reflections from a group of intercessors who have been asked to pray about this mission and identity discernment process. Many of the responses focused on Jesus as the center of CMC:

- Change is uncomfortable so I am trying to keep myself open to it. What does God want to change and not want to change?
- Deep desire for Jesus to be at the center. Jesus has to be at the head.
- If CMC is to move forward it must awaken its evangelism outreach.
- That CMC would be a revealer of the true Jesus.
- With Christ at the center, CMC is capable of more.
I cringe when Mennonites get labeled as being “good cooks” and hospitable…desire for us to be known as bringing people to Christ.

**Apostolic Group**

In response to the question of “What has God called CMC to?” we heard the following from a group of “apostolic” leaders:

- The need for whoever is leading the congregation to not simply give a message intellectually, but provide a message that speaks to the heart. Provide a message that is anointed by the Holy Spirit and changes lives.
- Continue to focus on developing leaders within the conference.
- Let’s be a movement instead of conference. Movement sends message of going somewhere and discipleship.
- Have a vision for CMC churches to be engaging with unreached people groups that come to our local communities.
- If we attempt to keep the same structures the future seems very challenging. If we plan to be gatekeepers and only let “correct doctrine” in we have already lost. There is a cultural change to move away from denominations.
- The more CMC conference is more like a family reunion, the less we want to bring outsiders here.
- We are missing an inspiring vision that creates a burning desire. If that is not instilled, young leaders threaten to leave.
- Our name isn’t what we are. What does conservative mean? Conservative what? We are called by what we used to be, not what we are.
- Jesus gave the disciples the word of God, which was sufficient, nothing else is needed.

**Pastors**

**When you think of CMC, what characteristics or qualities come to mind – including of its agencies and congregations?**

Many themes were used to describe the characteristics and qualities of CMC, its agencies, and local congregations. Several of the themes included commitment to scripture, diversity, missional focus, strong community, discipleship, servanthood, and a lack of direction. Within these themes, several in particular became focal points for responses.

The commitment to scripture was repeated throughout the responses, indicating a unified and dedicated view of scripture. Several responses included, “A commitment to the Word of God” and “A high view of scripture.”

As has been a theme throughout many of the listening session groups, the lack of direction and vision was shared as an identifiable characteristic of CMC. One pastor described the lack of direction as an “identity crisis” and stated, “I would love to know what’s driving RBC or RMM.” Another pastor shared, “CMC is an agency that doesn’t know why it exists – lacking direction. Where does the blame land?” It’s clear that as CMC continues to discern its future and next steps
for the conference, beginning the discernment process to identify a relevant mission and purpose
is an important piece of that process.

The strong sense of community was praised as a positive aspect of CMC and one which lends
itself to conference wide stability. One pastor described this sense of community as, “A strong
feeling of brotherhood/family.” At the same time, there was concern that an overwhelming sense
of community may at times discourage “non-traditional” CMC church attenders from
participating in a CMC congregation. One participant explained, “Because we are a family, we
don’t need other people…broken people don’t feel welcome…don’t fit in if you don’t have a
Mennonite background.”

In your mind, what defines a typical CMC congregation? To what degree does your
congregation “typify the typical”?

Many of the characteristics that were shared for CMC overlap with what typically defines a
CMC congregation. Pastors more readily answered what defines a typical CMC congregation
and less so whether or not their congregation is “typical”. Some of the aspects that define a
typical CMC congregation are family oriented, welcoming, commitment to scripture,
servanthood, a majority of members are “ethnic Mennonite,” fellowship, and diversity.

There seemed to be some variation over the perceptions that CMC congregations are mostly
comprised of “ethnic” Mennonites verses “non-traditional” Mennonites. One pastor stated,
“Perception is that most CMC congregations are made up of a majority of “ethnic” Mennonites,
but that has changed.” In contrast, another pastor shared, “Typical congregation is 80-90% of
members are of ‘ethnic’ Mennonite background.” These variations in perceptions may be driven
out of the geographical location of the respondent’s congregation—urban verses rural and even
the region of the United States in which the congregation is located.

Among those pastors responded to the second question, there was a range in the varying degrees
to which their congregation is a “typical” CMC congregation. Several pastors expressed a sense
that their congregations are moving away from the “typical” CMC congregation. This shift is
being seen in the range of dress, contemporary worship, and diversity both ethnically and
theologically. Questions were raised over how easy it is to define a “typical” CMC congregation,
and that some congregations may believe they are “typical”, but are not any longer “typical”
CMC congregations.

To what extent do you personally feel connected to CMC? Describe reasons for your
connection or lack of connection?

A majority of the pastors expressed a sense of connection to CMC and their appreciation for its
support. Pastors shared feeling a sense of respect, love, safety, and comfort in their relationship
with CMC. In spite of the connection experienced by pastors, many believe that their
congregations do not share the same level of connection. These beliefs would seem true based on
the feedback heard throughout the listening sessions. As one pastor shared, “As a pastor, I’m
well connected and believe in CMC. As a congregation from the Midwest – who is CMC and
what for?” Others expressed feeling greater connection when involved in leadership compared to
as a lay member. A pastor stated, “Not when I was a lay person, but much more now that I am a leader.”

It’s clear that CMC is connecting with its pastors and congregational leaders. This is encouraging but must be seen within a greater context. Where does the responsibility fall for fostering greater connection between the local congregations and CMC? It would seem, that pastors, as the gatekeepers for their congregations, must take responsibility for ensuring that their congregations remain connected to CMC. Likewise, CMC needs to identify ways in which it may empower its pastors to be able to foster the healthy connection between their congregations and the conference. Again, much of this work is easier after a clear mission and purpose have been established.

The conference’s agencies, RMM, RBC, and REACH have played an important role in helping pastors to feel connected to the conference. Others identified Choral Camp, City Challenge, and annual conference as avenues that provide connection for pastors. One pastor noted when describing points of connection, “I appreciated the institute for pastoral studies, as well as my wife’s background with RMM.” It is important to recognize the role that the conference agencies have in connecting pastors with CMC and to ensure that this role isn’t overlooked when evaluating the agencies.

Those who described a lack of connection pointed to issues with geographical distance between their congregation and the CMC office. As several pastor described, “CMC’s geographical spread makes connecting difficult, especially with bi-vocational pastors.” Others described a sense of isolation and lack of connection with both CMC and other pastors. For pastors that do not feel connected due to geographical placement or distance, what are other avenues that CMC could pursue in connecting with these pastors? Are their monthly or bi-monthly sessions that can occur virtually to foster greater community and connection between regional pastors?

To what extent do you believe your congregation connects with the mission and identity of CMC? Can you name specific places that you see that connection?

The connection that pastors sense their congregation experiences with CMC varies from being very connected, to no connection at all. When rating the connectedness of their congregation on a scale from 1-10, with 1 being no connection and 10 very connected, several pastors rated their congregation at 2 or below. The highest number received was 9, with most of the ratings falling in the range of 4-7. For the congregations that are connected, much of the connection seems to come out of engagement with conference agencies.

When expressing a lack of connection, pastors often cited the lack of a central mission/identity and theological differences. One pastor shared, “My congregation feels like they are more conservative and that CMC is not conservative enough.” Another pastor responded, “The average congregation member is not connected and does not think much about CMC.” Geographical distance was not shared as a reason for the disconnect of congregational members, but for those congregations who do feel less connected it would be interesting to know where they are at. Does there seem to be a correlation in the geographical distance that a congregation
is from Rosedale and the connectedness it feels with CMC? Likewise, if there are other CMC congregations nearby, does that increase the connection felt by those churches?

For congregations that do experience a connection with CMC, often the connection is with a conference wide agency. Both RMM and RBC were repeatedly seen by pastors as points of connection for their congregations. Other points of connection include REACH, Brotherhood Beacon, and internship opportunities through Bridge. One pastor noted, “Our congregation is connected more with RMM and RBC, not CMC as an agency.” It’s important to recognize the connections facilitated by these conference agencies, and the significant role these agencies have played and will continue to play in the future. It seems that at times their impact in the conference, in particular RBC has been underestimated, but it is clear in these responses that RBC is still a vital part of CMC.

How engaged are your members in RBC and in RMM – do they attend RBC as students or participate in RMM programs or support RMM missions?

Not surprisingly, the responses to levels of engagement by church members in RBC and RMM varied greatly depending upon the congregation. For those congregations engaged in RBC and RMM, engagement is often seen through financial investment, youth participation in RMM or RBC, members who served or have served for RMM, and members who have served in leadership roles for either agency. There was not a clear divide to whether more members attend RBC or participate in RMM missions, again the levels of engagement seemed to be broken up by each congregation.

For congregations with low levels of engagement in either agency, but in particular RBC, cultural and language barriers are hindrances for non-English speaking congregations. One particular Hispanic congregation expressed concern over the lack of the engagement by its members due to the language barriers.

Pastors expressed the concern that both RMM and RBC are losing out on member engagement to non-CMC agencies. Several mentioned YWAM and EMM as competitors to both RMM and REACH. One pastor stated, “YWAM is the preferred option to reach.” In addition, there is the sense that RBC is losing its appeal to church members due to financial and educational constraints. As a pastor explained, “People are professionally focused. A 2-year from a Bible college does not aid in that higher education goal. More core courses allow transferring could be beneficial.”

Do you think your congregation has a desire for a stronger connection with CMC? What might strengthen your or your congregation’s connections to CMC?

There is a clear sense from pastors that their congregations either do not desire to have a stronger connection with CMC or see no need for a stronger connection. Several respondents mentioned the lack of understanding of who CMC is behind the absence of desire for a stronger connection with CMC. One pastor shared, “The congregation does not have a strong desire for connection mainly because of not knowing what CMC is.” Another pastor explained, “The differences in vision, philosophy, etc. are too great; the lack of visionary leadership, and the name needed
changing for so long that it may be too late.” Others expressed busy schedules and other commitments as obstacles to hindering their congregation’s desire for a stronger connection.

Several possible avenues for strengthening a congregation’s connection to CMC were shared, including, connecting through media on Sunday mornings, better communication of the value of engaging with CMC, and creating leadership buy-in within each congregation. Pastors raised the idea of the conference regularly producing mini videos that could be played on a Sunday morning – highlighting various events, agencies, and other notable news from the conference. By being a more consistent presence on Sunday mornings through media sources, CMC has an opportunity to engage with congregations in a new way. By connecting through media, congregations that typically felt excluded from CMC due to geographical distance and location may begin to feel a greater sense partnership with the conference.

Can you articulate the mission of CMC? What is the purpose of CMC?

Many pastors seemed comfortable articulating their perceptions of the mission of the CMC, with only a few unsure. Most see the mission of CMC as being a body of support for local congregations and conference agencies. This body of support is identified through fellowship, disciplining and equipping leaders, evangelism, and maintaining a high view of scripture. In spite of the majority who perceived the core aspects of the mission, there were still a number of pastors who were unclear on the concrete mission of CMC. One pastor stated, “We have a vague idea, but can’t quote the mission statement. It’s not on the website in a clear manner.” Again this points to a lack of a clarity surrounding who CMC is and its mission as a conference. How is CMC able to create a mission that is clearly articulated not only by pastors, but by members as well?

The purpose of CMC is seen by many pastors to serve a support for congregations and their leaders. Several mentioned the important role that CMC must play in supporting its congregations and pastors through both good and bad times. Others believe the purpose of CMC is to bring accountability and structure to its congregations and agencies. Respondents also expressed a belief that the both the mission and purpose of CMC are similar, if not the same thing.

Conclusions: Describing the Table

In praying about this report, Conrad saw a picture of table being reset, and with it various questions emerged related to CMC’s discernment of mission and identity: Who will be at the center of the table? What does the current table look like? Who is the table being reset for? Who is setting the table? What will be served at the table? What function will the table have? Are new folks coming to the table? How will people at the table interact? The following conclusions and recommendations address some of these questions as a way of answering our original questions about CMC’s mission and identity with which we began this discernment process.

We also suggest that discernment about these conclusions and the recommendations that follow be done within a context of prayer and listening to Spirit speak through the three Scriptures that guided this process.
What does the current table look like? There is much to celebrate about the CMC table.

- CMC is a relatively stable conference and appears to be on solid footing as a fellowship of congregations. There are no major dividing issues that we can see. CMC is in a unique position to be intentional about identity and mission at this time in its history.
- CMC is a healthy conference. We picked up a bit of an inferiority complex among leaders in our listening sessions, but this can be overcome by clarifying the mission and core commitments of CMC, and by recognizing the valuable gifts that God has given to CMC. CMC is in a strong position relative to many conferences and denominations today.
- CMC has a high degree of theological cohesiveness. By and large, the conference is not divided by the theological and practice tensions that are major sources of conflict within many other conferences and denominations.
- The major social issues tearing at the unity of other churches are not revealing themselves within CMC—there is near total unanimity on the Bible’s teaching with regard to sexuality and marriage. In addition, there is relatively little debate in the conference over the roles of women in the church (this is not to suggest that this issue should not receive more careful discernment).
- CMC is consistently known for its Biblical orthodoxy and commitment to mission. CMC has remained strong, perhaps in large part, because it has remained faithful to these formative commitments that shaped its birth.
- Most respondents identify with being in a “typical” CMC congregation. This suggests that more members than not see themselves as being part of CMC and may indicate less distance from CMC than is sometimes assumed to be the case.
- Both a strength and a weakness, CMC is a relatively homogenous conference sociologically, particularly by measures of race/ethnicity and education. Homogeneity can support identity formation and sustainability but can be a barrier to mission and outreach. Indeed, homogeneity can be a measure of mission failure in a diverse culture.
- CMC members are largely committed to a Mennonite/Anabaptist identity. However, there is disagreement among members about key historic indicators of Anabaptist identity. Members want to be Anabaptist, but they do not agree as to what that identity includes.
- Congregations see themselves as welcoming of new persons but recognize that they have trouble creating a sense of belonging for all persons. In addition, members acknowledge that their congregations are very reticent to change. Congregations also have work to do in being more engaged in their local communities.

- What is the purpose of the table? The mission and purpose of CMC are unclear to many people. While there remains deep appreciation for CMC, the reasons for its continued existence are need clarifying. Leaders express a considerable disconnect between their congregations and CMC and that their congregations lack awareness of CMC. This lack of clarity undoubtedly affects many aspects of CMC including its ability to raise funds to support its ministry and mission. The lack of mission and connectedness threaten the current strength of CMC.
In addition, the identity of CMC is unclear. Who is CMC? Who should CMC become? We heard much anxiety about the broader culture, with congregations and members asking questions and offering suggestions about how to engage their culture. How is CMC going to assist its congregations in negotiating a rapidly changing culture and how will it assist them in remaining faithful to the call to follow Jesus generation after generation in that culture? Failure to clearly define its identity also threatens to undermine CMC’s current strengths.

- **Who is not at the table?** Several groups are largely missing from the table, including women, racial/ethnic leaders and congregations, and young adults. CMC leadership is largely white male. While we do not see much evidence of restlessness about this (outside of the listening sessions with women leaders), we do wonder if the homogeneity of CMC’s leadership will serve it well in the long-run. How can CMC include the gifts of women, young adults, and racial/ethnic leaders in creative ways that affirms the individuals and groups within whom these gifts reside?

- **What is happening at the table?** We heard quite a bit of ambivalence around this question—again, it relates to the mission and identity of CMC. We heard some calling for greater spiritual vitality with CMC, more openness to the Holy Spirit, and more energy for church planting and local community engagement.

**Recommendations: Resetting the Table**

We offer the following recommendations for the continued spiritual discernment of CMC leaders:

- **Make sure Jesus is in the center of the table.** As CMC takes next steps in clarifying its mission and identity, be sure that such discernment occurs in the presence of Christ, asking for his wisdom. We also encourage such discernment to be done patiently. In a world where the church is being pushed toward accommodation and assimilation and where interfaith dialogue and multiculturalism can discourage us from accepting and offering the exclusive claims of Christ’s lordship, continually reaffirming Jesus as Savior and Lord is perhaps more important than any other step to be taken. Certainly it is a prerequisite for any others. A presence-based leadership approach will help to insure that Jesus stays central to CMC.

- **Communicate, communicate, communicate why the table exists.** Develop a clear mission statement that can be communicated easily, putting forth sufficient energy and resources to communicate the mission broadly. This statement should communicate that CMC understands that it exists to bear the good news of salvation and should clarify to whom CMC is sent with that news (local and global).

- **Be clear about what is being served at the table.** Create a set of core commitments that reaffirm who CMC has been since its birth and which respondents clearly continue to affirm today: Biblical faithfulness, careful discernment about how to live in the world without being of the world, and a commitment to God’s mission. Other values that we
heard may relate to community, Anabaptist commitments, and understandings of marriage and family life. And certainly, it should be reaffirmed that Jesus is central to CMC’s core commitments.

We recommend that this mission statement and the core commitments be shared by CMC, RBC, and RMM as the mission and identity statements of all three. You might also encourage every congregation to own these statements, and develop online sermons or curriculum to support the diffusion of these statements in congregations.

In clarifying your mission and identity (core commitments), you are positioning yourselves to be a church that will face the pressures of the culture and society in coming years and that continues to have the answers in Jesus Christ. We caution you against any inferiority complex about the “conservative” nature of who you have been—the only Anabaptist churches growing in North America are the conservative churches and the racial/ethnic churches. Your conservative tendencies have positioned you well for what God has for you next—acknowledge this and build upon it. And, continue to cast a critical eye toward formal education, professionalism, and upward mobility that takes you away from your historic centering on Jesus and the mission and identity He has given to you.

**How can the agencies support the table?** RMM is deeply appreciated for its clear focus on reaching the unreached. But this vision has not necessarily made congregations and members more oriented to the mission of God in their local communities. Can RMM reposition itself to resource local congregations in reaching their communities for Christ?

RBC is an undervalued and underutilized resource, and in our minds fails to recognize its own value. This is not the time to accept the status quo or to believe the naysayers or to decrease support and the profile of RBC. RBC is a gem for training young people, missionaries, congregational leaders, and emerging leaders for faithful discipleship in a post-Christian world. Can CMC invest greater resourcing in RBC as it repositions itself to prepare a new generation of leaders in a world that is post-Christian and where educational institutions (including Christian ones) are being coopted by modernity and a progressive/liberal narrative that too often leads our youth away from the church rather than back into it?

- **Strengthen the relationships at the table.** Strengthen relationships among CMC and its two agencies. While language of merger is probably too strong or inadequate, we recommend that the relationships among CMC, RBC, and RMM be strengthened and that the three be more unified and collaborative in their efforts. To some degree (based on what we heard), CMC is best known by its agencies even as its agencies very much need the support of CMC. To the extent that the interests of the three can increasingly serve each other—all in the conference will benefit.

Clearly, many members are unsure about the relationships among CMC, RBC, and RMM—greater work needs to be done to raise awareness of the value of collaboration among these three. This collaboration could extend to the way budgets are designed,
Board meetings are held, fundraising occurs, staff are hired, facilities are shared, and communication to the constituency occurs.

- **Reposition the table.** Even though CMC has congregations distributed across the U.S., it remains perceived by some as more regional and parochial than national. We recommend that CMC begin to imagine and present itself as a broader national presence. CMC’s geographic spread has grown over the decades, but our sense is that its infrastructure and identity have not kept pace with this change. Remaining identified with Rosedale and with certain historic CMC families has provided strength to CMC, but how might God be calling CMC to expand its range in this season?

Our recommendation comes at a time when other Anabaptist affiliations are doing the same. On the one hand, the expansion of these other groups means greater “competition.” But the harvest field is limitless, and we believe there is great opportunity for the kinds of resources that the agencies of CMC have to offer. Because of the dismantling of traditional networks and affiliations, and the creation of new ones, the opportunities for collaboration across groups is greater than ever before. We recommend continued conversations with other networks of Anabaptist congregations over how RMM and RBC can resource these networks of congregations and their leaders, resourcing that they are not prepared to offer in the same way that CMC is.

- **Change the name of the table.** We recommend a name change. We see much support for this in the questionnaire and no obvious resistance from members. In doing so we suggest that you keep in mind the following:
  - A name that reflects Jesus as central to CMC.
  - A name that reflects a broader national presence.
  - A name that reflects the desire of most members to be seen as Mennonite/Anabaptist.
  - A name that communicates the historic foci on Scripture and mission.
  - A name that retains the “conservative” position of CMC relative to the broader culture.

- **Enlarge the table.** Be intentional about connecting with younger cohorts, racial/ethnic members, and women. Doing so will model for congregations the possibilities of greater “belongingness.” In addition, develop a new initiative in church planting and local community engagement among CMC congregations. There are relatively few “new believers” among CMC congregations—expanding community engagement will also enlarge the table.

- **Make the table more mobile.** Strengthen relationships with congregational leaders—they are far and away your greatest asset. How can the agencies assist?
  - Raise the profile of RBC as a center for training and discipling the next generation of church leaders, missionaries, church planters, and congregational members. Focus very specifically on key areas of church life, mission, and leadership—do not become a liberal arts college. This is too expensive and you will be coopted by accreditation and federal regulations.
o RBC and RMM should collaborate in developing a mobile training unit(s) that meets congregations and leaders where they are. There were also numerous calls for online education among respondents.

In conclusion, we believe that CMC and its agencies are in a strong position to discern the critical questions of mission and identity. We affirm the proactive nature of CMC’s leadership in discerning these questions at this time in its history. And we know that Christ will be faithful in leading as CMC’s leaders listen closely to what the Holy Spirit is saying. We offer this report as one component of that discernment process.
Appendix A: Regional codes

**Delaware**
- Gateway Fellowship
- Greenwood Mennonite Church
- Maranatha Fellowship – DE

**Florida, Sarasota**
- Abundant Life Church and Ministries - FL
- Bethel Mennonite Church

**Indiana, Northern (and Southern Michigan)**
- Maple City Chapel
- Mt. Joy Conservative Mennonite Church
- North Wayne Mennonite Church
- Riverview Christian Fellowship
- Siloam Fellowship
- Townline Mennonite Church

**Indiana, Southern**
- Bean Blossom Mennonite Church
- Berea Mennonite Church
- First Mennonite Church
- Providence Mennonite Church – IN

**Iowa, Kalona**
- Fairview Mennonite Church – IA
- Upper Deer Creek Mennonite Church

**Kansas, Hutchinson**
- Maranatha Mennonite Church – KS
- Plainview Mennonite Church

**Kentucky**
- Bowlings Creek Mennonite Church
- Caney Creek Mennonite Church
- Little Buckhorn Creek Mennonite Church
- Oasis Community Church
- Panco Community Fellowship
- Turners Creek Mennonite Church

**Maryland/PA, Grantsville Area**
- Cherry Glade Mennonite Church
- Maple Glen Mennonite Church
- Oak Dale Mennonite Church
1658 **Michigan, Upper**
1659 Fairhaven Community Church
1660 Fairview Mennonite Church – MI
1661 Maple Grove Community Church Mennonite
1662 National City Mennonite Church
1663 Pigeon River Mennonite Church
1664 Pineview Mennonite Church
1665 River's Edge Community Church
1666 Riverside Mennonite Church
1667
1668 **New York, Upstate**
1669 Carthage Mennonite Church
1670 Christian Community Center
1671 Croghan Mennonite Church
1672 Naumburg Conservative Mennonite Church
1673 Pine Grove Mennonite Church
1674
1675 **Ohio, Columbus Area**
1676 Agape Community Fellowship of Hilliard
1677 Columbus Network of Microchurches
1678 Iglesia Cristiana Hispana
1679 Lighthouse Mennonite Fellowship
1680 London Christian Fellowship
1681 Maranatha Community Fellowship – OH
1682 Mechanicsburg Christian Fellowship
1683 Shiloh Mennonite Church
1684
1685 **Ohio, Hartville**
1686 Bethany Mennonite Church
1687 Cornerstone Mennonite Church
1688
1689 **Ohio, Holmes & Wayne Counties**
1690 Berean Community Church
1691 Fairlawn Mennonite Church
1692 Grace Mennonite Church – OH
1693 Light In The Valley Chapel
1694 Mennonite Christian Assembly
1695 Pleasant View Mennonite Church
1696 Trinity Christian Fellowship
1697
1698 **Pennsylvania, Central**
1699 Allensville Mennonite Church
1700 Barrville Mennonite Church
1701 Boyer Mennonite Church
1702 Buffalo Mennonite Church
1703 Lauvers Mennonite Church
Locust Grove Mennonite Church
Manbeck Mennonite Church
Mountain View Mennonite Chapel
Otelia Mennonite Church

Southwest USA
Grace Mennonite Church – AZ
Abundant Life Christian Church - TX
Iglesia Cristiana Vida Abundante
Iglesia Dios Con Nosotros
Crossroads Christian Fellowship
Living Word Christian Outreach
Ministerio Manantiales de Vida
Mision Iglesia Cristiana Siloé
Paradise Valley Mennonite Church
Templo Vida Abundante