

CMC Mission & Identity Report

Introduction

At Pastors Conference 2016 the boards and administrators of CMC, RBC and RMM met to discuss, among other things, the possibility of a name change for CMC. They agreed together that it would be helpful to do more work at clarifying CMC's identity before proceeding with a name change. Dr. Conrad L. Kanagy was engaged to help with this endeavor, and under his direction a process was launched in which nearly 200 people were consulted in various listening sessions, and 1282 people were consulted through an online survey in regard to the mission and identity of CMC. Dr. Kanagy reminded us throughout the year that this must be a process of spiritual discernment where we attempt to listen to the mind of Christ, and not just a process of gathering and interpreting data. At the beginning of the process we discerned several scriptures that would inform and guide us (John 17:13-19; 1 Corinthians 3:1-11; Matthew 9:35-10:16). Additionally a 14-member intercessory team from various CMC churches was engaged to join in prayer with CMC leaders throughout the process.

On December 5, 2016, the Executive Board and representatives from RMM and RBC met with Conrad and Jacob Kanagy to receive their report and process their recommendations. The following is a summary of the report.

A Summary of the 2016 Kanagy Report

Demographic information about the survey respondents:

- 51.8 percent were men and 48.2 percent were women.
- 22.1 percent were between the ages of 18-35 years, 26.1 percent between 36-50 years, 31.8 percent between 51-65 years, and 20 percent are 66 years of age or older.
- 8.3 percent serve in pastoral roles, 15.1 percent in leadership roles other than pastors, and 76.6 percent identify simply as members of their congregation.
- 80 percent have been a Christian for twenty or more years, with less than two percent having come to Christ within the past five years.

Church Life and Faith Commitments:

- 84.7 percent said it is at least somewhat important that their congregation reflect a Mennonite/Anabaptist perspective (50.7 % "very" and 34 % "somewhat").
- 71.5 percent said they believe their affiliation with CMC is helpful to the fulfillment of their congregation's mission, 25.5 percent said it is irrelevant, and 3 percent said it is detrimental.
- 29.2 percent said their congregation is a very typical CMC congregation, 57.6 said somewhat typical, and 13.2 said not typical at all.
- In regard to a question as to what degree a list of six qualities represent their congregation, the highest quality was "Readily welcomes new persons to the congregation" (90.3 %) and the lowest was "Creates a sense of belonging for all persons" (73.4 %), indicating that it is easy for CMC churches to welcome people, but much more difficult to create a culture of belonging where new believers can connect, grow and thrive.

- In regard to a question that listed seven ways in which people personally engage in mission, praying by name for at least one unchurched person generated the highest response (72.6 %), while inviting unchurched persons to your church generated the lowest (10.1 %).
- In regard to personal faith practices, 84.4 percent of respondents said they pray daily, 76.4 percent give ten percent or more of their household income to church or charitable causes, 65 percent are in a small group that meets several times a month or more, and 43.9 percent read or study the Bible daily.

Theological Identity and the Broader Culture:

- When asked about words that describe their religious identity, 77.9 percent identified as Mennonite/Anabaptist, 52.3 percent as Evangelical, 8.4 percent as Fundamentalist, 7.8 percent as Charismatic/Pentecostal, and 15.7 percent as “Other”. (The most common “other” responses included “follower of Jesus”, “Bible believing” and “Christian.”)
- 58.1 percent disagreed that it is okay for Christians to fight in a war. 37.1 percent disagreed that it is okay for Christians to have a concealed carry. (Given that nonresistance is typically considered a primary tenet of Mennonite/Anabaptist theology, the contrast between these lower percentages and the much higher percentage of those who identify as Mennonite/Anabaptist creates an interesting paradox.)
- When presented with the following list of moral behaviors, the percentages shown are those who agreed the behaviors are never acceptable: viewing pornography (98.4 %), homosexual relations (98.1%), premarital sexual intercourse (97.3%), cohabitation before marriage (96.6%), use of illegal drugs (96.6%), abortion (95.5%), and euthanasia (93.1%), littering (83.8%), gambling (78.4%), marriage between a Christian and non-Christian (75.5%), tobacco use (70.6%), drinking alcohol (41.1), divorce (28%), unhealthy eating (25%), high risk/dangerous sports or activities (18.4%).

Women in Leadership

- When presented with the following list of leadership roles, respondents were asked to indicate whether they support women serving in those roles. The percentage of those who approved follow each role: teach children (99.5%), teach adults (80.4%), plan and lead worship (72.8%), pastoral counseling and care (58.3%), serve as elder (29.6%), preach sermons (26.4%), serve as a pastor (16.6%), serve as the lead pastor (8.1%).
- There is virtually no difference in support for a woman serving as a pastor between men and women with 13.9 percent of men supporting women in this role as compared to 12.3 percent of women.
- There is also very little difference by age with folks 51-65 most likely to support female pastors (17.3%), as compared to 18-35 year olds (13.2%), 36-50 year olds (12.9%), and 65 years of age or older (6.8%).
- Level of education does make a difference though with 24.4 percent of those with at least a Bachelor’s degree supporting female pastors compared to 8.8 percent of those without a Bachelor’s degree.

Connection to CMC, RBC and RMM

- When asked about their commitment to various levels of church, respondents were most committed to their local congregation (74.6% very strongly committed), the broader church (40.3% very strongly committed), and finally CMC (23.3% very strongly committed).
- When given a list of concerns about Conservative Mennonite Conference, the greatest three concerns identified by respondents were: the retention of young people in CMC (72.5% were concerned), reaching their surrounding communities for Christ (65% were concerned), and remaining true to Biblical teaching (62.7% were concerned).
- When asked about the importance of the resources provided by CMC, respondents ranked them in this order: training, resourcing and fellowship for pastors (93.9%), avenues to cooperate with other groups on mission and relief projects (93.4%), outside help when congregations face conflict (92%), leadership and congregational coaching through CMC's overseers (88.2%), educational resources and other means of congregational discipleship (86.3%), sense of identity and belonging that is larger than just the local context (81.2%), events which provide conference-wide fellowship and networking (78%).
- When asked about the resources of Rosedale Bible College that are most valued, respondents ranked them in this order: spiritual formation offered in a nurturing community (64.9%), teaching in the context of evangelical Anabaptism (60%), connection with the broader CMC community (54.6%), programs that offer internship and discipleship (53.5%), transferable college credits (52.4%).
- When asked about the benefits and resources of Rosedale Mennonite Missions, respondents ranked them in this order: programs like REACH and City Challenge (71.7%), opportunities to respond to natural disasters (57.1%), opportunities to financially support people I know on the mission field (56.8%), ministry partnership with my congregation in overseas context (48.1%), mission communication and education (43.7%), disciple 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 business as mission (25.3%).
- When asked whether their interest in RBC and RMM have increased, decreased or remained the same, respondents said of RBC: increased (17.7%), decreased (14.9%), stayed the same (67.3%). Of RMM respondents said: increased (27.4%), decreased (8.6%), stayed the same (64%). In both cases interest among pastors increased significantly more than that of congregational members.
- 60.9% of respondents said they believe the relationship between CMC and RBC is strong, while 67.9% said the same of CMC and RMM.
- 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?" 15.6 percent said very connected, 59.9 percent said somewhat connected, and 24.5 percent said not connected at all.

Open-ended Questions

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

Three things stood out from the responses to this question:

- 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.
- Mission and outreach, more than any other concern, dominated responses.
- The sense that members are calling for a stronger CMC center.

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 responses to this question:

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

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?

Two primary themes emerged from responses to this question:

- Calling for a name change
- Our engagement, or lack of engagement, with culture. This was a dominant theme very much on respondents' minds, but 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 theme was Biblical faithfulness. Other sub-themes emerged which altogether can be stated as such: Respondents value a conference that remains true to the authority of Scripture, engages in mission, and is intentional about how it relates to the broader culture.

Listening Sessions

The following are some of the main themes that emerged from the listening sessions with the boards, ministers, Café group, apostolic group, women, and intercessors:

- RBC and REACH are exceptionally strong connectors for young people with CMC.
- Anabaptist values and the missional focus of CMC are values that are attractive to young people.
- CMC's unified view of and commitment to Scripture is a real strength.

- There is significant concern about a lack of clarity of vision; Participants indicated a desire for a unified vision and a stronger sense of leadership/guidance from CMC (this theme emerged over and over in almost every listening session).
- There is concern about the relational strength of CMC and its agencies; competitiveness for financial resources, fishing from the same pond for young people, etc.
- There is concern about the lack of opportunity and freedom for women to express their gifts within the CMC context.

Conclusions

- CMC is a relatively stable conference and appears to be on solid footing. There are no obvious major dividing issues. CMC is in a unique position to be intentional about identity and mission at this time in its history.
- CMC is a healthy conference. Any inferiority complex that may exist 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.
- 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.
- 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 express that they want to be Anabaptist, but they do not necessarily 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.

Recommendations

In praying about this report, Dr. Kanagy saw a picture of a 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 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.

- Make sure Jesus is in the center of the table. 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.
- 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.
- 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 three be more unified and collaborative in their efforts. To the extent that the interests of the three can increasingly serve each other—all in the conference will benefit. 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?
- 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?

- 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.
 - 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.

Conclusion

The following is quoted from the conclusion of the report:

“In conclusion, we (Conrad and Jacob Kanagy) 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.”