

1 Communication Working Group Report

May 5, 2017

4 1. Steps taken

- 5 a. We took the questions posed in the terms of reference and organized them under the
6 following categories on a strategic planning worksheet: why? who? what? how? Each
7 member of the working group submitted their responses to the strategic planning
8 worksheet. Worksheet reflections were drawn on to provide a rationale for the guiding
9 principles listed below.
- 10 b. We asked each of the area churches and the national church to send responses to the
11 following questions: What communication staff positions do you currently have? What
12 FTE? What are the job descriptions of your communication staff? What print
13 communication pieces do you currently produce? What digital vehicles do you utilize?
14 Approximately how much do you spend annually on the above? (A compilation of
15 responses from area and national churches is available.)
- 16 c. We asked the newly appointed editor and publisher of *Canadian Mennonite* to submit
17 their responses to the strategic planning worksheet and to supply circulation and
18 financial information. Ron Rempel, as working group chair, also had an opportunity to
19 discuss overall working group directions with the Canadian Mennonite Publishing
20 Service board at its most recent meeting held April 21-22 in Kitchener, Ontario.

22 2. Guiding principles/recommendations. We agree that....

- 23 a. *In light of the Future Directions call for greater focus on local congregations within their*
24 *regions, cross-Canada communication will be more important than ever if the church is*
25 *not to be completely localized.*
26 We were asked to comment on the risks and benefits of a “network-shaped structure” for
27 communication rather than a “vertical structure”. The benefit is strengthened local
28 ownership for what happens in the congregation and beyond. The risk is fragmentation if
29 there is no centralized communication management in the network.
- 30 b. *The denomination needs to tell its story – and its many stories – of how God is working*
31 *through the church (locally, regionally, nationally and beyond) and through its members*
32 *– to each other, and to the wider world.*
33 The word “story” was chosen deliberately, because it represents the power of narrative,
34 which is able to convey nuance, complexity and diversity without polarizing viewpoints
35 too quickly. “Story” encompasses familiar content categories such as inspirational
36 features, news, analysis and discussion. The intent of a story-based approach is to keep
37 aiming for the overarching story of us as a Mennonite people in relation to God’s story.
- 38 c. *Telling this story – and these stories – requires intentionality, focus and skilled staff (not*
39 *only volunteers) both regionally and nationally.*
40 Specialized and well-equipped communication staff will be needed at the national level
41 to coordinate the increased communication responsibilities of the regions and to actively
42 foster the congregational, regional and national engagement that digital communication
43 technology makes possible. An integrated national web hub will be critical to carry out
44 this function.
- 45 d. *This story – and these stories – need to be told in multiple channels: print, online and in-*
46 *person.*
47 The good news is that there are more communication vehicles available to us today than
48 ever before. The challenging news is that print is on the decline but will not be replaced
49 completely, communication technologies are changing rapidly and everyone is trying to

1 figure out how to make the growing trend toward electronic communication financially
2 sustainable.

- 3 e. *Resources are required – money. Minimally, the Interim Council should ensure that the*
4 *current amount of funding for communications at the regional and national levels be*
5 *retained and possibly increased.*

6 Currently around \$444,000 is being spent by the national and area churches – about
7 60% of this by MC Canada and the rest by the area churches combined. In addition, MC
8 Canada and the area churches pay around \$253,000 in support of *Canadian Mennonite*
9 subscriptions. A summary of communication costs and benefits is included as an
10 Appendix.

- 11 f. *Financial resources to area churches will need to be increased, given their new level of*
12 *responsibility to share their stories regionally and nationally and to promote national*
13 *priorities.*

14 Area churches will need to be asked what they need for this work. Area church
15 communication staff, along with national staff, will have to be in regular contact to
16 coordinate their work and to ensure that national priorities continue to get attention.

- 17 g. *There is room within the church for multiple voices: voices of a diverse church*
18 *membership, public relations/institutional voices, and more independent journalistic and*
19 *editorial voices.*

20 Another way of stating the same principle: The communication strategy needs to
21 function both as a mirror, reflecting the many voices and the diversity of the church, and
22 as a portrait, providing vision and leadership for how things ought to be.

- 23 h. *For the church to achieve its communication goals, it has much to gain by continuing its*
24 *longstanding partnership with Canadian Mennonite, which has a proven track record of*
25 *journalistic success, a history of service to the denomination, and a dedicated and loyal*
26 *readership, along with staff on the ground in the regions who could provide services both*
27 *to the national and regional bodies.*

28 We were asked to respond to the question: “What role, if any, should *Canadian*
29 *Mennonite* play in a communication strategy for Mennonite churches in Canada”? At the
30 outset of our work, we agreed that the question should not be whether *Canadian*
31 *Mennonite* should play a role in the communication strategy, but what that role should be.

- 32 i. *If Canadian Mennonite is to be utilized as a partner in this communication, it will require*
33 *some re-thinking of the role and format of the publication; some re-branding to create a*
34 *new thing; and some bridge building in areas where trust has been damaged.*

35 In recent years *Canadian Mennonite* has begun to see itself not only as a magazine but
36 as a creator of content which is delivered through a variety of both print and electronic
37 vehicles. The staff and board are making a renewed commitment to be a collaborative
38 communication resource within the church. The specific details of re-branding and other
39 changes will need to be negotiated once the structural changes within the church are
40 finalized, the priorities and funding clarified.

- 41 j. *Any communication strategy will need to be held lightly with a commitment to ongoing*
42 *innovation and experimentation, given ongoing challenges such as an increasingly*
43 *fragmented audience (including multiple languages) and rapidly changing*
44 *communication technologies.*

45
46 3. Next steps

47 If the above principles find support, then a communication task group will need to be formed
48 by the governing body of the restructured church to do further work on specific
49 communication strategies and plans for communication within and outside of the church,
50 given more complete information on resources and funding. Along with communication staff
51 and specialists, representatives from the area churches, the national church, and *Canadian*

1 Mennonite need to meet regularly to build relationships and work collaboratively.

2
3 Communications Working Group Members: Ron Rempel (chair), Chris Epp, Gayle Goossen,
4 Henry Krause, John Longhurst, Doreen Martens, Dan Dyck (ex-officio, MC Canada
5 communication director)
6

7
8 Appendix 1
9

10 **Area and national church communication staffing and costs**
11

	Full time equivalent communication staff	Approx. 2016 cost of comm staff and comm-related work *	2016 cost of <i>Canadian Mennonite</i> subscriptions
Mennonite Church Canada	3.20	\$272,857	\$112,110
Mennonite Church British Columbia	.25	\$13,762	\$10,618
Mennonite Church Alberta		\$11,300	\$7,765
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan	.2	\$13,000	\$19,114
Mennonite Church Manitoba	.5	\$66,000	\$28,672
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada	1.0	\$67,250	\$74,209
Totals	4.85	\$444,169	\$252,488

12
13 *Included here are the identified costs for communication staff and for communication products such as
14 newsletters, etc. In some cases, communication costs embedded in program areas are accounted for and
15 in other cases not. Mennonite Church Manitoba also reported \$48,000 in radio costs.
16

17 **Congregations and church members benefit from the communication work of...**
18

19 **Mennonite Church Canada:**

- 20 • fostering identity and branding (e.g. signage, stationery, design assistance);
- 21 • promoting resources on behalf of CommonWord;
- 22 • news service on all areas of ministry/program;
- 23 • promoting and sharing stories of the work of Witness and Indigenous Relations;
- 24 • promoting Witness partnerships (supporting International mission);
- 25 • PrayerNet ministry;
- 26 • national church web site and social media coordination;
- 27 • Equipping Weekly;
- 28 • informing congregations on political agenda and coordinating actions (e.g. letter writing campaigns)
29 on issues such as climate change, medically assisted dying, peace and non-violence advocacy in war
30 times, and more;

31 • Assemblies
32 **Area churches:**

- 33 • camping ministries;
- 34 • connecting congregations via regular emails and newsletters;
- 35 • regional discipleship and other events and promotion;
- 36 • annual general meetings;

- 1 • communicating pastoral support and continuing education opportunities/events;
- 2 • in new structure, fundraising may become very important at regional church levels.

3 **Canadian Mennonite:**

- 4 • providing a direct mail reach into around 11,000 households across Canada;
- 5 • amplifying and extending the communication work of the national and area churches through a mix of
- 6 stories that educate, inspire, inform and foster dialogue;
- 7 • complementing the public relations communication “of” the church with a measure of independence to
- 8 report “about” the church and to provide a forum for the diverse voices of the church

9
10 *****

11 RESPONSE: May 29, 2017
12 FROM: Communication Working Group
13 TO: Executive Staff Group

14
15 Greetings! We’re pleased with the time you spent discussing our May 5 report and we welcome
16 your insights and questions.

17
18 Attached is a copy of your response, as summarized by Keith Regehr, with row lines in the left
19 margin to help identify sections being discussed (see page 6). As a working group, we can offer
20 some general responses to your questions. Since some of them are best answered not only by
21 us but also by the Canadian Mennonite staff, we also asked for their initial response (see page
22 5). Once we all come to agreement on general principles, a more detailed strategic plan will
23 have to be developed by a working group with all the partners at the table.

24
25 The nature of the relationship between Canadian Mennonite (CM) and Mennonite Church
26 Canada?

- 27 • Both public relations (PR) and journalism are important modes of communication within the
28 life of the church. The former describes and promotes the various programs of the church and
29 seeks to build the community and to inspire it to do things together. The latter writes stories of
30 how these programs are being received and reports on “places of faithfulness and places of
31 dissonance, places where the church is living faithfully and the places where it is not living up
32 to its stated mission/vision” (lines 26-30).
- 33 • Public relations and journalism understood correctly serve distinct but complementary
34 purposes. At points good PR resembles journalism (stories of people benefitting from the
35 church’s programs) and at points good journalism resembles PR (programs are promoted
36 through stories of faithfulness and dissent). At points the two kinds of communication stand in
37 tension. To manage this tension, we agree that the journalistic function of CM needs to
38 happen in the context of a covenantal relationship with other parts of the church with an
39 agreed upon conflict resolution process when needed.

40
41 Does the church need one or two channels?

- 42 • Within the above understandings of both PR and journalism, we don’t feel that both kinds of
43 communication can or should be fully combined within one channel.
- 44 • Even if the journalistic work of CM carries a good measure of PR value, the church will still
45 need public relations communication staff for a variety of functions. One major task will be
46 creating a website that integrates the online presence of all the regional church bodies – a
47 website married to an actively managed social media strategy. Other public relations functions
48 that will need staff attention include fostering identity and branding, creating promotional and
49 marketing materials, preparing news releases, preparing reports for annual gatherings.
- 50 • At the same time, we continue to think that there would be value for the church in revisiting
51 and exploring, together with CM, how the communication potential of this journalistic vehicle

1 could be maximized for the range of communication needed in the church.

- 2 • For the public relations work that cannot be done by a journalistic vehicle, the church will need
- 3 to have some communication staff or possibly contract some of this work to another entity,
- 4 such as a “church communication services” division of Canadian Mennonite Publishing
- 5 Service.

6
7 (Notes from May 19, 2017 meeting involving Ron Rempel, chair of Communication Working

8 Group, Tobi Thiessen, Canadian Mennonite Publisher and Ginny Hostetler, Canadian

9 Mennonite Editor.)

10
11 Purpose: An opportunity for the Working Group to hear responses to the ESG questions directly

12 from the CM staff.

13
14 In response to the principles/themes/ideas in lines 20-30, the CM staff...

- 15 1. Agree with the desire for a communication vehicle that functions in the context of a
- 16 covenantal and accountable relationship with other parts of the church.
- 17 2. Agree with the importance of formulating a covenant with clear articulation of policies and
- 18 cooperative relationships, along with a conflict resolution process (lines 35-36). This would
- 19 involve revisiting and updating the covenant that is already in place.
- 20 See <http://www.canadianmennonite.org/about-us> and scroll down the page to “Publishing
- 21 Partner Partnership Covenant”.
- 22 3. Acknowledge that at times various factors contributed to strained relations between
- 23 CM and MC Canada.
- 24 4. Resonate with the ESG call for a communication vehicle which functions as a “listening
- 25 group” in the church.

26
27 In response to the question of one or more channels, the CM staff...

- 28 1. Suggest that discussion of this question needs to be prefaced by a clear recognition of the
- 29 different yet complementary – and sometimes overlapping – functions of public relations and
- 30 journalism.
- 31 2. Resonate with the description (lines 37-39) of how a communication vehicle such as CM
- 32 ought to function in the life of the church.
- 33 3. Do not think that CM (the magazine) can fulfill all of the public relations functions of the
- 34 church and its programs, but that the church will need to continue having communication
- 35 staff or contract for some of these services with another entity.
- 36 4. Are open to exploring whether and how Canadian Mennonite Publishing Service (CMPS)
- 37 can be the “single channel” which the ESG is calling for. See attached proposal which
- 38 outlines a way in which CMPS, with two divisions, could fulfill a range of communication
- 39 functions.
- 40 5. Note the importance of not cutting the amount spent on communications, whether for both
- 41 national/regional public relations and for support of CM, given the important role of
- 42 communication in an increasingly decentralized church structure.

43

1 From Keith Regehr on behalf of ESG
2 To Communication Working Group
3 May 11, 2017
4

5 To begin, I want to express the gratitude of the Executive Staff Group for the work the group did
6 in preparing the report.
7

8 At the ESG's meeting on May 9 and 10, it spent considerable time discussing the report. We
9 spent considerable time on two issues:

- 10 • Is the goal to have one communication channel (assumed to be MC Canada and
11 Regional Church staff) or two channels (assumed to be staff plus Canadian Mennonite)?
- 12 • What is the nature of the relationship between Canadian Mennonite and MC Canada:
 - 13 ○ Does it exist to promote the church and to describe its activities to the church?
 - 14 ○ Does it exist as a "free press" which functions to challenge the church in the
15 nature of the secular independent press?
 - 16 ○ Are these mutually exclusive?
 - 17 ○ If not how do the two kinds of relationships sit in tension with each other?

18
19 After a full discussion, we landed on several principles/themes/ideas:

- 20 • A CM that acts only as the mouthpiece of the church and its structures does not play the
21 full role for which it exists.
- 22 • Given the financial support given by the church, CM cannot function from a simplistically
23 critical stance that takes no account of the relationship.
- 24 • What is wanted is a paper that offers a critical voice in the context of a covenantal
25 relationship with the church that provides some accountability to the church.
- 26 • The metaphor that the group worked with was that of the "listening groups" that the
27 church often uses in its larger gatherings: A group of people who are part of the church
28 tasked with listening deeply and reporting back to church on both the places of
29 faithfulness and the places of dissonance, the places where the church is living faithfully
30 and the places where it is not living up to its stated mission/vision.
31

32 The discussion then turned to channels: does the church need two channels of communication
33 or one? The conversation came to a sense that what is needed is a single channel and that we
34 need to explore whether CM can be that channel. The principles that were articulated:

- 35 • A covenant that carefully describes the cooperative relationship with the church
- 36 • An articulation of editorial policy in the covenant
- 37 • An articulation of the role of CM in pushing the church to be better
- 38 • Not a mouthpiece for the structures but a place that reflects the church back to us
- 39 • A space for rich conversation about the church and its mission
- 40 • A single web platform that brings together CM and the church
- 41 • A clearly articulated conflict resolution process
- 42 • Maintaining the CM board in its current structure
43

44 Some questions:

- 45 • Is this possible?
- 46 • What, if anything, might the church need to keep in house?
- 47 • What would this cost? There is an outer limit that is rooted in what it currently being
48 budgeted. We were also hopeful that this approach would bring savings. We were
49 budgeting at this point for
 - 50 ○ \$100K for MC Canada communication staff
 - 51 ○ The annual MC Canada grant to CM using the current formula
 - 52 ○ Area church subscription amounts paid to CM
 - 53 ○ Regional Church communication amounts