



Mennonite Church Canada 2017 Special Delegate Assembly

PROCLAIMING: Activity of the Spirit

299 New earth, heavens new

ALEXANDRA 56, 56, 56 with refrain

F Gm/F F C Am

1 New earth, heav - ens new, Spir - it
2 New love, mer - cies new, Spir - it
3 New minds, wis - dom new, Spir - it
4 New earth, heav - ens new, Spir - it

Cms C F Gm/F F

Covenant New: Report

In preparation for Special Assembly 2017 (Oct. 13-15)

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Mandate

In July 2016 the MC Canada Assembly meeting in Saskatoon passed the following motion:

That Mennonite Church Canada approve in principle the directions proposed by the Future Directions Task Force Final Report (FDTF)¹, and collaborate with the five Area Churches (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Eastern Canada) in developing a more integrated nation-wide church body along the lines envisioned to better resource all levels of our church in responding to God's call to live out and share the peace of Jesus Christ with local through global neighbours.

When the motion was presented and approved, a series of understandings of what the ongoing change process would look like were named:

- Prior to implementation there will be opportunity to vote on a more fully developed proposal no later than July 2018, with ongoing consultation with congregations in between;
- The final proposal will incorporate some form of Area Church delegate involvement in the governance of national agenda and priorities;
- The final proposal will include provision for national gatherings for study, fellowship, worship and discernment;
- Formal conversation will be undertaken (e.g. via working group, conference or other means) to review our future vision and strategy for international relationships and witness, addressing questions in the Addendum and related matters, to be completed by December, 2017)
- The final proposal will include concrete provisions that recognize and respond to the vulnerability of smaller Area Churches; and
- Formal conversation will be undertaken (e.g. via working group, conference or other means) to build on the Report and engage congregations to: (a) dream about how to live out the gospel of Christ locally, across Canada and abroad; (b) think creatively on how congregations can resource our common life together in being the church; and, in the short term, (c) work together and generously support our mutual ministry and transition from where we are to where God invites us to be.

In October 2016, the Interim Council appointed Keith Regehr (retained through L3 Consulting Group) as Transition Coordinator to give guidance to implementing this motion.

The Interim Council, composed of the five Area Church Moderators, the MC Canada Moderator and Vice Moderator gave overall leadership to the process. The Executive Staff Group (ESG), composed of the executive leaders of the five Area Churches, the Executive Director of MC Canada and the Chief Administrative Officer of MC Canada were mandated by Interim Council to give staff leadership to the process, with regular reporting to the Interim Council.

As the work of action on the motion began, the process was named "Covenant New" to distinguish it from the preparatory work of the Task Force.

Context

The work of The Future Directions Task Force, formed in 2012 set the stage for the Covenant New process. Its report addressed two questions: What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21st Century? And, what are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow?

Six objectives for the task force were named:

- Take stock of the various factors affecting the work of the church,
- Discern broad directions where God's Spirit seems to be calling the church,
- Identify particular opportunities for church growth as communities of grace, joy and peace,
- Articulate a robust set of program emphases for the church at its various levels to thrive and grow,
- Identify strategies and structures to sustain proposed program emphases for the foreseeable future, and
- Formulate recommendations on these for MC – Canada, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Eastern Canada.

¹ See <http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/18226> and <http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/18591>

In its report, the Task Force named four key pieces to the new structure that they envisioned:

- Vital and spiritually healthy congregations
- Regions as catalysts for calling leaders, creativity in mission, encouraging diversity, innovating in models of being church, and others
- A simpler, integrated body with regions covenanting to work together on common priorities
- A simpler sustainable structure where congregations are members of a region, and regional leaders meet together to align vision, theological identity and programming.

This vision for what the church would look like takes into account the deep changes facing the church as the world around it shifts, shifts that are arguably as deep as those that faced the church in the Reformation in the early 16th century.

As secularism deepens, the church is pushed ever further to the margins of society. As mistrust in institutions deepens, the church is seen as just one more damaging institution. As individualism deepens and the choices available for our time increase, the meaning of regular attendance shifts to being in church once a month. As charitable giving is more and more driven by marketing and the immediacy of social media, fewer people engage in committed regular giving to the church.

All these changes call for the church to rethink how it structures itself and how it engages the world. This does not mean that the church abandons all its historical practices and connections. It does mean that the church must adapt, as it has adapted so often in its history.

The Task Force framed its report as describing the adaptation the church (locally, regionally, and nationally) needs to make in order to flourish in new ways in this new context. The Covenant New process builds on that report and an understanding of the 21st century context to describe in detail the new structure for the church and its ministry.

What work was done?

The major work of the Covenant New process called for developing the structure model, developing the working groups including their mandate and membership, clarifying the ways the Regional Churches will work together and seeking feedback into the process.

Early in the Covenant New process it was decided that waiting until the regularly scheduled Delegate Assembly in July, 2018 was not possible. To do so would create too long a transition process and create too much financial risk. It was decided to hold a Special Assembly in October 2017. This significantly shortened the timeframe for the work to prepare delegates for the next round of decisions.

Website and Facebook Group

Early in the Covenant New process a website (www.futuredirectionsmc.ca) and a Facebook group were set up to facilitate communication with the church across the country, to enable conversation about the process and to gain insight and feedback.

Emerging Voices Initiative:

In early fall 2016 the leaders in the Emerging Voices Initiative (EVI) approached MC Canada leadership asking how they could be helpful. Out of that request grew a series of workshops across MC Canada, at least one in each Area Church, led by EVI. These workshops invited those attending to speak of their hopes and fears for the change process and to offer input to those leading the Covenant New process. All the workshops were attended by the Transition Coordinator and the MC Canada Executive Director. The feedback from these workshops was collected and sent to the Transition Coordinator.

Preliminary Proposal

Through the end of 2016 the Transition Coordinator in conversation with ESG and Interim Council developed a preliminary structure proposal. This proposal was tested with each Area Church board. This resulted in feedback for the next version of the proposal. This proposal was also presented to each Area Church Annual Delegate Session. Feedback was solicited in plenary discussion, small group discussion, and workshop conversations. This feedback was collected and sent to the Transition Coordinator. In addition, feedback on the proposal came through emails and the Facebook group. All this feedback was collated into themes and was used in subsequent revisions to the proposal.

Working and Reference Groups

A list of eleven topics for Working and Reference Groups was developed:

- Camp Program Working Group
- Canada Witness and Relationships Working Group
- Communications Working Group
- Congregational Life and Vitality Working Group
- Community of Spiritual Leadership Working Group
- Vision and Identity of a National Church Working Group
- International Witness and Relationships Working Group
- Governance Reference Group
- Finance Reference Group
- Higher Education Reference Group
- Listening Group

These groups were meant to provide advice and input to Interim Council on various issues related to the work and ministries of the church. Terms of reference were prepared and lists of possible members were developed in late 2016. The process of inviting members to the groups took some time as replacement names needed to be identified for those who were unable to participate. Most of the groups were up and running by mid to late February. They did their work over the next few months and the reports came in throughout May and early June.

The full text of the working groups can be found at futuredirectionsmc.ca/working-group-full-length-reports/. The delegates at Special Assembly 2017 will be given time for discussion of the Working Group reports. There will be time to offer insights and wisdom to Joint Council regarding the reports. In addition, there will be specific questions regarding some of the reports that the delegates will be asked to speak to. These reports and the delegate input will serve to frame parts of the work of the proposed Joint Council through the next stage of the process.

Final Documents

The primary work during late May into July has been the drafting of this Report and other final documents (bylaw, covenant, operating agreement, etc.) for Assembly.

Outcomes

The result

This work has led to the development of:

- A proposed new structure (which requires new bylaws) in which the Regional Churches come together to form MC Canada, and jointly define the priorities for the work of the nationwide church.
- A proposed new covenant among the Regional Churches that describes the ways they will relate to each other in forming MC Canada.
- A proposed new way of engaging international ministry that is tied more deeply to congregational and Regional Church energy and vision.
- A collection of Working Group reports that will inform post assembly discussions about the mission and ministry of the church.
- A proposed new operating agreement among the Regional Churches that describes how they will work together to shape and guide the nationwide church.
- A proposed new way of funding the work that the Regional Churches do together in the nationwide church that is rooted in congregational giving to the Regional Churches.

How do the recommendations respond to what the Covenant New process heard from you?

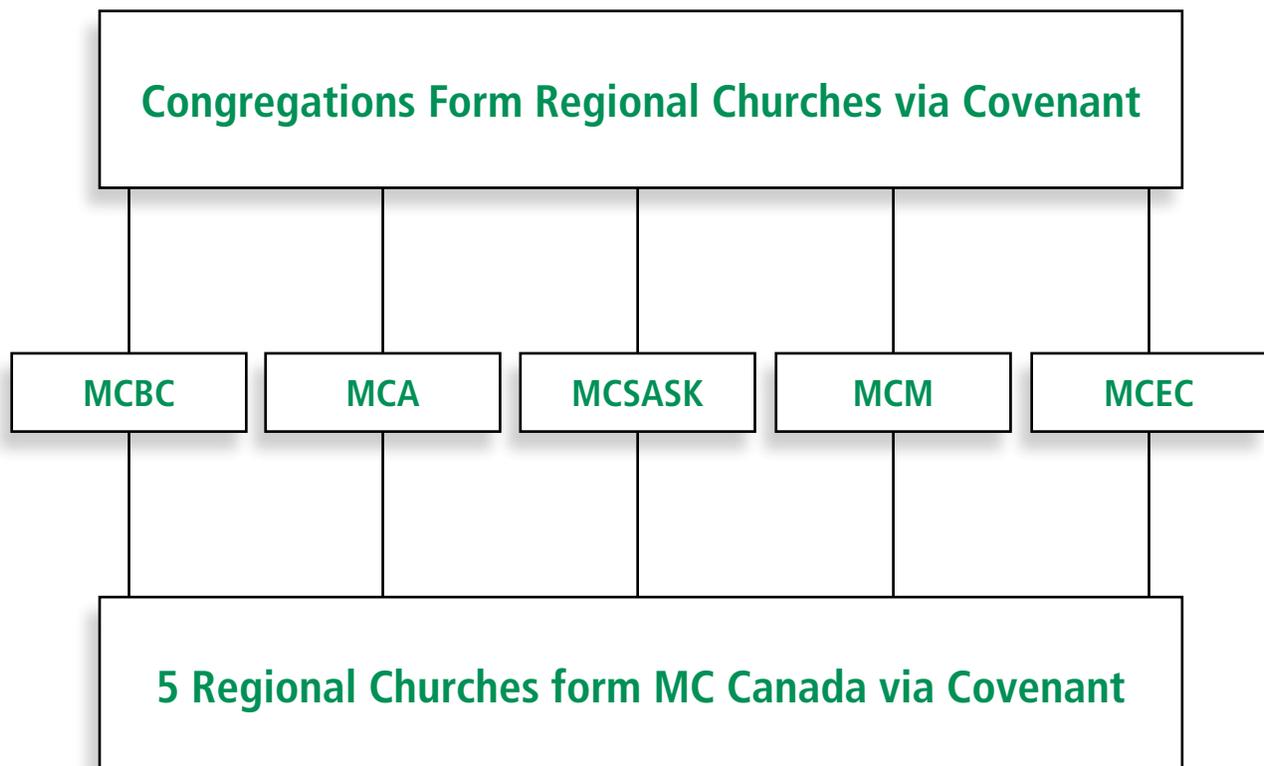
The Future Directions Final Report and Addendum (<http://futuredirectionsmc.ca/documents/>), approved at Assembly 2016 in Saskatoon, laid out general principles and directions that bring us to today.

Since then Interim Council and the Area Churches approved a preliminary Covenant New proposal that was circulated for feedback. The following themes have risen to the surface as a result of feedback from congregations and individuals through Emerging Voices Initiative workshops and Area Church gatherings, Area Church leaders and staff, MC Canada leaders and staff, many lengthy conversations among leaders at Area Church and Nationwide Church levels, and conversations in ecumenical settings. These themes are expressed together with actions that call for structural changes:

- **Refocus around the mission of God:** *The church exists as a community of God's people for the world; all levels of the church turn their faces to the world as expressed in Vision: Healing and Hope.*
- **Reorientation to the local congregation:** *Increased attention by Regional Churches to congregational vitality; increased emphasis on tying support for international ministry to congregational energy.*

- **Shift in allocation of resources and program:** *All fundraising through the Regional Churches; financial sharing among the Regional Churches; program priorities set by the partnership of Regional Churches; Regional Churches channel funds from congregations to national priorities.*
- **Focus on the Regional Churches to support the congregations and link congregations to the Nationwide Church:** *Regional Churches governed by congregations through delegates at annual meetings; program allocated among Regional Churches and Nationwide Church, with some program shifted to the Regional Churches; Regional Churches focus on mission formation, supporting pastoral leaders, congregational health, worship and fellowship.*
- **The Nationwide Church as the speaker for the whole at the direction of the Regional Churches and as the holder of identity as defined by the collective of Regional Churches and congregations:** *The Nationwide Church is governed directly by the Regional Churches through a Joint Council; Delegate Gathering is made up of Regional Church board members and other delegates appointed by Regional Churches; national gatherings for connection, worship, study; Community of Spiritual Leadership to meet for connection and learning.*
- **Staff Role:** *Greater emphasis on staff leadership under direction of Joint Council*
- **Shift in Decision Making:** *More decision making at the Regional Church level, with Joint Council offering recommendations to Regional Churches; Joint Council responds to priorities identified by the Regional Churches*
- **Program:** *Tied more closely to congregational energy and discernment*

Collectively, the descriptions in the points above necessitate a significant structural change: Instead of MC Canada being formed and operated independent of Area Churches and Congregations, as is now the case, MC Canada will be formed as the result of a covenant among Regional Churches (formerly "Area Churches"). This structure bestows ownership of the Nationwide Church (formerly "National Church") and agenda to Regional Churches, via congregational delegates at annual meetings of the Regional Churches. A simple organizational chart appears below.



The key outcomes of this process are as follows:

- A fully described model that responds to the FDTF call for an integrated structure in which congregations are members of Regional Churches and the Regional Churches collaborate to shape the nationwide agenda
- A bylaw that creates the leadership and governance bodies in the model
- A revised covenant that frames the relational commitments made by the Regional Churches to work collaboratively for the good of the church at all levels.
- An operating agreement that describes in detail how the Regional Churches will work together
- The working groups provided important input to Interim Council on the various ministries of the church. They were not able to address all the questions in their terms of reference. The remaining questions have been identified for the Joint Council to take up after Special Assembly 2017.
- Because the International Witness Working Group was unable to reach consensus on a model for the structure of International Witness, the Interim Council prepared a proposal to bring to Special Assembly.
- A financial planning guideline was developed for presentation to Special Assembly 2017, together with a preliminary financial plan
- Slate of officers for the new structure.

What Next?

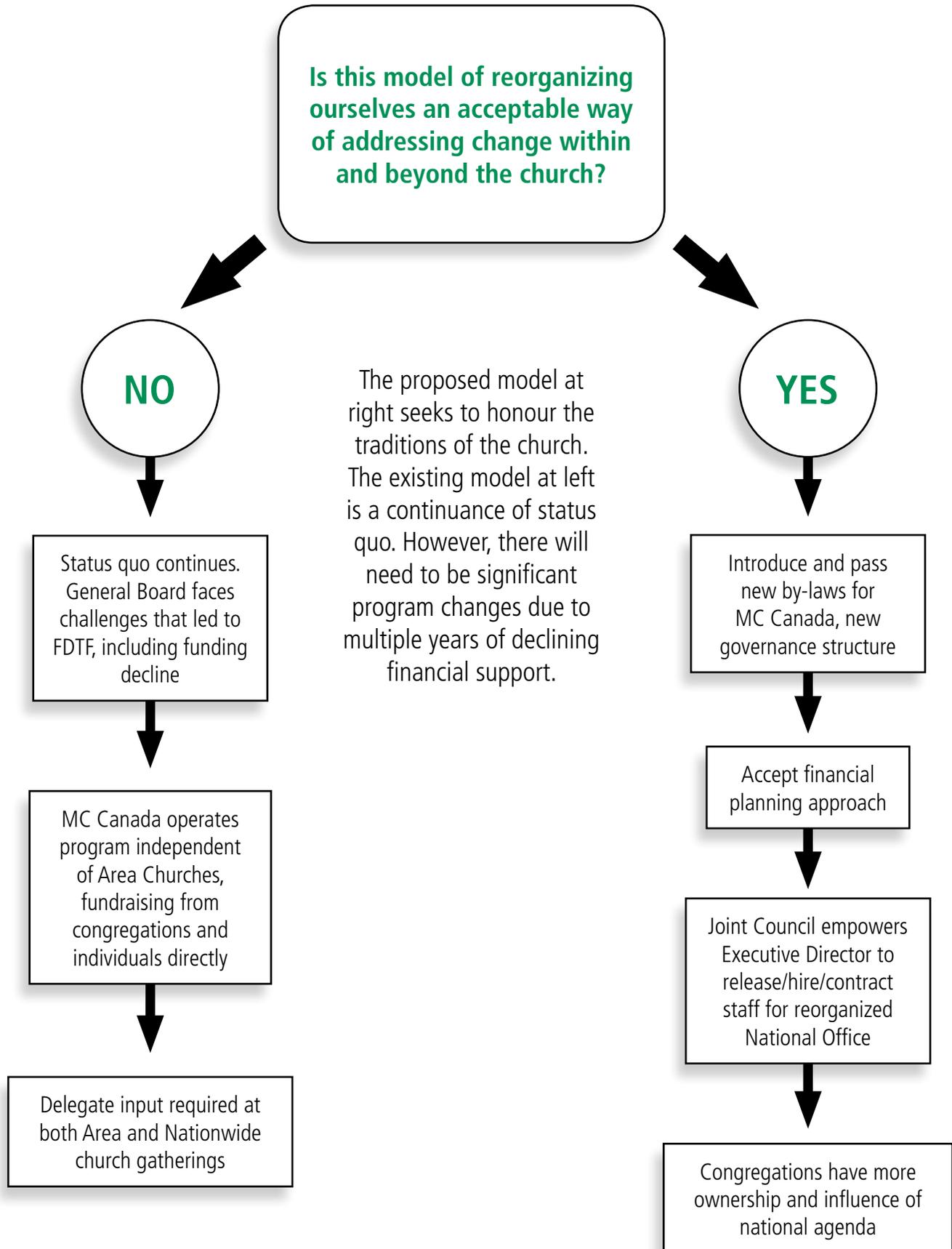
The transition to the new structure requires that the Special Delegate Assembly make the decisions to bring this new way of being together into existence:

- The New Structure: The delegates will be asked to approve in principle the new structure.
- Implementing bylaw: If the delegates accept the new structure they will be asked to approve the new bylaw that will bring it into existence.

If the new bylaw is passed, the following decisions will then need to be made (relevant documents available in the Discernment Guide):

- Draft Covenant describes the relationships among the Regional Churches: The delegates will be asked to provide feedback on the covenant and to affirm the direction it sets.
- Draft Operating Agreement describes in detail how the Regional Churches will work together: The delegates will be asked to provide feedback on the operating agreement and to affirm the direction it sets.
- Working Group input has provided valuable insight to Interim Council: The delegates will be asked to provide feedback on the activity of Working Groups and to commend them to Joint Council as it continues the implementation of new structure.
- International Witness Structure Proposal was developed by Interim Council in response to the report of the International Witness Working Group and FDTF Final Report and Addendum: The delegates will be asked to provide feedback on the Proposal and to affirm the direction it sets.
- Financial Planning Principles and Financial Plan: The delegates will be asked to provide feedback on the principles and the plan and to commend them to Joint Council for further work as it leads the nationwide church.
- Officers: The delegates will be asked to elect the Officers of the MC Canada Joint Council

Decision making implications





Interim Council

Mennonite Church Canada
Mennonite Church British Columbia
Mennonite Church Alberta

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan
Mennonite Church Manitoba
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

Our Vision

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Statement Of Identity And Purpose

God calls, equips and sends the church to engage the world with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are a community of disciples of Jesus,
a part of the Body of Christ,
covenanted together
as congregations,
area churches, and
a national church body.

Gratefully responding to God's initiatives and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves and our resources to calling, equipping and sending the church to engage the world with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ.