

1 **Franconia Mennonite Conference**
2 ***Vision and Finance Plan Team Recommendations***
3 November 10, 2007
4

5 **Executive Summary**

6 We believe Franconia Mennonite Conference has no shortage of financial or human resources
7 to do what God is calling us to do. What we have is a shortage of connecting the vision of what
8 God is calling us to do with the resources God has given us.
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10 The Vision and Finance Plan Team (hereafter, VFP Team) was called into being by the
11 Franconia Conference Board to seek greater alignment in Franconia Mennonite Conference's
12 use of historic resources to respond to the call for contextual and contemporary ministry. In
13 exploring that assignment, the VFP Team has been reminded of the legacy of God's goodness
14 and generosity with us in the past, the changes in the world that challenge us, and God's
15 invitation to us to respond as a conference with vision, goals, and strategies that speak to the
16 great needs and possibilities of today. We believe passionately that the "E³ Vision"
17 (*...equipping leaders to empower others to embrace God's mission...*) is the sound and
18 sustainable vision God has given us for this time. We have set goals that envision our churches
19 and ministries becoming more fully what God has called them to be, and becoming better at
20 what God invites them to do. We embraced a strategy that expands the traditional view of
21 "credentials" and gives not just our ministers, but also conference related ministries (hereafter,
22 CRM), new initiatives, and congregations a means of validation and support to respond in more
23 effective ways to missional opportunities. We devised a matrix of activities to envision the
24 implementation of a vision to equip, strategies that empower, and goals that embrace God's call
25 to us. Finally, we offer a series of recommendations regarding real estate, finances, and human
26 resources that seek to build and maintain a cohesive leadership team, create organizational
27 clarity, over-communicate organizational clarity, and reinforce organizational clarity throughout
28 the conference systems.
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30 **Introduction**

31 The Franconia Mennonite Conference Board established a Vision and Finance Plan Team
32 (hereafter, "VFP") in the aftermath of discussions that took place in Conference Assembly
33 Scattered and Gathered in late 2005. While the presenting element which led to the formation of
34 the VFP Team related to decisions about the future of Conference-owned Indian Creek Road
35 Farm near Harleysville, PA, (hereafter, "the Farm"); the real work of the VFP Team has been in
36 attempting to understand the complexities of the Franconia Mennonite Conference financial
37 environment, and how the vision, goals, and strategies of Franconia Conference find greater
38 alignment increasing the Conference's capacity to engage in significant and transformational
39 ministry collaborating with member congregations, partners-in-mission, and conference related
40 ministries.

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41 *In short, our task has been to seek greater alignment in the use of historic resources in*
42 *meeting the call for greater contemporary and contextual ministry.*

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44 **Christ the Center**

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This we believe:

- 46 1. Central to the entire visioning and listening process has been the need to reaffirm the
47 centrality of Jesus Christ in the life and witness of Franconia Mennonite Conference.
- 48 2. The conference does not exist to hold real estate, nor does it exist to serve its membership per
49 se though it may do both of these things. Franconia Mennonite Conference is its
50 membership, called into being by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus Christ
51 wherever he might lead, connecting and equipping congregations, ministries, leaders and
52 initiatives as embodiments of the witness of Christ.
- 53 3. At the core of the Franconia Mennonite Conference is an unshakeable core conviction that all
54 of Jesus matters to everyone, everywhere.
- 55 4. Through the decision to follow Christ daily in life, Franconia Mennonite Conference has been
56 given gifts of human and financial resources sufficient to the tasks God is calling the
57 conference to perform.

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59 God has entrusted Franconia Mennonite Conference with a legacy of history and resources, and a
60 new era of diversity and searching. This legacy and this new era call us anew to a God honoring
61 stewardship, faithful to Christ, while being sustained through a Christ-shaped identity as a Jesus-
62 led community of peace-building disciples, celebrative of the surprises that Christ brings into our
63 midst through the work of the Holy Spirit. Franconia Mennonite Conference is uniquely called
64 by the Holy Spirit to value relationships, articulate vision, and embrace values that are
65 intercultural, missional, and formational in nature.

66 *In short, our call has been to remember with gratitude the goodness and generosity God*
67 *has shown us through Christ in the midst of the great possibilities and needs of the*

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68 *world and to respond with vision, goals, and strategies that further God's mission of*
69 *reconciling all of creation.*

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76 **The E³ Vision**

77 The VFP Team strongly endorses the E³ vision: Franconia Mennonite Conference equips leaders
78 to empower others to embrace God's mission. Changes within our communities and the
79 increasing connectivity of the world compel us to think in fresh ways about the vision of being a
80 regional area conference within the Mennonite Church USA.

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82 We find ourselves shifting toward a more global and urban expression of the Way of Christ that is
83 both local and contextual. This challenges us to welcome and incorporate diversity of
84 perspective, culture and experience. We find ourselves shifting from a conference gathered for
85 fellowship, to a conference asked to catalyze for mission and witness. This challenges us to
86 perceive and measure the value of being conference in new ways. We find ourselves shifting from
87 an era of relative stability and cooperation to a season where churches struggle with the demands
88 of institutional survival in a changing culture and inward gazing self-sufficiency that doesn't look
89 beyond the needs and possibilities of localized congregational life. This challenges us to discern
90 and implement new ways of being the church together.

91

92 We affirm the previous work accomplished by the Conference Board and Staff to develop and
93 bring life to this vision. We bring to the end of our work a deep conviction that this vision is in
94 fact God's unique call to Franconia Mennonite Conference for today and for the season of
95 ministry ahead that our conference is now entering.

96 *In short, we believe E³ is a sound and sustainable vision for an area conference in*
97 *Mennonite Church USA.*

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100 **“More/Better” Goals**

101 The strategy to which Franconia Mennonite Conference has been called by God needs to be
102 understood through specific, attainable, and measurable goals. The vision of equipping to
103 empower for embracing lends itself to a serious focus on outcomes that increase the capacity of
104 the Franconia Mennonite Conference to welcome diversity, be a catalyst, and assist all parts of
105 the conference to be more discerning. The following goals should be understood as outcomes of
106 the implementation of the E³ vision and thus, the conference should increase its capacity over the
107 next years to:

108 **Equip more and better leaders.** Increasing the number of women, men, people of color, and
109 young adults who respond to God’s call to serve various ministries as pastors, missionaries,
110 administrators, evangelists, teachers, poets, leaders, designers, and managers, among others, is not
111 simply a numerical goal. Attention must be paid to the type of leader developed. Are they
112 savvy about ministry in a transcultural environment? Do their fundamental ministry activities
113 align with God’s Mission in the world? Do they have a passion for Biblically faithful, holistic
114 evangelism? Will they develop the capacity to grow spiritually and adapt intellectually, rooted in
115 an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, to the world as it is becoming? A measurement of this
116 goal would be continued healthy length of tenure for pastors in congregations with less short-
117 term unintentional pastoral leadership turnover. A second measurement of more and better
118 leaders would include the following three outcomes.

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120 **Equip more and better churches.** Franconia Mennonite Conference should place a premium on
121 creating and implementing strategies of church planting that fit the context of the communities in
122 which we live. Planting churches alone, however, will not reach the world with the good news of
123 Jesus. Existing congregations need to fine tune their ministries, embrace strategies to learn and be
124 transformed in the midst of conflict, and work together to clarify purposes in such a way that
125 they become evangelistic by becoming magnetic and invitational. Measurements of this goal

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126 include an increase in the number of member congregations and partners-in-mission, and a
127 reduction in debilitating conflicts within member congregations.

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129 **Equip more and better disciples.** All congregations within Franconia Mennonite Conference
130 should be characterized by a position of evangelism, invitation, and hospitality that belief in
131 Christ, manifested as discipleship within the church community, may flourish. The conference
132 needs to be about equipping congregations to increase their capacity to relate to, invite, welcome,
133 and incorporate those who are not yet followers of Christ, into an explicitly Anabaptist-
134 Mennonite faith frame of reference. Measurements of this goal would include increased numbers
135 of persons across the age range in service through church-related initiatives, young adults serving
136 in leadership roles, and increased numbers of new followers of Jesus attending Franconia
137 Mennonite Conference congregations.

138 **Equip more and better connections.** Franconia Mennonite Conference and our member
139 congregations, partners-in-mission, and conference related ministries are neither a single island,
140 nor even a cluster of self-sufficient islands, isolated from the rest of the Body of Christ. We need
141 closer connections with one another, healthy connections to other MC USA ministries, stronger
142 connections to constituent parts of Mennonite World Conference, and broadened ecumenical
143 relationships. This will be measurable in increased involvements in congregations with local,
144 regional, and global initiatives.

145 *In short, Franconia Mennonite Conference should place its energies on equipping*
146 *congregations, partners in mission, and conference related ministries to be “more and*
147 *better” tomorrow than they are today.*

148
149 **Credentialing and covenanting strategy**

150 In Mennonite Church USA, area conferences such as Franconia Mennonite Conference have
151 existed mainly to shape pastoral identity through the granting of credentials such as licensing and
152 ordination. The historic role of area conferences has been to install new pastors, ordain pastors,
153 participate in pastoral reviews, engage in conflict management when pastors and congregations
154 face difficulty and assist in searching for new pastors, especially when the conflict management

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155 failed. For Franconia Conference, there is the added reality and implication of having a mission
156 agency/board and identity now embedded within the Conference structure.

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158 Expanding on this historic role of credentialing and sustaining pastors, the Franconia Mennonite
159 Conference should embrace a broader understanding of credentialing to include covenanting,
160 validation and acceptance of people, organizations, projects, and learning communities. This
161 credentialing and covenanting strategy would work to create solidarity of identity in
162 congregations, among pastors, and in conference related ministries. Specifically, the Franconia
163 Mennonite Conference would issue four types of credentials:

- 164
165 1. **Credentialing Ministers** – the current practice of licensing and ordination would
166 continue with a more deliberate process of continuing education expectations developed in
167 consultation with pastors following generally understood denomination-wide practices of
168 credentialing while recognizing local and contextual development and nuance.
- 169 2. **Covenanting with Conference Related Ministries** – continued development of the
170 relationship between Franconia Mennonite Conference and the many related ministries
171 that have sprung from within the Franconia Mennonite Conference community. Multiple
172 levels of relationships may be considered, and first-fruits contributions of cash and/or in-
173 kind services would continue to be negotiated.
- 174 3. **Covenanting with Missional Initiatives** – conference staff would redirect their
175 resources and invest considerable time and energy in catalyzing congregations, partners-
176 in-mission, and conference related ministries to develop and implement missional
177 initiatives that have alignment with God’s mission, are financially transparent, and have
178 long-term sustainability and/or enduring impact.
- 179 4. **Covenanting with Congregations in Community** – conference staff would create
180 various learning communities with Franconia Mennonite Conference congregations, and
181 others, around issues that relate to the health, witness and missional well-being of
182 congregations.

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183 *In short, Franconia Mennonite Conference should employ a strategy to validate and*
184 *support not just ministers, but also covenanting with CRMs, missional initiatives,*
185 *partners and congregations for increased effectiveness, accountability and*
186 *relationality in mission and witness.*

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188 ***SEE MATRIX AT THE END OF DOCUMENT FOR MORE INFORMATION***

189

190 **Critical Pathways for Alignment of Vision and Finances**

191 To recap: Franconia Mennonite Conference is in the midst of a season of transition which calls us
192 to remember how Jesus Christ is to be the center of Conference life. To that end, we have
193 reconfirmed a vision of a conference that exists to equip for mission; we have embraced goals that
194 call us as congregations and as a conference to be “more and better” tomorrow than we are today;
195 and, we have adopted a strategy of credentialing and covenanting toward openness,
196 accountability and hospitality in fulfilling God’s mission. The question remains: How does
197 Franconia Mennonite Conference get from our present reality to the envisioned future? The VFP
198 Team makes the following recommendations that should provide a route from here to there...

199

200 1. **Real Estate Recommendations** – these recommendations are offered to solidify the
201 financial base of the conference and focus the leadership of the conference on the
202 leadership of ministry, rather than the management of property.

203

204 a. **Souderton Center Recommendations**

205

206 i. Franconia Mennonite Conference Office should relocate and downsize
207 its square footage within the Souderton Center, allowing for the possibility
208 of a nationally recognized retailer to become the end-cap store, and
209 shrinking the Conference’s financial outlay for office space.

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211 ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference should enter into marketing and
management agreement(s) with an outside firm to provide greater visibility
to the Center and maximize the Center’s potential to attract and retain
strong clients.

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- 212 b. Indian Creek Road Farm Recommendations
- 213 i. Franconia Mennonite Conference moves to sell a development easement
- 214 on part or all of the Indian Creek Road Farm’s acreage (This is based on
- 215 the assumption that development easement dollars can be allocated to
- 216 other operational purposes within Franconia Mennonite Conference).
- 217 This development easement assures preservation of the farm in the long-
- 218 term as open space minimizing development beyond agricultural usage.
- 219 ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference uses funds from the development
- 220 easement to pay down with the desire to pay off the mortgage on the
- 221 Souderton Center (The ability to pay off the mortgage rests on a
- 222 combination of factors including how many acres are sold into the
- 223 development easement, and at what rate the easement is sold for per acre).
- 224 iii. Franconia Mennonite Conference should further divest itself from
- 225 management of the Indian Creek Road Farm by leasing or through the
- 226 possible sale of the Farm to an outside group(s) to develop sustainable
- 227 creation-care oriented ministries that recognize the nature of the preserved
- 228 open space of the land and may or may not become a Conference Related
- 229 Ministry.

230 2. **Financial Recommendations** – these recommendations are being made to create a clearer

231 understanding within the Franconia constituency about how funds are generated and

232 allocated

- 233 a. Franconia Mennonite Conference Budgeting Process Recommendations
- 234 i. Franconia Mennonite Conference assumes a stable annual operating
- 235 budget of \$1.0-\$1.25 million for the foreseeable future, with approximately
- 236 75% of the budget earmarked for missional/ministerial leadership, and
- 237 approximately 25% of the budget earmarked for the support services, and
- 238 a varying amount to support properly credentialed projects (see below).
- 239 ii. Franconia Mennonite Conference creates a three-tier budget structure,

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240 consisting of:

- 241 1. Missional/Ministerial Leadership Budget – conference ministry
242 leadership financed by offering plate funds, and business services
243 revenue
244 2. Support Services Budget – conference infrastructure financed
245 totally by funds generated through the implementation of real
246 estate recommendations
247 3. Missional Initiatives Budget – a new section to the income and
248 expense budget made up of initiatives that have been covenanted
249 with or through the Conference-financed by special sources of
250 income and contribution.

251 **3. Human Resources Recommendations**

- 252 a. Focus on building and maintaining a cohesive leadership team – Franconia
253 Mennonite Conference needs to provide for staffing that has a single and clear
254 executive; additional staffing for finance and communication; specialized staff to
255 implement various credentialing and covenanting activities; and regionalized
256 pastoral support and oversight of congregations, all of whom are in sync with the
257 vision, strategy, and goals of the Conference.
- 258 b. Focus on organizational clarity through mission initiative development –
259 Franconia Mennonite Conference staff should be empowered to serve in more of a
260 project development and brokering approach to equipping for mission, including
261 the development of, subject to appropriate oversight, the criteria for credentialing
262 and covenanting. Organizational clarity will include clear paths to access funding
263 and resources that can help to implement newly covenanted initiatives to ensure
264 broad access for Conference leaders, congregations, ministries and partners
- 265 c. Focus on the over-communication of organizational clarity – Franconia Mennonite
266 Conference staff should create narrative coherence by developing and
267 implementing a common communication strategy that keeps staff working within

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268 a unified message and presentation about Franconia Mennonite Conference
269 systems and priorities that can be repeated, that is simple, and that is
270 communicated in multiple mediums.

271 **4. Review**

- 272 a. These recommendations should be reviewed annually by the Conference Board for
273 compliance and adjusted accordingly.
- 274 b. A more extensive review of the implementation of these recommendations and an
275 evaluation of their successful accomplishment of the specified outcomes should be
276 undertaken, beginning on or about January 1, 2011, and completed in time for
277 reporting to the Franconia Conference Assembly in the fall of 2011.

278 **Outcomes**

279 If implemented in their entirety, the vision, goals, strategy, and action recommendations should
280 provide for:

- 281 1. A stable, well-aligned financial environment that our membership is eager to
282 support, with all support services met through related business activities at
283 Souderton Center and Indian Creek Road Farm.
- 284 2. A narrative coherence measured by stable donated dollars and increased initiative-
285 related dollars for covenanted missional initiatives.
- 286 3. An increase in credentialed pastoral, congregational and conference related
287 ministry leaders from previously under-represented communities: women, people
288 of color, and young adults.
- 289 4. An increase in CRM related collaboration with Franconia Conference, measured
290 by increase in the exchange of first-fruits giving and documentable services.
- 291 5. An increase in partnerships that have high missional value, financial transparency,
292 and sustainability.
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293 **A Matrix for Evaluation**

294 One way to visualize the direction of Franconia Mennonite Conference if this vision, these goals,
 295 and this strategy are embraced is as follows:

Equipping Strategies and Goals	Empowering by credentialing ministers	Empowering by covenanting with ministries	Empowering by covenanting with missional initiatives	Empowering by covenanting with congregations
Embracing More & Better Leaders – healthy pastoral tenures	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops minimum standards for ordination and collaborates with Pastors to create increased continuing education standards	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops a learning community for training CRM leadership and assisting in forming a strong Anabaptist identity. CRM executives may offer leadership in Franconia Mennonite Conference based learning communities	Franconia Mennonite Conference creates venues to train pastors and other urban leaders in developing proposals for funding which have met standards for missional alignment, financial transparency, and sustainability	Franconia Mennonite Conference creates greater opportunities for coaching and collegial relationships among pastors in learning community environment
Embracing More & Better Disciples – increased young adult participation and increased numbers of new Christians in conference related congregations	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops training venues to assist pastors to engage in evangelism that is authentically Anabaptist, and in relating to and involving the gifts of young adults	Franconia Mennonite Conference works with CRMs to identify talent among young adults and new Christians	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides spaces for young adults and new Christians to develop and implement various missional experiments	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides leadership incubation opportunities with young adults and new Christians
Embracing More & Better Churches -- increased number of congregations becoming members of Franconia Conference and fewer debilitating church conflicts	Franconia Mennonite Conference develops training and coaching strategies that identify, release, and support new church planters, and trains pastors to assess church health and lead necessary systems changes for increased church health	Franconia Mennonite Conference brings CRM and congregations together for information sharing and learning exchanges	Franconia Mennonite Conference prioritizes projects that include new church development or demonstrate increased church health	Franconia Mennonite Conference provides opportunities for congregations to develop and cultivate relationships with one another
Embracing More & Better Connections -- increased congregational missional initiatives locally, regionally, and globally	Franconia Mennonite Conference collaborates with pastors to identify and resource increased missional partnerships	Franconia Mennonite Conference assists CRMs in making connections with various additional partners	Franconia Mennonite Conference brokers international and local initiatives that build connections with the world, recognizing possibilities and needs	Franconia Mennonite Conference encourages congregations to engage in mission, “from everywhere to everywhere...”