



# A M O S A I C

*One conference's*

# O F E M E R G I N G

*journey with its*

# M U T U A L

*diverse congregations*

# T R A N S F O R M A T I O N

*Marta Castillo*

**W**e at Mosaic Mennonite Conference are working on an intercultural, missional, and formational puzzle with a thousand pieces. We have a vision: “Embodying the reconciling love of Jesus in our broken and beautiful world.” We are on a mission: “Celebrating and extending God’s grace, justice, and peace. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we shape our relationships and work around missional, intercultural, and formational priorities.”

## THOUSANDS OF PUZZLE PIECES

At the same time, we have that overwhelming feeling most people experience when they open a puzzle box and pour out the thousand pieces onto a table. A few pieces are identified and sorted out, and a few pieces are put in place. We have a picture on a box, a hope that God has placed in our hearts, and those who work with us. But . . . there are so many

pieces. Where do they fit into the puzzle? How long will it take and who will persevere in the work? How many times will we be sidetracked by pieces that are wrongly placed, even with good intentions? Which pieces are being left out because they have not yet been turned over or have fallen on the floor?

You may think I exaggerate when I say that our Mosaic puzzle has a thousand pieces. After all, our conference community totals just 65 congregations. Yet if we add the layers of geography, ethnicity, immigration status, politics, education, language, racial worldview, economic status, faith traditions, gender, and history, we find the diversity multiplied exponentially. When we consider that we walk together but loosely, at times going in seemingly different directions, carrying our history and vision in different ways, and having had different experiences with the conference over the years, we find

more than a thousand pieces in this puzzle that is Mosaic Mennonite Conference.

## SEEKING MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION

We are Mosaic Mennonite Conference, a part of the body of Christ. This year, our assembly theme is “Mutual Transformation,” based on Romans 12:2–5:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members

have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We are a centered set—one body with many members. Centered on our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We ask ourselves, “Who is Jesus? What does he want us to do? How does he want us to do it?” We are centered on our mutual need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, by God, and by each other. Centered on the work of the kingdom and being the body of Christ together.

In our conference’s “Grace and Truth” statement,” we find a centering space.

We commit to making our churches places of radical hospitality, inviting, and engaging all people regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, lifestyle, or socio-economic status. God desires to bring transformation to all people; therefore, we will welcome all people and call all people to repentance and holy living.

## “MOST OF US DO NOT COUNT ON BEING TRANSFORMED OURSELVES.”

### TRANSFORMATION’S COST

The commitment and cost of mutual transformation is high and often unexpected. We have found that most of us do not count on being transformed ourselves. The integrity of the mutual transformation process means that we must identify and decenter ourselves to recenter ourselves in Christ. It means that we must be brave, venture beyond our comfort zones, and stay at a table that is not of our making or design. Mutual transformation means that we must process uncomfortable truth about culture, history, bias, and worldview through the eyes of others.

Our “Going to the Margins: Kingdom Mission Strategy” statement pushes us to look and move outwardly even as we hold to the center.

Therefore, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to solidarity with those on the margins of the Christian community, our neighborhoods, and society at large, seeking transformation in ourselves, those to whom we minister, and the unjust systems we encounter.

### OUR CONFESSION AND HOPE

We confess that we are lacking and have repeatedly tried and failed in several ways. We struggle to be less paternalistic and to develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial in our relationships with immigrant churches and churches of color. We depend too much on using money to solve problems instead of using creativity to build equitable relationships. We have repeatedly failed to confront racism in ways that are life-giving to our African American brothers and sisters and life-changing for our white brothers and sisters and for our system. We have sometimes failed to gather in congregations and people at whatever margin they find themselves.

The words of John Lewis—our beloved brother, civil rights leader, and US congressman—posted on Twitter in June 2018, ring out to us:

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.

In Mosaic Mennonite Conference, many of us are hopeful and optimistic that God’s Spirit is at work among us. We are a diverse conference with Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Creole, and English as our worshiping languages. Approximately 20 percent of our congregations, 30 percent of our credentialed leaders, and 40 percent of our staff are People of the Global Majority. Our board

and staff are committed to deepening relationships and spending time together. We seek to be hospitable and to welcome each other to God’s table, seeking not the places of honor but the places of fellowship with room for grace.

Noel Santiago, our leadership minister for missional transformation, noted in a conversation with me:

One difference between a puzzle and a mosaic is that a puzzle comes with pre-cut pieces that have a similar quality and are pre-designed to fit together perfectly. A mosaic is comprised of very different shaped pieces that may even require some changing of a given piece to help it come together into one unified whole while retaining each unique shape.

## “WE MAY BE RESHAPED TO MAKE SPACE FOR OTHERS.”

We know that we may be reshaped to make space for others—transformed because of their presence as one of us.

At Mosaic, we see as though in a mirror, with little glimpses here and there of the reflections of God’s design for us. We expect to be formed and transformed, a mosaic that God can shine light through to draw others. We are “confident of this, that the one who began a good work among [us] will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). **MC**

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