



Intersections

Franconia Conference Snapshots (Mar. 2012)

What does Franconia Conference do together?

Stephen Kriss (skriss@franconiaconference.org)

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Franconia Conference: Together. Bersama, Juntos. Cúng Nhau.

This sense of togetherness, of Conference, is a relationship that is sometimes tense and sometimes harmonious, counter to the individualistic and isolationist impulses of our time. We are striving to be held together as congregations, under a common willingness to follow after Jesus, to live in this historic and contemporary Anabaptist stream, to give and receive counsel, to share our gifts and resources, all for the glory of God.

Together. Bersama, Juntos. Cúng Nhau.

Posters with these words were distributed at Conference Assembly 2011. But the question sometimes lingers—what does Conference do?



Franconia Conference equips healthy and growing leaders.

Primarily through the credentialing and accountability process for pastors, chaplains and ministers, Conference provides structures for leadership. The conference's oversight platform—LEAD—is designed to equip and train congregations. Right now, there are over 120 credentialed leaders from the conference community serving in six states and three countries—probably an all-time high as congregations are calling for more pastors and the field of ministry continues to expand beyond traditional settings.

Equipping congregations

Franconia Conference, in the form of our new LEADership minister, Jenifer Erikson-Morales, has been helping our ministry enormously these past 11 months. She began with a major review of my pastoral leadership and of the whole congregation that was so helpful in identifying strengths and issues for clarification.

—Dawn Ruth Nelson, Pastor, Methacton congregation

Franconia Conference works diligently to cultivate healthy and growing congregations.

Healthy and growing leaders will likely bring forth healthy and growing communities. While equipping leaders is the conference's primary task, healthy and growing communities are tended by our relationships together. Conference staff members support congregations through transitions, reviews, and conflict—situations that up to 20% of congregations are facing at any one time! While ensuring ongoing health, Conference relationships provoke congregations toward missional experimentation and calling next generation leadership. This process becomes critical as congregations embody the Good News in our diverse settings from Vermont to Georgia.

Franconia Conference invites people into healthy and growing relationships with Jesus Christ.

Conference priorities include ongoing spiritual growth from cradle to grave—priorities evidenced in our congregations but also in our Conference Related Ministries, organizations that serve a cross section of people from both within and beyond our congregations. From schools to ex-offender ministries to senior living communities to service providers for people with disabilities to camps and retreat facilities, Conference Related Ministries extend the Good News alongside congregational discipleship. The formation work of Conference is also especially incarnated through conference staffing intended specifically for youth and young adults.



Through Conference's endowed funds, Missional Operational Grants are provided to congregations for initiatives to further extend the Good News in their communities. All congregations are eligible for these funds, which are most often used for new missional initiatives that allow the life of the congregation to extend the reign of God both nearby and sometimes globally. In recent years, 10-20 initiatives have received grants annually; \$68,000 has been earmarked for 2012 grants. Congregations may apply for funds through conversations with their LEADership ministers.

Franconia Conference builds healthy and growing connections between congregations and the world.

Historically, Conference has been both a governance body and a mission agency. Franconia Mennonite Mission Board was incorporated into conference structures around the turn of the millennium. This has not always been easy. In recent years, Conference has sought to build relationships with other Anabaptist groups across the world, especially in the UK and Haiti. At times, Conference has picked up relationships and conversation that spans the globe on behalf of congregations in places like Indonesia, Mexico, and Chile. Conference has maintained historic connections to places where mission workers were sent in the 20th Century, specifically Cuba and Mexico.



When Mennonite Church USA was formed over a decade ago, Franconia Conference joined the new national body.

Conference is the primary point of connection with the denomination, participating on behalf of its congregations along with 20 other conferences across the country. This means conference staff and board members regularly attend meetings and attend to relationships that are both near and far.

Franconia Conference: Together. Bersama, Juntos. Cúng Nhau.

Franconia Conference is a complex organism with partnerships and ministries that span the globe, with a history of over 350 years, older than the United States itself. It's not easily explained, multi-faceted, and in many ways blessed by years of faithfulness evidenced in risk and caution, generosity and savvy stewardship. Our story is one of togetherness, of trying to stay rightly related in the midst of dramatic changes. Our history, the story of God's movement through the generations, is ongoing. By the power of the Spirit, may we have the courage to not only preserve but to dream, to not only remain but to go, to not only endure but to flourish.

Missional Operational Grants

February 2011-January 2012

\$62,259.91

- Boyertown Mennonite Church
- Deep Run East Mennonite Church
- Doylestown Mennonite Church
- Frederick Mennonite Church
- Georgia Praise Center
- Good Shepherd Community Church
- Greensburg Worship Center
- Line Lexington Mennonite Church
- Nations Worship Center
- New Hope Fellowship
- Nueva Vida Norristown New Life
- Oxford Circle Mennonite Church
- Perkiomenville Mennonite Church
- Philadelphia Mennonite High School
- Providence Mennonite Church
- Ripple Allentown
- Rock Community Church
- Rockhill Mennonite Church
- Souderton Mennonite Church
- Whitehall Mennonite Church

Empowering new congregations

This February, by God's grace, Georgia Praise Center celebrated our one year anniversary. Throughout this year, Franconia Conference has graciously supported us in so many ways. We are very grateful for the encouragement, guidance, and financial support that have been given to us. We feel strengthened and honored to be a part of one big family of Franconia Conference. We pray that with God's blessing, our family will grow even more in the years to come. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all of our brothers and sisters in the Conference.

—Yunus Perkasa Tjeng, pastor, Georgia Praise Center

Equipping leaders

One significant role that Franconia Conference has played in the life of our church has been walking with us during our recent pastoral search process. Noah Kolb, as a Conference representative, was instrumental in providing a list of available candidates. As our team assessed and interviewed candidates, he was available for guidance and wise counsel along each step of the way. [And now] Franconia Conference provides further training and credentialing for this pastor. It is reassuring to us to know they are also part of evaluating and confirming this individual for service.

—Karen Moyer, pastoral search committee, Rocky Ridge

Empowering ministries

Christopher Dock Mennonite High School deeply appreciates the collaborative relationship with Franconia Conference. This year we have worked together to hire and share a campus pastor/conference youth minister. Ertell Whigham and John Goshow have been a wonderful face of Conference attending Dock events such as pastors' day, and providing counsel throughout the year. Our journey together is energizing and life-giving as we surround our youth with the support needed to prepare them to impact our churches and world.
—Conrad Swartzentruber, Principal, Christopher Dock Mennonite High School



May our stories abound

Emily Ralph (eralph@franconiaconference.org)

Earlier this year, Conference board and staff met together to discuss the purpose of Franconia Conference structures and staffing. A growing consensus was that “Conference” is more of a network than an institution, here to connect and train congregations and leaders for God’s mission in the world.

And as a network, it is so important that we share our stories with one another. We cheer when others celebrate, we mourn when others grieve, we give when others are in need. And in our time, we also receive.

In the coming months, you may notice some changes in the communication coming from the conference office:

- A weekly email newsletter to pastors (franconiaconference.org/intersectings) with news, blogs, and social media updates from our conference.
- A new 4-page format to Intersections that will be published in English, Indonesian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.
- Connections: a new podcast celebrating our connections in Christ through stories and interviews.
- Continued experimentation with technologies that allow us to connect with one another despite time, distance, and language barriers.

Unexpected hard places will always be with us. But that isn’t the end of the story. There are also unexpected places of joy, understanding, and growth. May our reaching out stories abound!



Does your congregation have a story to share? E-mail stories, photos, videos, or blogs to ERalph@franconiaconference.org. And don't forget to share meaningful moments from congregational life using #fmclife on Twitter!



Unexpected mutual aid helps save church building

Sheldon C. Good (Mennonite Weekly Review)

When Nueva Vida Norristown New Life acquired an office building next to its meetinghouse in 2007, a local realtor projected it would only take six months to fill it with tenants. Then the Great Recession hit. By last summer the congregation was on the brink of foreclosure of its 104-year-old meetinghouse, listed as collateral for the new building's mortgage. Several pastors and leaders in Franconia Conference learned of the plight. In September, they initiated a conference-wide appeal for \$95,000 to satisfy the mortgage's needs for a year. To date, more than 20 churches, businesses, and individuals have committed over \$100,000.



Why did we do this?

Plains has a history of assisting members in time of need and this was an opportunity to extend assistance at a conference level. This action helps us to realize we are part of a larger body, and when one member of the larger body hurts, we also feel the pain.

—Merlin Grieser, Council Chair, Plains

Not only do we have a responsibility as brothers and sisters in Christ, but PPC and Norristown are also similar: both have mostly people of color in the congregation; both are serving in urban settings; both face similar challenges.

—Aldo Siahaan, Pastor, Philadelphia Praise Center

Whitehall made the decision to give a certain amount from our benevolence fund and then presented the story to the congregation in case individuals wanted to give. In three weeks, the congregation's giving matched what we gave from our budget. Why did we do this? We wanted to be a part of God's Kingdom work continuing in Norristown.

—Rose Bender, Pastor, Whitehall

New Life is a treasured part of our Conference family and they are meeting many needs in their community. We want to learn from them how to more effectively reach out to our community, sharing the love of Christ.

—Steve Landis, Pastor, Franconia

We wanted to partner with other congregations so that Norristown could continue its significant ministry in the Norristown community. An application was submitted to a congregational fund for “above-budget” requests, which provides support for ministries that are an extension of Deep Run East. The members “caught the vision” and supported this funding opportunity.

—Ken Burkholder, Pastor, Deep Run East

I can't help but see the many faces of the local Mennonite Church and wonder what stories may be told of congregations finding themselves in unexpected hard places, stories of congregations finding safe places to process their struggle, and stories of congregations reaching out across our differences to share in these struggles. Unexpected hard places will always be with us—may the reaching out stories abound.

—Jeff Knightly, Deacon, West Philadelphia



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