

Missional Leader Report

July 19, 2012

Four years ago, Mennonite Mission Network began a partnership with Allegheny Mennonite Conference to test how dedicated funding for missional agenda staff would affect the mission of the church. Because of downsizing decisions due to funding constraints, that experiment has concluded. In a sense, this report is a summary of the work that came of that partnership. However, it is hoped that seeds planted during this period will continue to influence the missional life and vision of the Conference and the wider church.

The first year and a half was used to visit each of the churches in the Conference to learn of the vision and practices of missional life and to update profile information. These visits were meant to be listening and sharing in nature. It became clear from these visits that congregations desire to be communities of faith that are joining God's work where they are located. Generally this meant a process of identifying needs and organizing activities to meet them as talents and resources were available. This also meant being part of national and worldwide mission. The list of activities that churches are involved with is extensive. The sharing part of the visit was meant to encourage each church to see itself and each member as active participants with the work God is doing, not in some future calling and another place, but where we are now.

It became clear that churches struggle with questions about visible signs of succeeding and growth. To help congregations deal with those questions a process for the intentional strengthening of missional life was offered to congregational leaders for study and discussion. In this process the emphasis is placed on each member participating in identifying and claiming relationships that are a natural part of life for prayer and witness rather than emphasizing more activity time and expense. In a quote used by David Augsburg in the book, Communicating Good News (Herald Press, P.102), a pastor said about his church, "We needed not just to inspire core groups to begin reaching out, but to turn our whole membership face-outward, in an every-member-mobilization. Not to a program, but to person-centered living, fellowship, and time schedules." This quote captures the spirit of the relationship based missional process that is suggested for consideration by AMC churches.

Churches were encouraged to make invitations to share the vision for the missional process. In the past year and a half visits have been made to churches (eight to date) to speak with congregations or leadership groups in response to invitations. As of the date of this report, no churches or groups have indicated a commitment to intentionally pursue this process. It is hoped, however, that elements of the presentation will be claimed as part of congregational life and stories of God's working will encourage us all.

About a year ago, AMC was invited to partner with a church plant among Bhutanese/Nepali refugees in Pittsburgh. This coincided beautifully with the expressed vision to be agents for church planting as the third segment of our missional vision. Since January, we have supported this new church with finances and counsel, as we have been blessed with the energy and vision they have modeled. AMC congregations were encouraged to participate financially while becoming acquainted about this work at regional meetings. This opens AMC to partnering in sharing the Gospel with those we have few natural connections as well as potentially to parts of the world not otherwise open to our witness. This partnership has breathed new life and spirit into the Conference.

I want to conclude with a personal note. Thank you to all for allowing me to participate with you in this missional journey. I see the journey as ongoing in discovering how we can be engaged in joining God's work among us and around us. It is my prayer that we will always keep God's missional calling as the top priority. I believe that we should always keep this question at the forefront of all our work and discussion: "How does this decision, this organization, this activity, this spending, this time, help us to be better able to join God's work?"

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