

CHURCH PLANTING:
VISION AND VALUES FOR THE CENTRAL PLAINS MENNONITE CONFERENCE

“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.” (Mennonite Church USA)

“The mission of Central Plains Mennonite Conference is to create settings for our congregations and partners to grow in holistic witness to God’s reconciling mission in the world by developing leadership, encouraging fellowship, and promoting lifelong discipleship.” Members of the Church Planting Strategy Team of the CPMC Outreach and Service Committee therefore urge congregations of CPMC and their members to embrace church planting, and new church plants, as important ways to fulfill our conference’s mission, and to carry out its three ministry priorities:

- Leadership for Witness
- Fellowship as Witness
- Discipleship For Witness

As established churches engage their communities in missional ways, one result will be the emergence of new churches, as spiritual gifts among the members interact with opportunities and developments in their mission fields. These new congregations can often reach some people in ways that older churches cannot. Not only does this result in numerical growth, it grows the persons involved, and their spiritual gifts.

Because of the variety of communities, contexts, resources and visions for church planting in the CPMC, it doesn't work to prescribe a universal and inflexible policy for church planting. In place of a one-size-fits-all church planting policy, we on the Church Planting Strategy Team recommend the following guidelines and values:

Regarding current CPMC congregations:

1. **CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHURCH PLANTING**--The emergence of church planters, new churches, and of visions, plans and support for them are congregational responsibilities and opportunities, not only conference ones.
2. **CONGREGATIONS AS SEEDBEDS OF NEW CHURCHES**--The members and leaders of each member congregation of CPMC must see their congregations as seedbeds and supporters of new churches and new leadership, either singly or in partnership with other churches. While it is customary to say that new churches are planted, it is more often the case that they are *transplanted* from existing churches, so that there is enough strength in numbers and gifts to take root and survive. Instead of asking *if* or *why* a new church would emerge from a church or a cluster of congregations, we should be asking ourselves *Why not?* and *When?*
3. **THE COURAGE TO “FAIL” AS WELL AS TO SUCCEED**--The only true “failure” in church planting is when we are so satisfied with the maintenance and survival that we fail to consider our roles in starting new churches. By contrast, CPMC, congregations and their members will pray, discern, explore and experiment in quest of new and emerging churches from their midst, or in partnership with other churches, knowing that many efforts and experiments will not result in new, viable congregations, while being grateful for the efforts made and the lessons learned.
4. **SACRIFICIAL SHARING ON BEHALF OF NEW CHURCHES**--Current and historic CPMC congregations will be willing to release members and leaders, in addition to time and

finances, for the formation of new churches and leaders, even those most gifted members and leaders whom they are often most reluctant to share, trusting that God will bring new leaders, or will gift and empower current ones as the lending/sending congregation needs them.

5. **CHURCH PLANTING AS PARTNERSHIP**--Church plants and supporting congregations will develop covenant relationships of mutual support and accountability, understanding that each partner has gifts to contribute to the other. The Church Planting Strategy Team of the Outreach and Service Commission of CPMC will help all partners develop and carry out the terms of support and accountability for each other.
6. **CONFERENCE SUPPORT OF CHURCH PLANTING THROUGH SUPPORTING CHURCH PLANTERS**--CPMC's primary way of supporting church plants and new churches, will be through equipping and empowering church planters and their core leadership teams, through the Outreach and Service Commission and specifically, the Church Planting Strategy Team.

For Church Planters and New/Emerging Churches:

7. **CHURCH PLANTERS' COMMITMENT TO CONFERENCE VISION**--All church plants and church planters in the CPMC, seeking membership, recognition and support from CPMC, will be committed to the mission and beliefs of CPMC, in particular, Vision: Healing and Hope and The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995).
8. **CONFERENCE COMMITMENT TO A SHARED VISION**--CPMC will provide church planters and the new churches' core leadership groups with the teaching and training needed to better know, embrace and articulate the basic tenets of Mennonite faith, as stated in Vision: Healing and Hope and The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (95), in order to receive endorsement and support from CPMC, whenever this is not already the case.
9. **GROWING CHURCHES THROUGH GROWING LEADERS**--CPMC-related church planters will consecrate the necessary time and energy to the discipling of congregational leaders who will share the ministry tasks and financial burdens of their church plant.
10. **CONFERENCE DOORWAYS TO SUPPORT**--CPMC-related church planters who desire support, recognition and endorsement from CPMC, will present their mission, vision and plans to the Outreach Commission via the Church Planting Strategy Team for CPMC endorsement and support.
11. **BALANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH CONGREGATIONAL DEVELOPMENT** will require most church planters to be bi-vocational, as will likely conference funding sources, for the foreseeable future. Church planters are encouraged to leverage their employment as opportunities for outreach. But CPMC also commits to helping church planters find enough support to release adequate time and resources for church planting.
12. **ORGANIZING AND SUPPORTING CHURCH PLANTING BY SPECIFIC TASKS**--Church planters will seek funding primarily in support of specific ministry tasks in the church or community, and from a variety of sources. The Church Planting Strategy Team will help the church planters in this search for support.
13. **VALUING EVERY STAGE OF CHURCH AS CHURCH**—There being no ideal nor required size, shape nor age of church, CPMC welcomes, honors and engages each recognized church plant as a partner of dignity and capability equal to other churches. CPMC particularly welcomes the lessons that new church plants have to teach us through every stage of growth.

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Mathew Swora
Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Minneapolis, MN