

Akron Mennonite Church

Vision Process
2001-2007

“Charting Our Course”



A Progress Report

Jim S. Amstutz, Editor

**AMC Vision Process
2001-2007
A Progress Report**

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Getting Started

Leadership at AMC recognized a “crossroads” moment in the life of the church in 2001:

- End of the current Ten Year Goal Cycle
- New Lead Pastor came on board in August (Jim S. Amstutz)
- Formation of Mennonite Church USA with “Becoming a Missional Church” expressed as a core value.
- The sanctuary mortgage would be paid off a year early.

A task group was appointed to begin long-range “mission and maintenance” planning, including a “Vision Retreat.”

From the Archives:

July 29, 2001 Discernment Sunday Actions

AMC Mission Plan for 2001-2003 approved, including:

D. Use the opportunity provided by the paying off the Building Fund in year 2002 to do longer term comprehensive “mission and maintenance” planning.

1. Challenge the congregation to give at same or increases levels and to not cut back because building is paid off.
2. Create a task force to develop a 5-10 year building/maintenance budget, which will be needed to cover special needs as our building ages, i.e. kitchen upgrade, major repairs, minor construction changes.
3. Determine a long-term solution to our space limitations. AMC’s growing children’s ministries and DSECC have pushed the limits of available space. Adult Christian Education space is now limited. How do we deal with further growth?
4. In the midst of looking at our own needs, find creative options for directing some additional funds for “mission.”

Vision I Retreat

A representative group of 45 AMC members/attenders gathered at the MCC Welcome Place, January 4-5, 2002. Jim Smucker and Marcus Smucker served as resource persons.

Purpose: *To envision a preferred future, not problem solve based on the past. The focus of this approach is answering the question, “What must we do differently to find and move toward God’s future for our congregation?” The purpose of the retreat is to get a critical mass of people in the congregation to understand the need to change, agree upon a vision for the future, and agree upon and make a commitment to take the first steps to realize the future vision. Additionally, the retreat is meant to be a time of worship for the participants.*

Step 1: Focusing on the Past (self, church, society)

Step 2: The present is examined from two perspectives (external, internal)

Step 3: Future (desired, attainable future)

Step 4: Implementation (self, role in church, entire church)

Table groups generated ideas, hopes and dreams. A Listening Group harnessed the information to present, report and propose next steps for action at the February, 2002 congregational Discernment Sunday. Members include: Naomi Wyble, Bob Wyble, Nancy Chapman, Lowell Detweiler, Jim Smucker, Jim S. Amstutz, Don Mellinger, Dawn Yoder Harms.

February 17, 2002 Discernment Sunday Goals:

1. Share a sense of retreat process.
2. Have the opportunity to share and reflect on retreat data.
3. Reflect on common elements of the group’s dreams.
4. Invite responses and prioritize “We dream of a Church that…” for the work group to develop into a draft Vision statement to share with the congregation.

Focus Groups

A combination of Retreat participants and other congregational members were invited to form 4 Focus Groups to carry on the Vision work for AMC. The work was called “Charting Our Course.”

The Focus groups and their area of church life included:

- **Shaped by our Gifts and Vision**
organizational structure, discerning and equipping leaders
- **Across the Street and around the World**
outreach, mission, counter-culture, community, Anabaptist/Mennonite via MC USA
- **Renewing our Worship and Community life**
Christian Ed, Anabaptist/Mennonite, Christ and Church centered
- **Planning for our Growth**
space, land-use, worship services, spawning, children’s programs

Vision Steering Committee: Bob Wyble, Chair; Jim S. Amstutz, Dawn Yoder Harms, Co-pastors; Lowell Detweiler, Congregational Chair; Dale Hershey, Marlene Kaufman, Bruce McCrae, Jim Smucker, Focus Group Chairs; Nancy Chapman, Vision Listening Committee & Scribe.

From the Archives:

April 10, 2002 Congregational Council minutes.

Jim Smucker spent three Sundays during Christian Education with the MYF working on the Visioning process with them. Steering Committee continues to plan for Discernment Sunday.

Vision Statement

The following vision statement was adopted during Discernment Sunday on April 28, 2002.

Akron Mennonite Church will be fully engaged in God's mission in a broken world as we are called, equipped and sent by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ in life. Shaped by the gifts and vision of our members, we will keep Christ and church at the center of our lives as we reach out to neighbors near and far and witness to the world around us through an Anabaptist-Mennonite expression of faith.



Missional Core Values

1. God's Spirit is among God's people (the ordinary men and women in local gatherings)
2. Therefore, *God's future* is among God's people, not in some individual leader's plan.
3. The role of leadership is to create environments that release this missional imagination of the people of God so that they can discover God's plan and put it into action in their local contexts.

-The Sky is Falling by Alan Roxburgh

From the Archives:

December 1, 2003 Council Minutes

All adults will meet in Assembly room for extended discernment for Winter Quarter. Format is table group discussions with input from each Focus Group. Jim S. Amstutz and Dawn Yoder Harms begin each session with a devotional. Herman Bontrager and Susan Hershberger serve as *discernmentarians*. Bob Wyble is convener.

Transitions and Experiments

February 23, 2003 Discernment Sunday

Four items are brought to the congregation for action growing out of the vision process:

- 1. Shaped by our Gifts and Vision.** We recommend that the direction and process leading to a 'Ministry Team Structure' be approved to provide encouragement, guidance and flexibility for ministry teams to organize within the context of our AMC mission and vision statement. If approved the Congregational Council and the focus group on Gifts and Vision will develop the operating guidelines for the "Gifts and Vision Committee" and in coordination with the Leadership Selection Committee appoint the committee.
99% Affirmation
- 2. Renewing our Worship.** We recommend that for a one year period beginning September 7, 2003 that we reverse the order of our worship service and Christian Education classes. No later than June 1, 2004 the congregation will take further action on the ongoing order of services from September, 2004 onwards. If approved, the Congregational Council in consultation with the Pastoral Team and Christian Education leaders will appoint a transition team to implement this change.
77% Affirmation
- 3. Adult Christian Education.** We recommend that beginning September 7, 2003 that we transform the focus of the Adult Christian Education hour into a Sharing and Discipleship Hour. The intent is to provide more flexible options for participation in Bible Study groups, Ministry Team meetings, longer-term classes and other options as called for from the congregation. If approved, the Congregational Council and the Adult Christian Education Committee in consultation with the Leadership Coordinating Committee will appoint a "Transition Team" to oversee this process.
93% Affirmation
- 4. Planning For Growth.** We recommend that AMC hire an architectural consultant to assist in the development of a facilities and land use master plan. The consultant will be directed by a "Master Plan Task Force" of congregational members who will share information regarding our space/facilities needs in keeping with our vision, mission and Anabaptist/Mennonite values. If approved, the Master Plan Task Force will be appointed by the Congregational Council in consultation with the Growth Focus Group. Costs are not to exceed \$7500 and will be drawn from the AMC budgeted contingency fund. The Task Force will report back to the Congregational Council at regular intervals and to the congregation by December, 2003.
96% Affirmation

Outcomes

Discipleship Hour

- Leaders and offerings generated by members, not a committee
- Shift emphasis from *information* to *formation* of disciples
- Oversight Committee provides orientation for leaders
- Not bound by the quarter system
- Core Values of DH
 1. Community building
 2. Pray for and with one another
 3. Dwelling with Scripture
 4. Discussion of topic

Ministry Teams

- Formed around the gifts and passions of member(s)
- In keeping with AMC and Anabaptist mission/beliefs
- Not dependent on a committee structure
- Must have personal involvement of members
- Empowered by Missional Challenge Fund

Missional Challenge Fund

- Budgeted line item for missional activity “across the street and around the world.”
- Contingent on ideas from members and personal involvement.
- In keeping with the vision and mission of AMC and Anabaptist-Mennonite faith.

Long-Range Maintenance and Building Master Plan

- Money ear-marked for long-range maintenance and repairs
- Architect assisted in developing a comprehensive master plan for future growth
- Congregational Discernment on multi-purpose facility addition failed to pass by a narrow margin
- Storage space issues identified

Difficult Conversations

- Modeled “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love”
- Made room for divergent opinions without decision making
- Lowered anxiety by raising trust level and understanding

Listening to Scripture

Lois Barrett, Adult VBS speaker for Summer, 2003 introduced AMC to “Dwelling with Scripture.” She shared “Eight Patterns of Missional Faithfulness” from the forthcoming book *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Eerdmans, 2004). Lois is one of the contributing writers and editors of the book.

Dwelling means to literally live and inhabit a space. Dwelling with scripture is a way of entering the biblical story and to linger there, to delay our fast-paced, answer-driven, application-focused agenda, and let the text *read* us. It is to seek a deeper level of understanding and knowing that only comes by going beyond what we can observe on the surface and “dwelling in the particulars” of the biblical story. When we begin to internalize the text, it transforms us.

Darrell Guder, Mission Festival speaker for 2007, introduced AMC to a “missional hermeneutic.” *Hermes* was the Greek messenger god. *Hermeneutics* is the systematic study of calling out the meaning or message of the biblical text. A missional hermeneutic sees the whole of scripture as a *missionary* document. It explores how God calls and shapes a worshipping community, equips them to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and sends them into the world “from across the street to around the world.”

Outcomes:

Dwelling with scripture was introduced as an ongoing practice and habit in multiple settings at AMC such as Discipleship Hour, Pastoral Team meetings, small groups, and eventually Congregational Council. The Ministry Team Formation Group; Mission, Identity and Community Focus Group; the Hospitality group, and the Listening Ministry Team found this practice especially formative in their discernment and generating ministry opportunities.

One member commented “*We are doing more with the Bible now than we ever have in the life of Akron Mennonite Church.*”

Listening to One Another

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a process and conversation that helps organizations of any kind focus on the best practices and positive energy at work within its members. Mark Lau Branson, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and Mission Festival Speaker in 2005, adapted Appreciative Inquiry (AI) concepts for congregations in his book *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Alban Institute, 2004). He writes, "AI is a different way for the people of an organization to know, to communicate, to discern, and to imagine concerning themselves, their past and future.

The five Appreciative Inquiry processes:

- 1) choose the positive as the focus of inquiry
- 2) inquire into stories of life-giving forces
- 3) locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry
- 4) create shared images for a preferred future
- 5) find innovative ways to create that future

AMC organized Appreciative Inquiry Sessions with:

- Charter Members on April 17, 2005
- Small Group Leaders, April 28, 2005
- 55+ Group on November 6, 2005
- Congregational Council on May 6, 2006

From the Archives:

AMCers are open and receptive to change: Over a year ago we agreed to try several new ventures. Discipleship Hour is a new reality and going well. Missional teams are being formed, with more to come. A "master plan" for growth has been affirmed and this fall we will need to determine the next steps in that process. And we survived the change in order of service with a good spirit...over 50 persons indicated they would be willing to go either way regarding the order of service. Yes, we grumbled some...you can reread the survey taken this spring and see our honest, sometimes selfish, comments. But in the end it was summed up well by another comment "no matter what the vote, I will continue to be part of AMC."

-Lowell Detweiler, Congregational Chair

"Learnings from our year of change", AMC Newsletter, June 2004

Vision Process & Long Term Goals. The AMC Bylaws state that every five years we should be setting goals for the next five years. However, since we did the Vision process, we are on a different path at this point, and the goals are much more ongoing than just five years. It was felt that this is not a problem, but one thing it is important to keep in mind is occasionally looking at staff needs and whether or not what we have is meeting our needs

-May 10, 2005 AMC Council Minutes

Vision II and Listening to the Community

A “Missional Readiness Survey” was conducted among a cross section of AMC Members, leaders and staff. Results were discussed and adaptive change challenges generated at a **second Vision Retreat** held February 17-18, 2006 at the MCC Welcome Place. Three initiatives were identified:

1. AMC’s identity in relation to the community.

How can we be an Anabaptist-Mennonite Church in our local community? How can we listen and learn from our (literal) neighbors about being a better Christian presence in their midst and be salt, light and a city on a hill?

Outcomes:

- Mission, Identity, Community Focus Group formed around Mt.5:13-16
- Listening Ministry Team formed around Luke 10:1-12
 - The Porch Project
 - Tutors at Akron Elementary School
 - Summit Quest Academy (guitars and tutors)
 - Community interviews
- *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty* (2007 Adult VBS)

2. Making room for guests:

What does it mean to welcome guests to our church? What kind of people do we need to become to truly welcome guests as sent from God who can also teach us and have something to offer?

Outcomes:

- Hospitality experiment group dwelling with hospitality texts
- Discipleship Hour offering on Hospitality
- Hospitality Ministry Team Formed
- *Welcome Center* staffed with trained hosts

3. Membership or Discipleship:

How can we move beyond getting people to “join” AMC toward “making disciples” in the spirit of Matthew 28? What are the Spiritual habits and practices of discipleship?

Outcomes:

- Discipleship Inquiry Group format (two sessions to date)
- *An Exploration of Spiritual Formation* booklet generated
- Begin to move from Membership Committee to Discipleship Oversight

Appendix I

Adult VBS Speakers

- 2001 Nancy Heisey (*Ways of Reading the Bible*)
- 2002 John D. Roth (*By Whose Authority?*)
- 2003 Lois Barrett (*Patterns of Missional Faithfulness*)
- 2004 Calvin Shenk (*Encountering other Faiths*)
- 2005 Tom Yoder-Neufeld (*Ephesians*)
- 2006 Marilyn Houser Hamm & Marcia Bender (*Sing the Journey*)
- 2007 Bill Ehlig (*What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*)

Mission Festival Speakers

- 2001 Peter Dyck (MCC Storyteller)
- 2002 Michael Banks (Peacemaking)
- 2003 Nancy Heisey (Mennonite World Conference)
- 2004 Alan and Eleanor Kreider (The Early Church)
- 2005 Mark Lau Branson (Missional Church)
- 2006 Wilbert Shenk (Gospel and Culture)
- 2007 Darrell Guder (Bible as a missionary document)

Ministry Teams

- Gifts and Vision
- Homes of Hope
- Rybaltowski Refugee Family
- Argentina Partnership
- Every Church a Peace Church
- Mom's Morning Bible Study
- Saturday Night Worship
- Taize
- Philip Rutt Respite Care
- AMC Bible Quizzing
- Listening Ministry Team
- Hospitality

Appendix II

Missional Challenge Fund Activity 2001-2007

2001-2002 Annual Report (Outreach Committee)

- Provided funds to Goshen College's Service Inquiry Program (SIP) for Adam Roth and Elizabeth Bontrager to participate in summer service experiences in Harlan, Kentucky, and Tucson, Arizona, respectively
- Financially supported Nathan Bontrager's upcoming involvement in Eastern Mennonite Missions' Youth Evangelism Service (YES) program

2002-2003 Challenge Fund

- \$500 to Eastern Mennonite Missions' Youth Evangelism Service (YES) program for Nathan Bontrager's continuing participation in that program.
- \$70 each for three AMC elementary students—Feleen Nancarvis, Trevor Stoltzfus and Madeleine Yoder—to participate in the Warwick (School District) Association of Churches' "Released Time Religious Education Program."
- \$500 for H.A. Penner to participate in Mennonite Central Committee's 1/31-2/12/03 delegation to Colombia, South America
- Affirmed AMCer Menno Diener in his visit to the Mennonite Central Committee India program on 2/10-3/6/03.
- Supported AMCers Eileen Graybill and H.A. Penner in their 2/13-22/03 trip to Argentina to explore an emerging mission partnership opportunity between the Mennonite Churches in the VEMZO (Western) District of Argentina, the Mennonite Mission Network and Lancaster Area MC USA Atlantic Coast Conference churches.
- \$300 from its 2002-2003 Challenge Fund to help the Atlantic Coast Conference underwrite the costs of a trip to this area of Argentina's VEMZO leaders, Raul and Anita Garcia ·
- \$700 from the FY2002-2003 Challenge Fund for the Bright Side Opportunities Center in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for their capital campaign.

2004 Missional Challenge Fund Projects:

- Warwick Released Time Program – five students @ \$75 each. - \$350.
- Funds for 5 beds for Rybaltowski family -- \$375.
- Medical expenses for Rybaltowski family - \$224.
- Elizabeth Bontrager: support her first year of voluntary service with Christliche Dienst in Germany: \$500
- Support work of Border Action Network - \$500.
- Support building fund for Bible College of The Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia - \$500
- Goshen Indiana Habitat for Humanity Project - \$500
- Camp Deer Park Flood Emergency - \$2500
- Moyer Argentina Support for Current Year - \$5000
- MMN Elkhart Coordination Meeting (Penner) \$323.82
- AMC Family Christmas Florida MDS Project - \$12,000
- Support Samuel Rolon's VEMZO Partnership trip to Argentina: \$ 1200
- DSECC support for scholarships: \$5000
- Rybaltowski Family Ministry Team: \$1000

- Homes of Home Ministry Team: \$2000
- Mom's Morning Bible Study Ministry Team: \$360
- Way Station Ministry Team: \$900
- Taize Service Ministry Team: \$360
- Bible quizzing Ministry Team: \$2200
- Beyond Borders (Kris Stoesz): \$500

2005 Missional Challenge Fund Projects:

- Argentina Mission Assignment: David and Starla Moyer - \$5000
- Rebuilding of Homes destroyed by flooding in Bangladesh - \$1500
- Ephrata Area Homes of Hope Transitional Housing – \$1000
- Completion of Caribbean Theological Seminary in support of Jim and Sara Wiegner - \$500
- Peder Wiegner's Participation in Judson College's Summer Peace and Justice program in Tbilisi Georgia - \$1000
- Chris Harms' Participation in summer "Witness for Peace." in Nicaragua - \$1000
- Sing the Journey Hymnals for Bethany Mennonite Church, Vermont: - \$200
- H.A. Penner's Participation in MCC Haiti, Cuba, and Miami Learning Tour: - \$500
- Elizabeth Bontrager/ Participation of Volunteer Service Worker from Southern Hemisphere in Christliche Dienst: - \$750
- Match of Adult VBS Offering for MDS Scholarships for Disaster Management Program at Hesston College – \$1600
- Missional Church Readiness Survey – \$600
- Scholarship for Joel Nsongo at Eastern University - \$1000
- Scholarships for Kairos School of Spiritual Formation
- Financial Assistance to Bridge of Hope: \$500
- EASS Heating Fuel Fund - \$1000
- Contribution to Moro Moro Scholarship Fund - \$2500
- DSECC Scholarships - \$5000
- Bible Quizzing Ministry Team - \$2200
- H.A. Penner – Anabaptist books for Cuba - \$300
- Herman Bontrager: support participation of a Southern Hemisphere Anabaptist leader from the at the Mennonite World Conference Global Church meeting in Pasadena - \$2500
- Adam Roth's voluntary service assignment with MVS - \$2500
- MDS Continuing work - \$2350

2006 Missional Challenge Fund Projects

- Moyers' Argentina Mission w/ MMN - \$5000
- Bible Quizzing Ministry Team - \$4400
- Community Based Respite Care \$500
- Sara Roth for Botswana voluntary service project - \$1000
- Peder Wiegner for Northern Ireland Conflict Resolution Program - \$1000
- Christina Martin for Honduras Medical Mission Project - \$1000
- Bruce McCrae for Congo election monitoring - \$500
- Preaching Peace for web-authoring software for Kenton Martin - \$400
- EASS for food for Food Pantry - \$1000
- Bridge of Hope to support Conference Retreat Day - \$500

- Transportation support for Homes of Hope family - \$1250
- Porch Repair Project - \$1500
- Listening Ministry Team - \$1000
- Bible Quizzing Ministry Team - \$3350
- Ephrata Area Social Services - \$2000
- Argentina Ministry Team - \$115
- DSECC Scholarships - \$5500

2007 Missional Challenge Fund Projects:

- DSECC Board Participation in MEA Conference - \$1850
- Christina Martin for Cure International Project in Honduras - \$1000
- Travis Weaver for Flying Mission Project in Botswana -\$1750
- Matt Harms for Habitat for Humanity Project in Dominican Republic - \$1000
- Nicole Weaver for AIDS Orphanage Project in Botswana - \$1000
- Sol Amstutz for –Shirt Project for Darfur and MEDA Training - \$1750
- Kansas Tornado Relief to MC-USA and MDS - \$2500
- DH Committee/ Equipped Cluster for Damascus Road Training- \$2000
- Kairos Scholarships - \$2000
- Edgar Stoesz for publishing Paraguay book for MWC Assembly - \$2500
- Bridge of Hope Staff Day - \$800