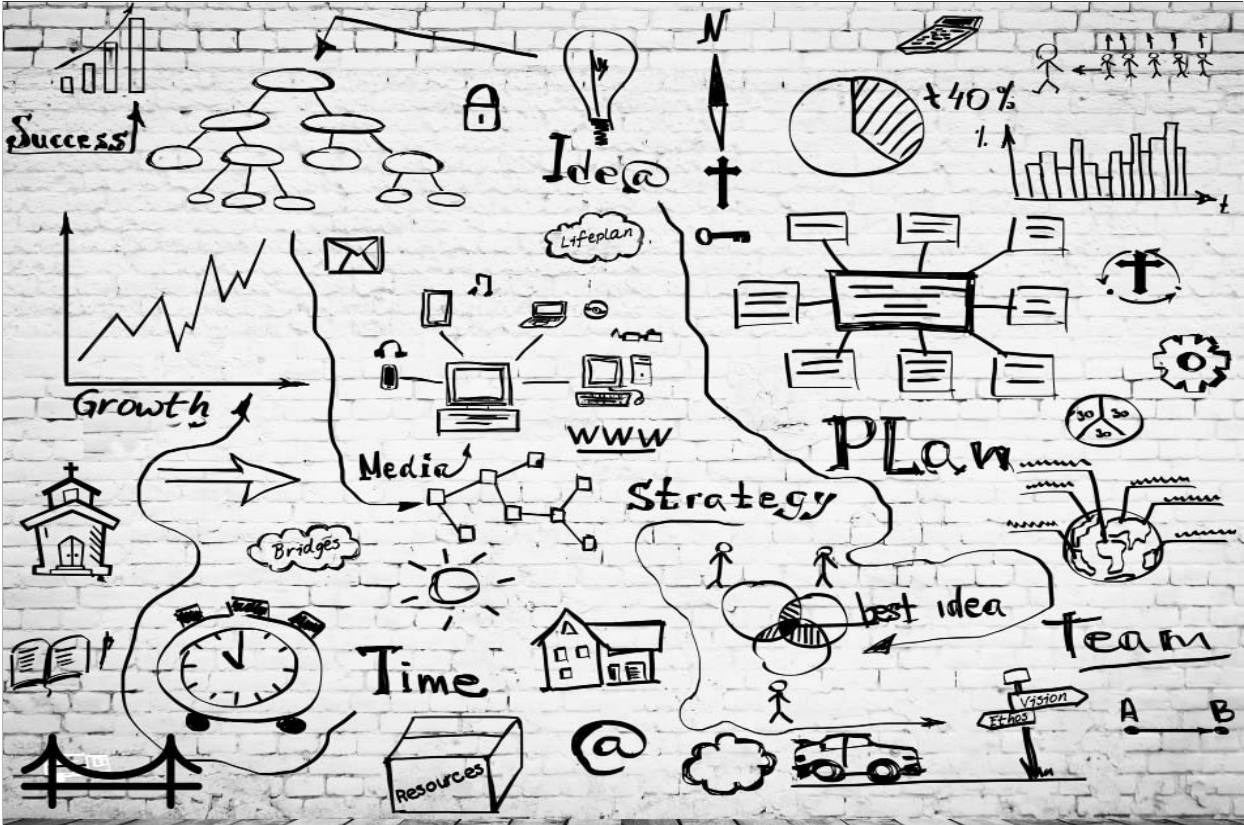


Life Plan Study Team Report



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Report of the Life Plan Study Team

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Summary

The Life Plan (2017) was initiated in October 2015 as part of a commitment to regularly review the direction and execution of the church's mission. It was also intended to provide the new leadership of the denomination, once elected, information on the state of the denomination. Discussions were held with the Network Leaders and BOA, and additional information was collected by the NLT to formulate eight themes for the Regional Gatherings of Spring 2016. Discussion notes from the gatherings were summarized and additional discussions held with the NLT to confirm the findings. Two major conclusions influenced the Going Forward statements. The first is that the rapidly increasing population of Canadians with no religious inclination will best be reached by Christians engaging in a Christ-like fashion in the community, rather than relying on conventional church programs. It is concluded that the church that Canada needs is one that accepts the responsibility for its entire community. These churches will be characterized by continuous development of disciples who are Christ centred and others focused. The denomination must emphasize the elements of its identity that support this missional approach, including the freedom to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and a methodical approach to engaging in this activity. The second conclusion is that the functioning of the church would benefit from more intentional relationships. This applies to the identification, development and continuing support of leaders, recognition of the critical role that bi-vocational pastors play in the denomination, improved communication among churches and headquarters, and a commitment to connection among all of our churches. Part of this may involve re-configuring the NLT and BOA to more efficiently conduct the work of the denomination at the current level of financial support. The MEGap process and how we mentor ministerial candidates requires some modification to ensure timely progress toward ordination and recognition of missional ministries. The Life Plan will be extended up to 12 months beyond General Conference to work with the new leadership to finalize the Going Forward plans.

Introduction

At their October 2015 meeting the Board of Administration (BOA) decided to conduct a 'Life Plan' review for presentation to the 2017 General Conference. At this same meeting Bishop Elford indicated to the BOA that he would not accept an extension of his term beyond that same General Conference. Thus, the BOA also set in motion the process of nominating a new bishop through a Bishop Leadership Task Force. The reasons to pursue a Life Plan review at this time were twofold:

- a. Life Plan is intended to be repeated on a regular basis in order to keep the direction and execution of our mission up to date and functional. The last review, the SATT, was presented to the 2011 General Conference. The current review would then be on a six-year schedule.
- b. With the impending change in leadership it was considered important to present a current perspective on our denomination to the new bishop. In this way, the new leadership would be better informed of the state of the denomination at the beginning of its tenure.

It is recognized that any Life Plan review will only yield suggestions on how the vision for the future of the denomination should shift, and how the administration of the denomination can be improved. Any change in direction must be approved by the General Conference and changes in administration must be implemented by the appropriate boards and committees (eg. BOA and Ministerial Education Guidance and Placement (MEGaP), or the bishop and National Leadership Team (NLT)). This particular review,

because of the concurrent nomination and election of a new bishop, must be especially cognisant of the new leadership. Thus, bishop-elect Cliff Fletcher has been involved in the process since his selection in December of 2016.

The Process

The Life Plan team was appointed by the BOA. It consisted of the executive of the BOA (chair, vice-chair, secretary), the chair or a designate of each BOA committee (management, leadership, church health, missions, church planting), the NLT (Bishop, Directors of Personnel, Growth Ministries, Administrative Services, Intercultural and Global Ministries, and Church Health). Additional members were added as needed to replace members who could not attend. In addition, two critical friends were appointed to provide perspective from outside the BOA and NLT. Bishop Elford later recused himself from the deliberations of the task force but remained available as a resource. The final membership of the task force is listed in Appendix A.

Initial input was received from the Board of Administration, National Leadership Team, and Network Leaders to identify areas of interest for the Life Plan review. The NLT gathered background information on several issues of concern. Topics for discussion at the 2016 Regional Gatherings were selected. In addition to all ministers, delegates and board chairs, invitations to these Regional Gatherings were extended to all board members and other leaders in the local churches. The discussions from each Regional Gathering were summarized for the Life Plan team, which further summarized the data and discussed the input at its meetings in August and October 2016. In February of 2017, the NLT was asked if the results of the Regional Gatherings reflected input they had received over the past few years, and if they felt the relative rankings from the Regional Gatherings were similar to their own.

Discussion Topics:

No particular order was used for the discussion of topics at the Regional Gatherings. In subsequent meetings, we followed the approximate order of priority established by a survey at the gatherings. The following order reflects modifications made as we discussed our moving forward direction.

1. What Kind of Churches Does Canada Need?

Introductory Note:

“The Canadian religious landscape has changed. The fastest growing segment of the Canadian population are people who are converting toward having no religious identity at all (the so-called ‘Nones’). In order to be more faithful to what God is calling us to be and do, we need to recognize that many Canadians see life very differently from us. We need to understand how much has changed and reach out beyond our comfort zones.”

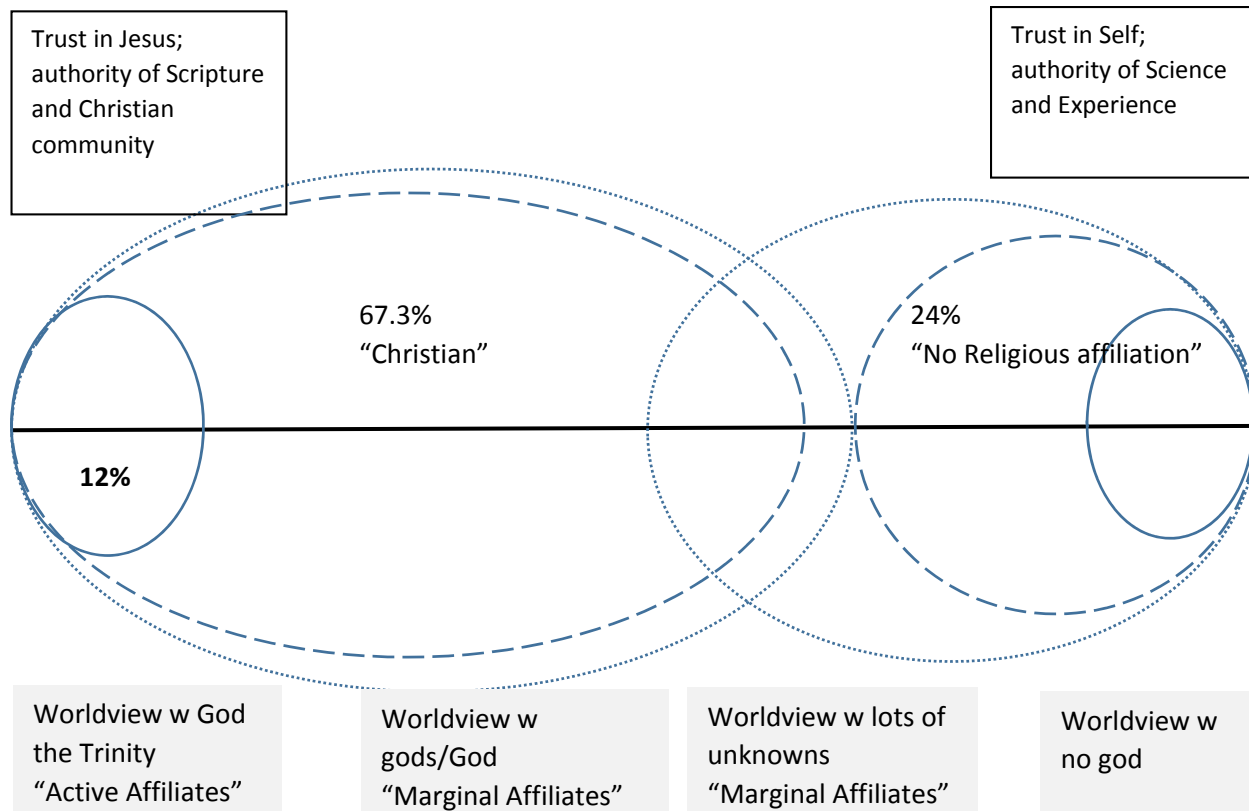


Figure 1. Our new faith landscape. Only 12% of Canada's population are Evangelicals. Approximately 45% consider themselves Christian, but that it makes no appreciable difference in the way they live. Those with no religious affiliation (Nones) account for 24% of our population. A portion of these may have been raised as Christians but consider themselves 'Done' with church.

Regional Gathering Summaries:

Two themes arose from the regional comments of where they would like to see growth in Free Methodist Churches. In both areas the emphasized and repeated words were intentional relationship, being relational, and discipleship.

1. The first theme was around descriptors of a God led, Kingdom focused church.
 - Things like open in love, welcoming differences, being missional where we are, flexible and full of grace while understanding the costs, like learning to handle dissent well, when we welcome those who don't think like us. Also improving how we deal with negative church dynamics by modeling openness, forgiveness and grace in action.
 - The desire to become a safe place to struggle, ask questions, make mistakes while being honest

- and real about the brokenness in us all.
- These desired attributes use different growth metrics and/or measures of success as well as how we educate members and equip pastors.
- This aspect of the church can be called SUPPORTIVE/NURTURING

2. The second theme was around becoming missionally focused, where application and integration is part of our everyday life in the community around us.

- Recognizing that our church services are not likely to attract the NONES and DONES, our attractiveness will be based on our ministry in the broader community.
- We need to go out and be Jesus to our communities with an awareness and understanding of our culture.
- Developing long term relationships requires us to become listeners, engaging community and being reliable to them, as well as coming to know our individual neighbours and their needs.
- This aspect of the church can be called MISSIONAL

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

The NLT and Life Plan discussed the summaries as well the metaphorical piece, 'The River' (Appendix B), and concluded the following:

The summaries were felt to be accurate and a good reflection of local realities. A few statements and questions that were added are as follows:

We need to pair asking what kind of church does Canada need with what kind of leadership does the movement need?

Many churches are presently attractional churches emphasizing the nurturing and supportive nature outlined in point one. Many leaders desire to move towards becoming a church that is Christ centered, and in becoming others orientated, goes out into our communities. This reality brings us to the challenge and work of transformation, while maintaining the support network within.

We are not giving the Canadian culture what they need. We need to stop making DONES; so how do we meaningfully engage with our neighbours taking them and our faith seriously while accompanying this thought with the realization this may not happen in the church.

Evangelical Christians tend to dictate what church looks like; the church that reaches other Canadian cultures may not be recognizable to them.

How do we steer away from quick solutions to better conversations and the implementation of those conversations?

When we have a strong national identity we work together and avoid missing mission and cultural trends which result in our becoming remote churches that are unconnected to our culture.

2. Discipleship

Introductory Note:

“Free Methodism relies on intentional discipleship as a core component of Christian formation in our churches. In order to be more faithful to what God is calling us to do we must continue to develop a culture of discipleship within our churches.”

Regional Gathering Summaries:

1. Discipleship was defined differently by individuals within each gathering, but some common characteristics existed:
 - a. It involves intentional relationships that keep us moving forward and maturing.
 - b. It is not an extra activity, but how we live in relation with others around us.
 - c. It requires a personal investment in people for the long haul.

2. Discipleship will be evident in both our personal and corporate lifestyles:
 - a. Adopting discipleship as a lifestyle requires a shift in thinking from legalistic to a natural outpouring of who we are in Christ.
 - b. It asks for an involvement of the whole church, not just our local pastors and laity, but other (our sister) churches and our NLT.

3. There are roadblocks and challenges to adopting a discipleship lifestyle:
 - a. The term is unfamiliar and daunting, causing some feelings of inadequacy. A clear definition and explanation would be helpful.
 - b. We need to be aware of our external culture, in which independence works against the community needed for discipleship to flourish; and internally where, for example, tensions may exist between an emphasis on salvation vs. discipleship.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

The Life Plan Team agreed that the summary was accurate and realized one reason discipleship was ranked high is because of its interconnectedness to other issues, therefore becoming important for the local churches to both understand and engage in it.

Question: How is this lifestyle transmitted to local church culture?

In regards to discipleship the role and support of it is very different on a national scale vs. a regional/local church scale. There is a communication gap to be dealt with.

The NLT has a big picture viewpoint. While they can't disciple churches, they have more leverage with pastors. The NLT question is, are we forming pastors who know how to lead in churches and disciple others? The implementation of the Wesleyan Way is a prime example of an NLT led time where an

active model of what discipleship looks like on a personal level is experienced. It's not a course but a way of thinking and seeing discipleship.

The head office doesn't know what is happening day to day in all the churches; therefore the local churches become the 'boots on the ground' to work out creative and appropriate responses within their local realities and unique situations.

We need to accept the long haul nature of this process and commitment. Sometimes different seasons and growth need to be gone through to prepare for the discipleship lifestyle.

3. Clarity of the FMCiC Identity

Introductory Note:

"When people healthily identify with the mission, vision and values of the FMCiC, they are able to experience the benefits of full participation in its ministry. In order to be more faithful to what God is calling us to do, we must address the lack of clarity around what it means to be a Free Methodist in our churches."

Regional Gathering Summaries:

1. The value of a denominational identity is not universally recognized.
2. Our identity is first and foremost as followers of Christ. Denominational identity is secondary.
3. People will be attracted to a local church by the way its people live, not by its denominational label. Even FM transfers will seek out another Free Methodist church based on their experience in their previous church.
4. Our attractiveness as a FM church is only as effective as our doctrines, beliefs, distinctives and emphasis are in affecting how we live.
5. The connection between our heritage and beliefs and our local church character is not always recognized.
6. Our beliefs, distinctives and history can be important parts of our character if presented well, consistently and with understanding.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

Taking in and agreeing with the summaries presented from the regional gatherings it was recognized that

Identity and What Kind of Church are closely tied together. We must be clear on what aspects of our identity support our view of the missional church in Canada.

4. Denominational Ecosystem

Introductory Note:

"Our denominational ecosystem is the interrelated way by which we sustain and nurture life together as local churches, pastors, and lay leaders. In order for us to be more faithful to what God is calling us to do

we need to take a deeper look at the functioning of our denominational ecosystem.”

Regional Gathering Summaries:

Many aspects of the ecosystem are included in other divisions of the documents. In wanting to be a connectional church, following God’s trinitarian relational nature, we can experience the importance and necessity of sharing ourselves and resources as a collective (like financial, spiritual, community, logistic and human resources). Healthy ecosystems build compassion, love and promote what unifies with connection and communication while breaking down status condemnation and fear.

The comments fell into 3 areas of ecosystems.

Ecosystems within the Denomination

The comments tended to fall into two areas.

1. *Training and education.*
 - A need (desire) of training for pastors and those coming into leadership for their situations and levels.
 - Paying attention to changing culture and attitudes.

2. *Creating space for healthy connection and relationship.*
 - There are frustrations with development systems which may benefit from fine tuning. MEGAP is a good system that has been recognized by those becoming shepherding and teaching pastors but has limited flexibility.
 - Transitions for both churches and pastors are stressful to the point of creating fear. This relates to the time and persons involved in making a successful transition. At the time of transition the failure to engage leadership from either head office or a transitional pastor extends the time, often to more than a year.
 - How to help struggling networks and their leaders.
 - Mentoring and a resource person for pastors.
 - NLT reaching out to and responding to local congregations.

Ecosystems within the local church.

Again two areas emerged.

1. *The necessity of intentional relationship.*
 - Flowing out of relationship and the leading of God we get to know members and those in community.
 - Taking time to understand the views of each other concerning the roles and expectations we have of the members of the church community (pastor, officials, members).
 - Ongoing mentorship and discipleship, built into the rhythm of living, brings us to seeing and living God’s bigger vision.
 - The relationship between the NLT and the local church is something built from both sides.

2. *Education.*
 - Understand who we are, our identity.
 - Delegate and leadership training.
 - There is a poor understanding of Core at many levels among our congregations, and the connection to stewardship.

- Congregational understanding of denominational processes and ecosystems is lacking.

Ecosystems of local church to local church.

1. *The desire for relationship.*
 - Lay leadership and congregational ecosystems
 - Encouraging commitment to each other; like it's interdependence with resources and mentoring as well as helping one another connect with their communities.
 - Connecting church plants with existing churches.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

After agreeing with what was shared in the Regional Gatherings, the Life Plan Team went on to say that, 'What kind of church does Canada need?' is a central question to our ecosystem. This needs to be solidified for everything to make sense.

To have ecosystems that create the leaders and churches that we need is one place where the NLT's denominational oversight becomes an important component. With their unique overview they can keep the important things in view for the churches as a whole.

5. Young Leaders and Development of Competent Godly Leaders

Introductory Note:

"A healthy organization must be led by Godly competent leaders. In order to engage with the present and prepare for the future we must develop new generations. To be more faithful to what God has called us to do, we must address the issue of leadership recruitment and development.

Of our 113 organized societies in Canada, 35 are currently being led by individuals who are in the tracking process. This includes 13 who are lay ministers, 15 who are ministerial candidates, and 7 who were ordained in another denomination and transferred to the FMCiC. Individuals who are tracking are normally guided by their lead pastor. In the case of a lead pastor who is tracking, they are to receive direction from their Network Leader or the Director of Personnel.

Regional Gathering Summaries:

A large portion of the data focused on the development of young leaders. It also shows that leadership and discipleship are closely connected. Thus, the following points became evident. (Discussions on tracking are found in the Ecosystem and Discipleship sections).

Identifying Young Leaders

1. Leadership is identified at a young age within the family and in the church where Jesus is a part

- of their natural rhythm.
2. Canada now has a second generation of youth who believe that having no religion is better than having one. Young people are asking questions to discover a faith that meets their spiritual needs and helps them engage meaningfully with Christianity in their culture.
 3. Youth are looking for healthy relationships and mentoring which identifies giftings for leadership and ministry
 4. Youth take leadership roles, which will allow them to develop and the congregation to expand its view of church traditions.
 5. Leadership may begin at the local church level where leadership skills are identified or it can begin where the individual feels his/her call. Often leadership needs to be affirmed and nourished before it can blossom. Leadership development requires the time investment of individuals, the local church and/or the denomination. Leadership involves recruiting, mentoring, coaching and tracking... (Tracking is a denominational process for credentialing).

Developing Godly Leadership

1. Leadership formation occurs during ministry in the local church, while the denomination must credential these leaders as they expand their role.
2. Leaders come from local churches that intentionally disciple and develop Godly leaders. Small group leaders may eventually lead congregations.
3. Continuing education helps leaders to develop their skills, and inward character. It broadens their ability to deal with the changing Canadian culture.
4. In Canadian church culture, leaders are needed who can recognize and actively adjust to congregational or societal changes occurring around them.

Network Leaders

Leadership development does not end when a pastor is appointed to lead a congregation. Ongoing development is part of our pastoral network system.

1. A network leader is a volunteer pastor who encourages and supports local pastors for group encouragement and benefit.
2. Network meetings consist of individuals reporting in, professional development, prayer, and personal commitment.
3. Effectiveness varies with each group and is dependent on the individual investment of time.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

After reflecting on the summaries, it was stated that developing Godly leaders was a great concern for the NLT. Young people are looking for training beyond the local church. The present tracking system seems to deter some, particularly church planters, from pursuing leadership.

6. Communication

Introductory Note:

“Healthy two-way communication is essential for a robust organization. In order to be more faithful to what God has called us to do, we must address the issue of communication.”

Regional Gathering Summaries:

1. Communication is key to the denominational ecosystem and identity. It must share information and needs.
2. Communications must be intentional, with a clear purpose.
3. Communications must be directional, being addressed to a specific target.
 - Communication must be directed to the appropriate individuals be they pastors, delegates, treasurers, youth workers, or administrative assistants etc.
 - Communication goes both ways, with local churches initiating communication to the larger church as well as vice versa. A time to tell stories.
4. Communications are subject to bottlenecks (on the pastor's laptop).
 - Need for response includes recognition of importance and mutual trust.
 - Avoid overload in general and seasonally.
 - Local church needs functioning internal network.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

The NLT agrees with these statements and realizes the importance of communication. Communication is a problem for organizations because there is so much information out there and people use technology to get the information they need. To be effective, communication needs a relational component. It also needs an objective eye who constantly evaluates what is happening.

7. Bi-Vocational Pastors

Introductory Note:

“At least 50% of our churches currently function with bi-vocational leadership. In order to be more faithful to what God is calling us we must grapple with current realities of Bi-Vocational pastoral ministry.”

Although the proportion of pastors who are bi-vocational is very high in church plants (23 of 25), we have even more bi-vocational pastors leading organized societies (40). In addition to the roughly 45% of lead pastors in organized societies and church plants (63 of 138), numerous support pastors are also bi-vocational.

Regional Gathering Summaries:

1. Bi-vocational pastors play a critical role within Canadian church culture, including that of the Free Methodist Church in Canada.
2. Some bi-vocational pastors have talents in supplemental employment that they can use to advantage to serve the church and the community.
3. Our present denominational system, including networks, needs adjustment to properly support and accommodate the bi-vocational pastor as they attempt to balance church, supplemental employment, and personal scheduling.

4. A mutual understanding of the role of pastor and role of the church congregation, in this situation, is essential to enable a properly functioning team in the church and in the community. ie: What portion of the ministry will be carried by the congregation to assist their part time pastor?

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

Bi-vocational pastors, with its complexities, continues to be on the NLT radar. There is a need to develop a system that is geared to these ministers. The church will move from a one person model to a mighty army of people working together. Every pastor in Quebec would like to be full time if they had the choice. Some churches resist going from full time to part time because it is viewed as poor church health. Bi-vocational could be an effective strategy, not a hindrance.

8. Connection

Introductory Note:

“Although connection is a core value of the FMCiC, some people are feeling less connected. In order to be more faithful to what God has called us to do, we must address the issue of what links us together.”

Regional Gathering Summaries:

5 Points (excludes many specific suggestions on how to increase connection e.g. pulpit sharing etc.)

1. Conflicting priorities were expressed: Our local congregations all enjoy a degree of independence but differ in the degree of collaboration or connection that they desire with other churches in their community and within the denomination.
2. While current operations facilitate connection among pastors, there is much less opportunity for lay leaders to connect within counterparts in other FMCiC churches for support in their ministries.
3. Our cultural bias of ‘What’s in it for me (us)?’ must be countered with the importance of our relationships to other believers.
4. Requires leadership starting within healthy local churches: Pastors, delegates, and lay leaders, who attend, organize, share.
5. May be held back by geography and time restrictions.

Reflections of the NLT and LifePlan:

The Lifeplan team felt this summary was a good representation. In conversation the following points came out:

With connectionalism being one of our values it becomes an expectation and needs to be managed to ensure it’s happening.

While the talk and desire for connectionalism is a reality, there seems to be little walk to actually make it happen. This may be due to the many things that have been lost that previously offered connection ie: Aldersgate experience. We need to rethink and recognize how connectionalism is present in today's church.

Having an FM presence at Tyndale and Briercrest has resulted in leaders to the FM movement.

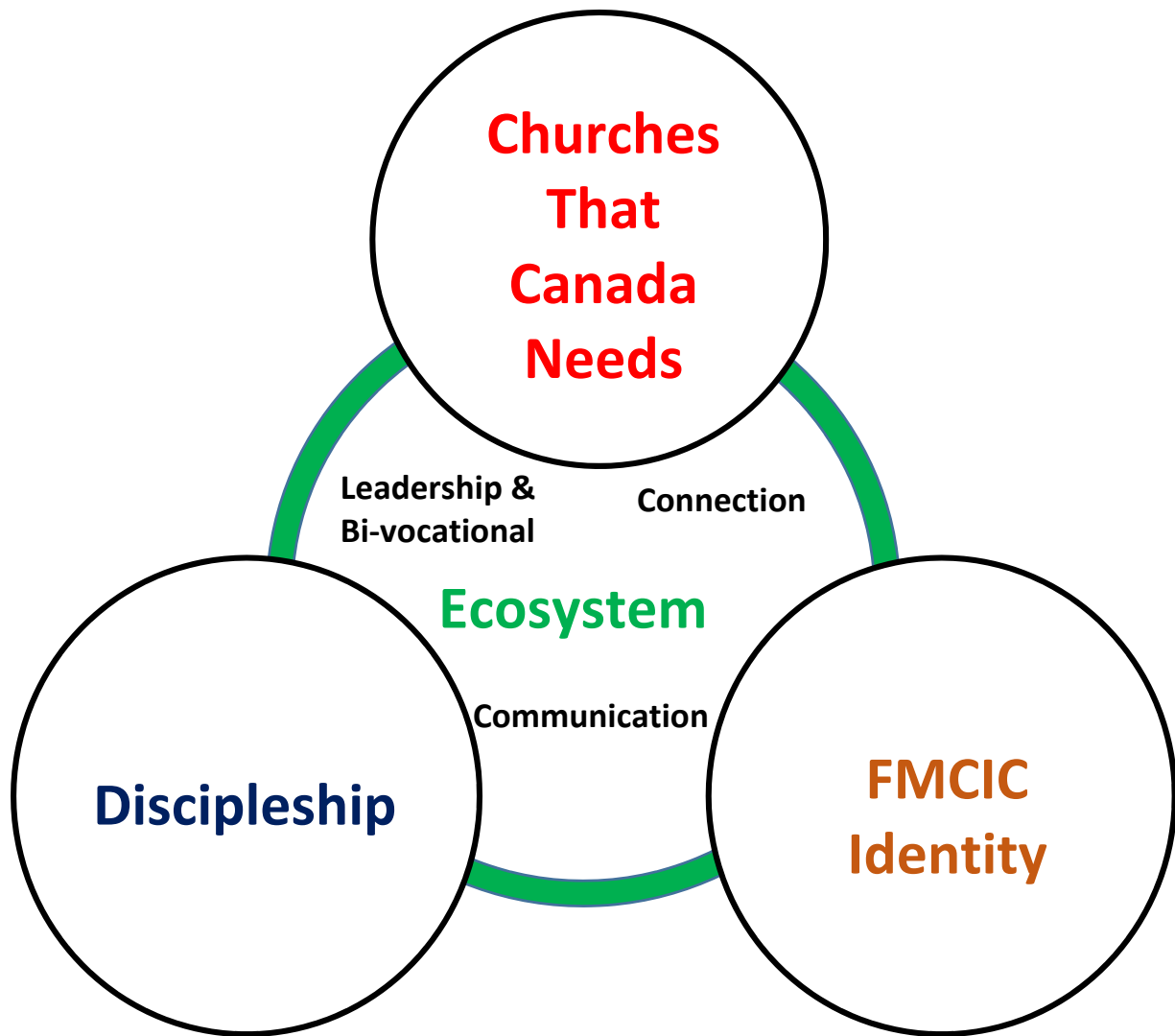
Going Forward

Three of the themes discussed by the Regional Gatherings and Life Plan team are seen as pillars of our going forward vision. These are 'What kind of church does Canada need?', Discipleship, and FMCI Identity. They are closely interrelated and so, although discussed separately, must have a common goal.

Unless we as a denomination and individual churches focus our attention on our entire community, including the Nones and Dones, our society will continue to see an increasing proportion of Canadians who do not recognize any merit to a relationship with God or the church.

As Canada changes (the river has moved), it is going to require us as churches (bridges to those across the river) to accept responsibility for our community and develop new ways of engaging with them and leading them into relationship with God (building new bridges).

Taking this as our goal, we can look at each of the pillars.



What kind of church does Canada need?

Unless our churches accept the responsibility for their entire community, we will not be the church that Canada needs.

Community includes not only those with connections to the congregation, but also those living in church's neighbourhood. This is not an easy task. We are currently out of balance. In many cases, it will require a letting go of a predominantly support/nurturing model and balancing that with a missional orientation towards our communities. The balance of the Supportive/Nurturing and Missional components within each church will change and all churches will find themselves living on the edge. They will need the understanding of one another in sister churches (Connection) and the denomination

(Identity) as they face the challenge. Local churches, that the mission needs, could be described this way:

1. Free – free to act on where the Spirit is leading, on what the mission requires, and on what the church learns and knows so far (Why haven't we already accepted this, like actually?)
2. Methodical – willing to ask honest questions by attempting to measure both the tangibles and intangibles (disciple-making, evangelistic effectiveness, intentional engagement)
3. Responsive – willing and able to take appropriate action
4. Constantly reforming – willing and able to evaluate and change on an ongoing and never-ending basis

The challenge is to implement this missional component while maintaining the support and nurturing network within.

“What is the end (or purpose) of all ecclesiastical (church) order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love? Order, then, is valuable so far as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is worth nothing.” John Wesley

Discipleship

Discipleship is defined as an intentional, organic and transformative relationship that Jesus modeled for each of us. The purposes of discipleship include: 1) nurturing the church family, 2) learning God's word, 3) worshipping, 4) and participating in God's mission in the world.

In order for a church to be missional in its approach, it must be constantly developing disciples who are Christ centred, and others focused. This is a continuing, long term process for both individuals and churches. An underlying emphasis on discipleship will yield individuals open to the spirit's direction for ministry in the local community and, for some, a call to leadership in the denomination.

Unless our local churches decide to constantly develop disciples who are Christ centred and others focused, we will not achieve the missional approach needed by our communities.

National leadership can, and have, prepared and identified materials that can be used, but cannot lead discipleship programs within each local church. Part of accepting the responsibility of ministry is to act on the need to develop effective disciples.

Free Methodist Church in Canada Identity

Our identity as a church, and success in ministry, is based on how our doctrines, beliefs, values, and vision affect how we live our daily lives.

Unless the Free Methodist Church in Canada emphasizes the aspects of our identity that promote the missional approach, it will fail to provide the support our local churches need to reach their communities.

We see our identity to include:

1. Freedom

- a. To think about and explain our story in ways that make sense to the local context
- b. To make disciple-making a priority
- c. To organize in a way that makes sense locally and in collaboration with the broader Free Methodist community
- d. To risk and try
- e. To be together. We need each other because there is richness in diversity. We partner with people and churches that are different
- f. To take the long view and patiently work at whatever it takes

2. Methodical

- a. As we work at knowing and developing our story and identity
- b. As we work at our relationships with other churches
- c. As we work at making disciples and forming character for mission
- d. As we work at building bridges to our communities
- e. As we work at understanding the broader Canadian context in exploring what works and what doesn't work
- f. As we take the long view and work at continuously re-forming

The remaining themes seem to fall together as a network of structures connecting and supporting the main pillars. This, in a way, is how we initially defined the Ecosystem, and the interdependence of the five themes means that they must work to hold us together. A common point raised for all of these themes was the need for intentional relationships. Although the details have not been worked out, we recognize the need for the following:

Denominational Ecosystem

- 1. To support churches and pastors to make the changes needed through the following four themes: leadership development, bi-vocational pastors, communication and connection.
- 2. To provide a higher level of personal support for network leaders, ministers, and ministerial candidates (such as personal coaching).
- 3. To examine ways to re-configure the NLT and BOA to more efficiently conduct the work of the denomination at the current level of financial support.

Leadership Development

1. To emphasize and support the key role that local churches have in leadership development. Local churches are responsible for identifying youth, second career, men and women who give evidence of giftings and will respond to God's call. Churches are to empower and encourage them, and channel them in the appropriate direction for ministry in pastoral roles or as lay leaders in the community and the church.
2. To expand the scope covered by the MEGaP process to include such ministries as church planting and missional outreach in Canada
3. To ensure that all candidates have a mentor to help them develop and progress towards ordination in a timely manner
4. To better define the role of Network Leaders and provide additional support for continuing development of all pastors

Bi-vocational Pastors

1. To recognize the critical role that bi-vocational pastors (40% of our lead pastors) play in both our church plants and organized societies
2. To better accommodate the needs of bi-vocational pastors to balance church, supplemental work, and family when organizing pastoral gatherings
3. To ensure that congregations and pastors have a realistic understanding about responsibilities in a bi-vocational church, and to create a workable model for use in bi-vocational situations

Communication

Communication problems exist, and these need to be addressed as we evolve our strategy of going forward. This involves a commitment:

1. To reviewing and improving communications between the denomination and local churches on an ongoing basis
2. To give our churches the opportunity to tell their story to the family of Free Methodist churches in Canada

Connection

This is a core value that requires commitment from both local churches and the denomination. This will include a commitment:

1. To identify and promote new sources of connection among our churches, pastors, and laity. Sources of connection that predominated in the past, such as the Aldersgate (or Spring Arbor or Robert's Wesleyan) connection, annual conferences and family camp, must be transitioned to new connections which will serve us well into the future. This will include Tyndale and Briercrest connections, continuing camp programs, intercultural identity, and other activities among individuals and churches.

Finishing the Task

The Life Plan team was charged with better defining our vision, as well as identifying ways to improve our administration or how we function. It was recognized that these changes must be made with the full support of the new leadership in the denomination. While our vision is nearly complete, the refinement and implementation of administrative changes will take more time. Therefore, the BOA has approved an extension of the Life Plan for up to 12 months beyond General Conference to complete the project.

Appendix A: Members of the Life Plan Task Force

Gregory Ford (Chair)	Lay	Ontario
Harold Gonyou	Lay	Saskatchewan
Evelyn Lawrence	Lay	Ontario
Darryl Dozlaw	Clergy	Saskatchewan
Michael Tesema	Clergy	Ontario
Rodney Peterson	Clergy	Ontario
Tamera Goller	Lay	Alberta
Tanya Prinsep	Lay	Ontario
Ian Isaak	Clergy	Saskatchewan

Critical Friends

Elle Pyke	Ontario
Laurie Cook	Ontario

NLT

Kim Henderson
Jared Siebert
Mark Molczanski
Dan Sheffield
Marc McAlister

The River

A Metaphor for the Current Free Methodist Church

The metaphor of a river changing course, played a significant role in the LifePlan team's discernment of the future direction of our movement.

Here's the basic story.

Ever since the Fall, life on earth has been divided by a metaphysical river—an uncrossable boundary—between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven. The river was never God's intention. Instead it was formed when human beings decided to establish their own kingdom on earth- a kingdom apart from God. Ever since that dividing river began to flow, it has always been the practice of the kingdom of heaven to build bridges from its side of the river to the other. These bridges are the means by which the people from the kingdom of this world could be pointed toward reconciliation with their rightful king and make their home once again in His kingdom. For generation after generation, God has seen fit to partner with His people to build bridges across this great divide. He built bridges through Abraham. He built bridges through the Children of Israel. He continues to this day, building bridges through His Church. Generation after generation, this bridge building has continued. Generation after generation, this bridge building will continue until He comes again.

Until only a short while ago it was relatively commonplace to find Canadians making regular use of these bridges. If they needed direction, if they struggled with a moral issue, if they were afraid, if they needed help marking a life milestone, it occurred to them to look for one of our bridges in hopes of finding what they needed. When they did seek out a bridge, there were all kinds of people, ready to help, and ready to lead them across the river. However, with time, something started to change.

Sometime in the not-too-distant-past, the river began to change its course. The landing points on the world's side of the river—landing points our carefully constructed bridges depended on—began to shift. The river began to change course and soon our bridges were no longer spanning the river. Canadians who, at one time would have sought us out, are now



beginning to look elsewhere. This group of Canadians has grown by nearly 500% in the past 30 years.¹

The Free Methodist Church in Canada currently finds itself here: the river in Canada has changed its course and many Free Methodist bridges do not span the river at all... Complaining about this won't help us. Waiting for the river to begin flowing under our existing bridges isn't a viable option either. Our best response is to become a movement of bridge builders. This means several important things for us:

First, we will need a community of surveyors. We need people who will actively look for new landing points in Canadian culture and set out to build new bridges there. Church planting has historically played this role in our movement—this should continue. However, the work cannot



be limited to church planters alone. All Free Methodist churches will need to work on surveying projects of their own.

Second, we will need freedom. Local churches and church plants will need to be free to build wherever and however makes sense in the context. We'll need to make all kinds of attempts at this. This will result in a diversity of forms, methods, and results.

Third, we'll need to be methodical. We're going to need bridge building engineers: people who can sift through the pile of interesting ideas and begin to find bridge building principles.

This won't happen overnight. It may take years. We will need to patiently and methodically engage in this work. We'll have to get real with each other and ourselves about what is and what isn't working. We'll need to collectively learn from our failures and our successes. We'll all need to take those lessons to heart and allow this to change what we do on the ground. Above all, we'll need to trust God. The Holy Spirit has led, is leading, and will continue to lead us into the future. This is God's mission and we are joining in as a partner. We have all we need. We just need to use it.

¹ Canada's Changing Religious Landscape, Pew research