

FINAL REPORT

SUBMITTED TO: Preston Mennonite Church,
Wanner Mennonite Church, &
Fairview Mennonite Home

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Introduction

In November 2018, the Synergy Group, made up of members of Preston Mennonite Church (Preston), Wanner Mennonite Church (Wanner), and Fairview Mennonite Home (Fairview), met with Betty Pries of Credence and Co. (Credence) *to discuss the idea of the three groups remaining independent while sharing joint leadership in some fashion.* The three organizations subsequently contracted with Credence to facilitate a series of conversations regarding this idea.

Betty Pries and Jessica Dyck of Credence met with the Church Council of Wanner and Preston on January 24, 2019 and January 30, 2019 respectively, and with the Executive Director of Fairview on January 30, 2019. Credence met with each congregation individually on March 3, 2019, following which a survey was sent to each congregation for distribution to their attendees. Credence met with both congregations together on April 7, 2019. The following report is a summary of the outcomes of these conversations.

Background Information

Wanner and Preston are relatively near to one another; they occasionally engage in activities together; both are smaller congregations and both feel energized by various ministry initiatives. Both congregations are facing challenges associated with declining numbers and both anticipate a leadership change/decision in 1.5 years. Both congregations also welcome participants from Fairview. At the time that this project began Fairview was reviewing its strategy for spiritual care. All three bodies were interested in exploring how their ministries could be strengthened by sharing pastoral staff.

Fairview's Engagement

While Fairview was originally part of the conversation with Wanner and Preston, Fairview's own strategic planning process led to a discerned need for a Director



of Spiritual Care and Culture, leaving no monies available for shared ministry with Wanner and Preston. While an option presented itself to build a closer connection between Preston and Fairview, this option was not seen as viable by either Wanner or Preston, effectively removing Fairview from the shared ministry conversation. Nonetheless, Preston, Wanner, and Fairview remain committed to reflecting on how their ministries can support one another.

Strengths and Challenges of Shared Ministry: Wanner & Preston

Strengths

- Preston and Wanner share an Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition of faith.
- Wanner and Preston recognize that their anticipated leadership decisions in 1.5 years creates a unique moment when a shared form of ministry might be possible, allowing each congregation to be strengthened.
- The physical proximity of the congregations allows shared leadership resources to be easily imagined.
- The conversation regarding a shared leadership model creates energy by inviting congregations to dream bigger together. In a sense, this process is 'reverse engineering' a larger church, where multiple staff can be hired according to their core skill sets. This holds exciting potential.
- As congregations of relatively equal strength, Preston and Wanner are excellent conversation partners for this process. There appears to be a natural pairing between Preston and Wanner (both are churches that, while different from one another, have similar needs). There is also precedence for this type of pairing in other denominational settings.

Challenges

- The congregations of Wanner and Preston have different cultures as seen in the congregations' routines for planning Sunday morning worship, organizational structures, theological emphasis, and mission/visions. Each has worked to create a mission statement; each statement is good – but



they are different. Some worry whether the congregations will be able to work effectively together across these differences to select leaders and/or whether shared leadership can effectively lead two distinct groups.

- The available monies from Wanner and Preston for shared ministry positions is not yet clear.

Congregational Direction

- It appears that both Wanner and Preston would benefit from further conversation regarding where God is leading them. While Preston has the benefit of newcomers joining them from Fairview due to their close proximity, Wanner does not have this natural source of new participants. Further, while Preston appears to align with a focus on serving seniors, Wanner does not appear as much at ease with this identity. Looking ten or more years into the future, each congregation faces significant further decline (though this may be less true for Preston if 'seniors' becomes Preston's expressed mission). This suggests that the congregations will be served by the question: Do we want to live? If the answer to this is yes, the moment for creative thinking, dreaming and hard conversations is now.
- Both Wanner and Preston have decades of experience in planting, growing, and nurturing people and projects, and both congregations are at a fitting moment in time to turn to legacy thinking. As each looks ten years into the future what does each want to plant, grow, and nurture for that future congregation, and/or community? What implications does this suggest for the current membership? Mission/vision? Organizational structure?

Learning from other Shared Congregational Ministry Contexts

- The idea of shared ministry between congregations is less common in Mennonite churches but frequently seen in other denominations. In these places, shared ministry is often referred to as a 2-point or 3-point (or even 5-point) charge, based on the number of participating congregations.



- To pursue such an idea, Wanner and Preston would maintain their unique leadership councils while nonetheless developing a shared lay leadership structure to facilitate joint decision-making, as necessary.
- Having different congregational ways of being does not seem to be an impediment to shared ministry. Challenges do present themselves in the following areas: Learning to make hiring decisions together; jointly addressing ongoing employment questions; resisting us-them ways of thinking, and developing a code-of-conduct with regard to how congregations speak of – and relate to – one another.

Constellation of Possibilities

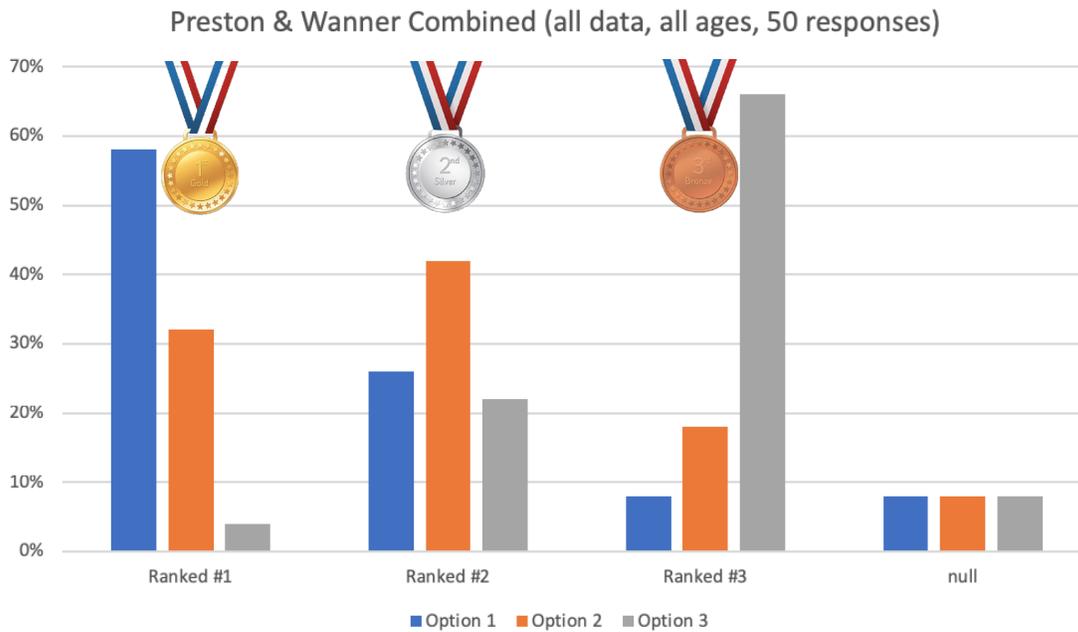
Given the data collected from each congregation's leadership bodies, the congregations were presented with three options for further discernment, along with a fourth "unknown" option, leaving space for creative thinking beyond the three presented options. This was tested at a congregational meeting and via a survey. The three options provided were as follows:

1. Shared pastoral leadership for Wanner and Preston
 - a. One focused on Preaching, Worship, & Pastoral Care and one focused on Mission & Pastoral Care
 - b. While the available dollars is not yet clear, it is assumed that the two positions would equal approximately 1.5 FTE.
 - c. Following the appointment of these two leaders, one or both would support the congregations in determining their senses of identity and purpose.
2. Processes with each, Preston and Wanner, to determine each congregation's identity and purpose. The decision regarding whether to pursue joint ministry and what joint ministry would involve would be made after these processes are complete.
3. Shared leadership with Preston and Fairview



Survey Findings

A total of 50 survey responses were collected, 58% of responses were from Preston and 42% of responses were from Wanner.





Findings from Preston



Findings from Wanner





April 7, 2019 Congregational Meeting

The congregational meeting on April 7, 2019, held at Preston with both congregations present, invited the congregations to review the outcomes of the survey and the emerging direction of the congregations. The conversation raised several questions for the Synergy Committee's further consideration:

- How will worship time shift for each congregation to accommodate pastors moving from one congregation to another?
- How large would the hiring group for the pastoral search be?
- Is there room, in the long haul, for the two congregations to become one?
- What is being done to develop lay leadership?

Next Steps

Each congregation is planning to take a vote on April 28, 2019 on a motion related to Option 1. If the decision passes, the congregations are invited to consider the following steps to operationalize this decision.

1. Develop the internal structure to operationalize a 2-point charge (could be done by June 30)
 - a. Appoint a joint personnel committee with people who embody the values of thinking together
 - b. Ensure joint personnel committee is connected into church structures
 - c. Develop TOR for how to work together (incl. speaking kindly of one another)
 - d. Establish how communication between the congregations is maintained
2. Develop a vision for shared leadership positions (could be done by Dec 31)



- a. Include vision for roles/expectations, how positions are shared between congregations, how each participates in and/or leads ongoing congregational visioning, etc.
 - b. Determine available dollars, number of hires, job descriptions of the hires
 - c. Consider practicalities, such as worship times
 - d. Articulate a vision for relating to Fairview
 - e. Develop congregational profiles (CIF)
3. Post positions (After Jan 1)
 4. Hire; maintain ongoing structure

Conclusion

It has been an honour to work with Preston, Wanner and Fairview. We wish all Fairview, the congregations and the Synergy Group well as they discern their ongoing direction.