

Fuller Detail of What has been accomplished in the last 17 months.

First in this "report" is to remind all that at that same meeting in 2018 we introduced the newly hired Transitional Conference Minister who has now been actively working to develop communication and trust over a wide range of "brokenness" in several settings of our conference. In similar vein, numerous meetings are held with various stakeholders attempting to begin implementation of those parts of the plan which can be done without formal constitutional change or the more formal aspects of relocating possible regional sites or staff.

Outdoor Ministry

Second, the BOD, following many years of emotionally challenging conversations recommended at the same meeting the selling of one camp and bringing back on-line our temporarily moth balled camp, Templd Hills. With over \$750,000 reinvested in the basic infrastructure of the camp so that we can assure camp goers of safe and dependable facilities, the BOD (see accompanying Outdoor Ministry Article for fuller details) has affirmed recent recommendations that will turn attention toward improvements in adding amenities and programming, including the hiring of an architect to plan some key renovations and additions. Most recently the Board completed approval of the first official set of Outdoor Ministry Policies done in many years that provide consistent rules assuring uniform experiences across our Outdoor Ministry program. Also, 2019 saw a search for an Executive Director, introduced to the conference 5 months ago. Since the hiring of Jill Frey, the summer outdoor ministry program had its earliest roll out in years, our current registrations are up 50 compared to the same time as last year, and numerous groups have been consulted with much needed insights into specific, continued upgrades, being identified and planned for, to continue to build a quality camping experience. (all in 5 months).

A New Name – Heartland Conference

Third, as per the report to the Conference 17 months ago, a first consideration was given to naming this new entity. That was accomplished at the last meeting of the Conference with our name change to Heartland Conference. Between the legalities of simply changing a name and the desire to be good stewards in rolling out such things as branding, materials, etc., it meant we have begun to live into that name and at a recent meeting of all the stakeholder staff and then the Board, the practicality of how, now to bring the Associations into a similar context of "renaming" reflective of "one organism" is clearly part of our restructuring effort.

Shared Ministry

Fourth, as the vision report also mentioned, it stressed the importance of "living into" our one organism concept. In the report it stressed beginning with "shared practices" that can be employed even if the particulars of "centers" or final distributions of staff are yet to be determined. To that end, the following "shared practices" have been engaged this last year around the following needs:

- Lay school education program uniformity
- Procedures for Church and Ministry across our Association boundaries that are uniform
- Regular meetings of Association Ministers and Conference Minister to drive next step processes
- Possible realignment of the Board of Directors from the model that has persons elected to the Board who do not sit on Association Boards to one where those who are in the Association leadership positions become the BOD. Although legalities mean we cannot go forward with this

formally we can begin to model it informally and several meetings have been held to better communicate both progress and deal with the anxiousness as we proceed ahead.

- Similarly, as permission was given for Living Water to proceed with a "living into" model that was recently affirmed as an official organization (again in 2019) two more of our associations, CSE and SONKA will begin conversations around closer working relationships.
- As 2018/2019 work to reconcile a complete financial picture in accordance with newly determined audit suggestions is nearing completion, the BOD is turning its sights toward a major goal of the vision implementation strategy, namely unifying our financial practices. Again, this is being attempted as a "live into" proposition, first starting some new practices at the Conference level, and inclusion of those association who are ready to change to a unified provider, and then, to a mechanism that all will buy into.
- When looking at the Shared Practices list of those areas perceived to be quickest to engage in, beyond those mentioned earlier that fall under the rubric of Church and Ministry, Faith Formation has made some significant progress as well. The implementation of the "Learn It, Live It, Share It" initiative, just completing its second major equipping event, is prepared to offer "facilitators" to aid Associations and local churches to build Faith Formation initiatives that fit their identified needs. Integration of the initiative into our Outdoor Ministry work is also proceeding forward.
- Wider Church Relationships, which primarily happen in the current structure through the work of the Conference Minister, a first round of engagement and participation in multiple wider church settings has been completed. Each gathering brings home new information and work has begun to develop better integration between the attendance at certain events and practical "take homes" that can influence our life together. Most recently, because of attendance of our TCM on a trip to Bangladesh/India a relationship was built that encourages a joint application for a Lilly Grant and permission to pursue a first step process of showing interest in pursuit of a \$1,000,000 grant.
- The Social Witness focus area (what to say here?)
- The communication and marketing focus has seen a significant step forward with the hiring of Nikki Shaw in June. A shared position across three conferences, Nikki has begun to bring her gifts of marketing and communication which will come in near term solutions to a more user-friendly website, more frequent communications, and more consistent branding. A next step challenge after the initial modifications are made in the next few months within the "conference" portion of communication will be tackling the issue of fuller integration of conference and association communications. At this point, we still are operating out of a model of programming and communication that is siloed within the configuration of separate entities Associations and Conference while attempting to move toward a model that is fully integrated. A practical application of this is: How can we design a site that helps us all know quickly about the ministries across the full spectrum of our life?

So what hasn't been done?

A lot. The closer we move toward the goal of "one organism" each step requires greater and greater adjustments and buy-ins. That takes time and a sorting out of preferences even within the affirmation of desiring a "single organism". Even this language is challenging because some things are happening cross association lines or within associations that are seen as precursor models (potential shared practices concepts) but haven't yet moved to practical organism wide strategies. For instance, two of the Associations have begun stewardship initiatives using expert consultations. But we have yet to move beyond those association boundaries into the larger Conference wide application. In similarly, the work of the Hills Are Alive Campaign is considered as a precursor model for a wider fundraising model but is not yet presumed to include Associations need for special capital campaign contexts. And our participation in the by.....is considered yet another precursor for how to support wider church initiatives. Consultation with some of the key players in our ability to raise funds is likely "behind" in an organizational sense, partly because of taking care of the necessary business right in front of our noses (like bringing a camp up to speed) while still attempting to try and figure out how to implement a "conference wide" strategy.

It became clear that the BOD traditional approach of approximately 4-5 meetings a year is not sufficient and that the representation on the board needs to be more closely aligned with the intentions implied in "one organism". To this end, the BOD voted to begin monthly meetings starting in March with the intention of spending most of each meeting directly focused on the preferred future suggested by the vision team. Future, a wide range of key stakeholders will be invited to each meeting to enhance decision making and communication flow.

Perhaps the most significant of "what hasn't been done" is attempting to determine how to form the "teams" envisioned in the original plan so that progress can be made. We are anticipating that early in 2020 a strategy will be quickly affirmed for "teams", groups to be formed so that ever faster progress can be made.

As noted in the original working group on the vision, outside consultation was a big help in their deliberations. So too, the BOD has asked Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches, to aid us over the next few months in the formation of an even clearer picture of the Vision, Mission and Core Values which will guide our life.

Since our first affirmation of the vision team recommendations which were overwhelming said yes to in the conceptual framework offered 17 months ago, implementation has yielded demands for more specificity by many of the stakeholders involved, not for the purpose of holding things up, but to be certain that we are truly living into a fully embraced concept.

So far, when I think of the reality that there has literally been only 5 full board of directors' meetings since the vote 17 months ago, I view the progress as remarkable. But more needs to be done and the pace ramped up. With key staff now fully in place, veterans of the visioning process rightfully championing the call to ever faster movement, necessity driving some urgent changes, new persons asking all the right "particulars" questions, and our mutual staffs meeting talking regularly and openly, my own hope is that 2020 will see us move even farther and faster in the ultimate work of officially, both legally and practically, cementing a "done deal" on all the major pieces of the original plan by the original goal of 2021. It will not all be done, but a good deal will be.

To that end, in the next few months there is hope to have a concrete Gantt chart outlining in clear detail anticipation of completion of the key elements of the original plan within specific timelines and clarity about when key decisions will be made that will necessitate constitutional changes across the entire "organism" of our union together. As always, we are reminded by the plan itself that all that will be done by the end of 2021 not the end but merely the beginning of having an authentic "one nimble organism". In many ways it will always be a work in progress and will need constant monitoring and that too, is going to be built into processes going forward.

Blessings and Peace,

David Plant