

Part One – Background: 1987 – present

Since the 1994 merger of the Pacific District of the General Conference Mennonite Church (PDC) and the Southwest Mennonite Conference (SMC) to create the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference (PSMC), mission has been at the heart of our conference. Previous to merger, leadership in PDC and SMC strongly encouraged local and regional mission initiative for ministries of community and economic development, voluntary service, church revitalization, immigration advocacy, peace & justice ministry, and so forth, while seeking to partner with their respective denominational mission boards to fund and oversee a significant number of church planting projects. From that encouragement, in 1987, pastors in Southern California formed Shalom Ministries, a 501[c] (3) corporation, and the Center for Anabaptist Leadership (CAL), a d/b/a (“*doing business as...*”) of Shalom Ministries. Leadership in Arizona and Northern California specifically declined to participate in the formation of Shalom Ministries, encouraging a truly regional/local response. In the years 1987-1992, CAL organized a number of urban ministry programs (job creation projects, microfinance, immigration advocacy, food pantries, group homes for youth in the foster care system, etc...), often with direct support from local congregations, and either the Mennonite Board of Missions (MBM), or, less often, the Commission on Home Ministries (CHM).

In 1992-1994, as a response to the civil unrest in Los Angeles, CAL pioneered a metropolitan approach to urban ministry and launched, in consultation with, and support from the Southwest Mennonite Conference, the Pacific District of the General Conference, the Pacific Conference of the Brethren-in-Christ Board of Brotherhood Concerns, Mennonite Church General Board, Mennonite Board of Missions, the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church, West Coast Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Central Committee US, and Mennonite Disaster Service, an ambitious plan of “relief, reconciliation, and redevelopment.” West Coast Mennonite Central Committee became an active partner for the next 11 years with CAL in providing services. CAL also provided office space and administrative support for the SMC, and ultimately, for the PSMC.

By 1994, however, it was clear something was amiss. The strategy of CAL “doing mission” while having some successes also seemed to detach congregations in the urban context from their communities. A period of consultation and consolidation took place with Southern California congregations and agency partners in 1994-1996, with CAL repositioning itself as an agency focused on training, coaching, and consulting for congregations seeking to embrace God’s mission.

In the period 1996-2000, CAL worked in tandem with the new PSMC Evangelism and Church Development Committee (ECDC). In 1997, ECDC authorized a resolution which the delegates adopted that placed PSMC into the global mission enterprise. This resolution was also affirmed by Mennonite Church General Assembly in Orlando, and General Conference delegates in Winnipeg. It was understood that PSMC and Southern California in particular represented a gateway for the world. However, by 1998, the ECDC realized its focus, church planting, had become too narrow. ECDC found it difficult to integrate needed leadership formation, community development and economic empowerment strategies. In addition, shrinking financial support from denominational agencies further reduced the profile of the ECDC. By the summer of 1999, ECDC had informally decided to suspend its operations and asked CAL to informally provide strategy and oversight for new church planting, all of which was happening in Southern California. This arrangement became official PSMC policy in early 2000 with the delegate body agreeing to a covenant with Shalom Ministries. Shalom Ministries became a mission agency of the PSMC with significant responsibility for church planting, revitalization, new

immigrant ministry, leadership formation, and community/economic development. No funding was provided for this agreement, although the PSMC Conference Minister for Southern California and CAL Executive Director were understood by both the Shalom Ministries Board and the PSMC Board to be a “conjoint position.” This agreement, with minor revisions was reaffirmed by PSMC delegates in 2003. To facilitate the conversations among and between the various Regional Conference Ministers and CAL staff, the delegates affirmed the creation of a “Conference Mission Team” (CMT). This body was later referred to as Mission Strategy Council (MSC). In both permutations, it existed to provide a space for planning and development of mission strategy. CMT/MSC was made up of the Regional Conference Ministers, Staff from CAL, and beginning in 2006, CAL’s sister d/b/a, Amahoro International (AMI), which focuses on global partnerships, immigration advocacy, and worship.

In the period 1987-2003, the number of Mennonite congregations in Southern California increased from seven in 1987 to thirty-two in 2003. The vast majority of these new congregations were made up of persons new to the USA and new to the Mennonite experience. As of 2008, approximately 60% of the membership of the PSMC was born outside the USA.

From 2000-2008, in addition to the missional expectations set out in the covenant, the PSMC began to formally contract for some administrative staff support and office space. The Mennonite Mission Network continued long-standing funding for an Urban Mission Director in Southern California. Previous to 2003, that funding relationship was between MBM/MMN and CAL, after 2003, it was mutually agreed by all parties for funding to come from MMN, and be passed through PSMC, and then ultimately on to CAL, as a means to express mutual commitment to the area conference’s prerogatives in establishing missional priorities. Also, 50% of the profit realized on the sale of the Voluntary Service house in Downey, was, again by mutual agreement, “banked” by the PSMC. One-half of that fund was designated to support a part-time staff position at CAL focused on exploring ways to revive Voluntary Service in Southern California. Funding for that position ends June 30, 2008. The other one-half of that fund was designated to assist Voluntary Service Units within the PSMC with low interest loans for projects as needed. In 2006, the PSMC entered into a contract to provide partial support for the School for Urban Mission – CAL’s pastoral training program in association with Hesston College. This remains the only contract for service whereby PSMC donated dollars are used to fund an explicitly CAL project.

The years since 2002 have also seen a growing relationship with between Mennonites in the PSMC and Anabaptists in the United Kingdom (the first such exchange was supposed to have begun on September 12, 2001 – it was postponed to January 2002). Through CAL’s leadership, since 2002, 12 exchanges between Mennonites in the PSMC and Anabaptists in the UK have taken place. Seven of these exchanges have involved PSMC leaders and others visiting the UK, and five have involved UK Anabaptists visiting the PSMC. Other such exchanges, between PSMC and churches in Java and Timor, in Indonesia, and between PSMC and West African nations have been requested.

In addition to this history, it is important to note that approximately 1 out of every 5 young adults in Voluntary Service serves in a unit located within the PSMC. Congregations in San Francisco, Reedley, Fresno, and Tucson have kept Voluntary Service Units thriving. First Mennonite Church of San Francisco has recently completed a major capital campaign to purchase a property in San Francisco to expand the possibilities of the VS unit. A VS unit in Kykotsmovi, AZ provides teaching and educational support staff for Hopi Mission School.

With respect to ministries located on the Navajo and Hopi Nations, congregations there made the decision in the mid 1990s, in consultation with denominational mission agencies and others, not to seek

membership in the PSMC. This decision was reaffirmed in conversations between conference, denominational, and Hopi and Navajo leaders in 2001 and 2003. Two Navajo congregations that were members of the former SMC withdrew in the 1990s for the purpose of accessing increased funding from Conservative Mennonite Conferences. A pastoral couple serving among the Hopi is currently provided a small annual stipend as a part of their financial support base. Interest from an estate was designated by the PSMC delegates to provide a small fund for ministry initiatives on the Hopi and Navajo Nations. There remains continued interest in the PSMC for supporting Hopi Mission School, and re-examining how PSMC might creatively reengage with Native Ministries

Trinity Mennonite Church is leading the way in blending voluntary service with church-based community development. Goldensun Peace Ministries, which partners with West Coast MCC, plus MMN and its Service Opportunities for Older Persons (SOOP) program, provides services for developmentally disabled persons in Glendale, AZ.

Part Two: Moving Forward, 2008-2015

One of learnings of the PSMC organizational assessment (2007-2008) has been that mission in the PSMC is one of three central priorities:

PSMC Organizational Priorities

Adopted by the PSMC Delegates, February 2, 2008

1. Equipping Pastors and Leaders
2. Facilitating Church-to-Church Communications
3. Strategizing with Congregations for Missional Vitality

Incarnating the Priorities

Living into these priorities require a strategy, or perhaps better said, an approach to mission that is relatively simple and yet challenging. Working together, CAL and the PSMC through the CMT/CMS process worked out such an approach:

1. **Embrace the geography** – live in awareness and appreciation of the social, political, economic, environmental, and spiritual qualities of the Pacific Southwest of the USA
2. **Build a ministry team** – develop leaders. Repeat as often as needed.
3. **Articulate a consistent identity** – Anabaptist-Mennonite identity is a theological construct available to all ethnic groups. It is grounded in scripture and based on a Jesus-centered view of discipleship; a Jesus-led community of witness; and, a Jesus-shaped mission of reconciliation that extends to all of Creation. It is an identity that is not closed to or threatened by the fruits, the gifts, and the signs of the Spirit.
4. **Equip for missional vitality** – Equip leaders to empower the church to embrace God's global, urban mission. Equip leaders to empower the church by focusing on intercessory prayer, community organizing, and leadership formation as the core tasks of urban church leaders.
5. **Strengthen grassroots, supportive institutions** – Congregations may be God's Missionary Agencies, but they are not islands. Congregations need supportive institutions and environments. The PSMC has developed such institutions for pastoral credentials and accountability (Pastoral Leadership Committee); mission equipping and strategy (Shalom Ministries); and faith formation and spiritual development (Pacific Southwest Retreat Ministries).

To facilitate the missional dimension of each of these priorities, the PSMC is building on two core approaches that have been sustained over the past 15+ years:

Missional Church Revitalization

“Congregations are God’s Missionary Agencies...” Using missiological principals established by the *“Gospel in Our Culture Network,”* PSMC and CAL staff has worked with congregations to embrace congregational vitality defined by:

- Commitment to Intercessory Prayer
- Skill at Urban Community Organizing
- Systems for Congregational Leadership Formation

These vital behaviors are enacted by congregations as they develop Voluntary Service Units; as they engage in advocacy for new immigrants; as they develop economic empowerment and community development plans; and as they develop fresh expressions of congregational life.

New Immigrant Church Development

“Pacific Southwest as the Ellis Island of the 21st Century...” According to the *Center for Religion and Civic Culture*, at the University of Southern California, it is this region of the USA that is home to greatest influx of persons born outside the USA national borders. It is estimated that over 2,100 PSMC participants are immigrants or the children of immigrants. It is further estimated that PSMC participants come from up to 49 different nations. PSMC and CAL staff has worked with developing new immigrant congregational life by:

- Developing and implementing a local pastoral training venue – the School for Urban Mission
- Developing and implementing a training and coaching regime for new immigrant church planters – the Critical Foundations process
- Collaborating with West Coast MCC on developing an Immigration Ministry Team
- Speaking out forcefully within MCUSA on immigration and the need for comprehensive and fair immigration reform in the USA, which included significant participation in the MCUSA Statement on Immigration at the Atlanta 2003 Churchwide gathering, and the *“God’s Love has No Borders/El Amor de Dios no tiene fronteras”* project of MCUSA
- Participating in and supporting MCC US antiracism training and organizing
- Providing access and support to new immigrant congregations seeking access to church meetinghouse facilities through Church Extension Services
- Working with MCUSA Executive Leadership in developing a consultation on new immigrant congregations

As we move forward, these two approaches will continue to grow and develop. Drawn from Tom Sine’s recent book, *The New Conspirators* (Intervarsity Press, 2008), the PSMC anticipates that over the next few years additional approaches to mission will be developed.

I. From New Immigrant Congregations to Mosaic Congregations

New Immigrant Congregations will acculturate. Just like Mennonite congregations in Reedley, Paso Robles, and Upland each ultimately transitioned from German-speaking congregations to English-speaking congregations, so our Latino, West African, Chinese, Hmong, and Indonesian congregations will at some future point also become more “western” in their language and approach to ministry. Already, we are seeing the children of new immigrants at a crossroads: Do I fit in the church of my parents? Do I need a fresh expression of church?

Several forms of Mosaic congregations are being formed in the PSMC. First Mennonite Church of Reedley has pioneered two churches becoming one. El Remanente del Senor – the outgrowth of the church division in LaPuente is launching a pilot Mosaic project under the leadership of George Makinto. Remanente will be a church for all peoples – their worship and their mission will welcome various cultural and ethnic forms. The Bridge in Santa Rosa is an established congregation with Anglos and Latino members that is in conversation with PSMC leadership about the possibilities of affiliation.

2. From Missional Congregations to New Monastic Communities and “Submergent” Congregations

Our missional congregations are also in need of fresh expressions support their future. The Conrad Kanagy study of MCUSA membership revealed a growing trend of young adults to leave the Mennonite Church. We need to be launching new models of church to welcome our young adults back into the church, and to provide a live expression of incarnational Anabaptism to the thousands of young adults across the USA who find Anabaptist ways of being the church very relevant in the “post-American world” and a “post-Christendom America” which they uniquely inhabit.

We will need New Monastic Communities of Anabaptists who pray, organize, and serve in neighborhoods where the institutional church has long abandoned hope. The Ecclesia Collective in San Diego is an example of this vision. Peace House Fellowship in Claremont is another. Nathan Slater, Phoenix, has already been serving as a PSMC Elder to “Alternative Ecclesial Communities.”

We will also need to embrace the Emergent Church with its postmodern, eclectic approach to being the church. But the Emergent congregations and leaders interested in Anabaptism describe themselves as “Subversive-Emergent” or “Submergent.” Already, a new work is being developed in San Diego that is self-consciously submergent. Jason Evans is beginning a new ministry through CAL this summer to develop submergent church leadership.

The PSMC continues to be an organization committed to fulfilling God’s call to mission. In the next decade, we will continue to need new forms, new ideas, and new policies to further God’s mission among our member congregations. Thanks be to God for His invitation to participate in the reconciliation of the world.