

The Habakkuk 223 Project
*For there is still a vision for the appointed time
If the vision seems slow wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay*

Introduction

What an exciting time to be engaged in ministry in the Missouri Mid-South Conference! For over 150 years our ancestors in the faith have been actively serving God in the mid-west. They heard God's call to begin communities of faith and churches were built. They listened to God's challenge to care for the poor, the hungry, the lonely, the oppressed, and they built hospitals, facilities for children and places to care for the elderly. They responded to God's command to pass the faith along to the next generation and they started schools and colleges and a seminary to train pastors to serve those churches. We are the inheritors of this rich history of evangelistic zeal, commitment to social service ministry, and enriching theological thought and education.

Now the spirit of the still speaking God is moving among us again and placing before us new challenges for ministry in our day and our time. Now is our appointed time. How will we perceive the call of the still speaking God to us? How will we discern the movement of the spirit in our time? How will we respond as faithful disciples of Jesus in the 21st century? The prophet reminds us that there is a vision for our appointed time – our task is to discern that vision in the full expectation that it will come.

Proposal

There is a vision for the appointed time

The Administrating Ministry of the Missouri Mid-South Conference is requesting that the directors ask the **Coordinating Ministry** to empower a Task Force to help us discern the vision for ministry for our conference for this appointed time.

The Task Force will be divided into two working groups. One group will focus on our Conference Structure and the other will develop and lead us through a process of discernment to develop a Strategic Plan for the ministry of the conference for the next 3-5 years. In addition we are asking the Personnel Committee of the Administrating Ministry to evaluate the current staff configuration and job descriptions of conference staff and make recommendations for future staffing in our conference.

We are proposing the **Coordinating Ministry** appoint a Task Force Chair to call meetings of the task force, facilitate meetings of the Task Force, and monitor the progress of the working groups.

We are proposing that each of the working groups be composed of 7 to 9 people and that the composition of the working groups reflect the diversity of our conference. It is our hope that the **Coordinating Ministry** will invite a UCC member of the faculty at Eden Theological Seminary to be a part of each working group so that the work of the groups will include theological reflection on the mission and ministry of the conference and the role of the conference in the lives of

our congregations as well as the financial anxieties and realities we are currently facing.

Conference Structure Working Group

The task of the Conference Structure Working Group will be to evaluate our current conference structure and make recommendations for any needed changes to our structure. We would like to suggest the following questions to this working group as they begin their work:

- What is working well with our current structure and where are we experiencing difficulties? Are there areas where our structure is enabling ministry and places where it is getting in the way of vital ministry?
- Our current structure was put into place a number of years ago. It may be helpful to talk to some people on that previous restructure committee and ask what issues with the previous structure they were attempting to address when this structure was put into place. In what ways has our current structure addressed those issues and concerns? Where has it failed to address those concerns?
- Identify other conferences in the UCC of our size and which share our geographical realities. How is their conference structured? What is working well for them and where are they experiencing problems?
- Would the conference benefit from having a board of directors to work with the conference minister to coordinate the ministries of the conference? What should be included in a ministry position description for a board of directors? How many people should be on the board? How do they get elected? What would be the length of the terms?
- Would the conference benefit from having an Outdoor Ministries Committee to work with the director of outdoor ministries to coordinate our outdoor ministry program? What should be included in a ministry position description for this board? How many people should be on the board? How do they get elected? What would be the length of the terms?

Conference Staffing Working Group

The task of the Conference Staffing Working Group will be to evaluate our current conference staff configuration and make recommendations for any needed changes to our staff configuration. We would like to suggest the following questions to this working group as they begin their work:

- Interview the Associate Conference Ministers, Office Support Staff in Webster Groves, the director of Outdoor Ministries, and the Director of Shannondale Ministries. The Working Group will be asked to develop a list of appropriate questions to use to engage the staff in discussion about their

work in the Missouri Mid-South Conference. As those questions are developed the task group may want to consider these sample questions:

- What are the most fulfilling parts of your ministry?
 - What do you consider to be the essential ministries of the Missouri Mid-South Conference?
 - What did you understand your ministry to be when you began and what are the inherited expectations you have picked up during your work with us?
 - Where do you see gaps in our ministry as a conference or areas that need our attention as we move forward into the next 5 years?
 - What are the biggest challenges you face in your ministry?
- Identify other conferences in the UCC of our size and which share our geographical realities and share a comparable financial situation. What is the staff configuration of their conference? What is working well for them and where are they experiencing problems?
 - What do we expect from our ACM's and Conference Minister? How will our ministry as a conference be strengthened if we move from 3 to 2 ACM's? How will our ministry be weakened if we move from 3 to 2 ACM's? How will we reconfigure the work of our ACM's if we move from 3 to 2 people and how will the work of the conference with pastors, local churches, and associations be affected by the loss of an ACM?
 - Review, evaluate, and update our current job descriptions for all members of the staff.

Conference Strategic Planning Working Group

The task of the Strategic Planning Working Group will be to develop and lead the conference through a discernment process to identify our essential ministries for the next 3-5 years. There are some ministries that will continue to be essential to our life together such as search and call, providing pastoral support to pastors and congregations, and resourcing the ministries of the conference. The task of this group is to lead us through a discernment process to identify who God is calling us to be and what we are being called to do in the name of Jesus in the next 3-5 years.

- Are there areas of our ministry that need special attention? Justice and Witness? Spiritual growth and development? Ministry with Women? Men? Young Adults? Leadership Development? Church Growth and Renewal? Others?
- What do local churches and pastors need or want from the conference? How can we work as covenant partners to strengthen the work of the local church? What does the conference need or want from local churches and pastors?

How do we work together as covenant partners to strengthen the work of the conference and wider church?

Time Line and Closing Thoughts

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Two final thoughts as we conclude this proposal. First we suggest that the working groups meet together as a task force – at least initially and on a regular basis as we move through the process. There may be times when the working groups need to meet separately to accomplish their task- however it is also valuable to meet at the same time and give progress reports so that each working group knows what the other is doing. We propose that when the task group meets as a whole the day begin with worship; the working groups meet separately and go about their work; and then the task group meet as a whole at the end of the day so the working groups can report on their progress and receive feedback and suggestions. We want to end up at the same place at the end of the process and avoid being like two groups building a bridge from opposite sides of the river who are four yards apart when they arrive in the middle.

Second we want to suggest the following time line:

1. The task force make regular progress reports to the Coordinating Ministry
2. The Structure and Staffing Working Groups will have a preliminary report to the Coordinating Ministry by the Faith Works event in 2008.
3. The Structure and Staffing Working Groups will have a final report and recommendations presented to the Directors by March 2009.
4. Coordinating Ministry will develop and implement an education process to present the recommendations to the churches of the conference and receive feedback from March – July 2009.
5. A final report and recommendations will be ready for presentation and vote by the delegates to the 2009 Biennial Meeting.
6. The Strategic Planning Working Group will develop and present a proposal for discernment process for the conference by the Faith Works event in 2008.
7. The Strategic Planning Working Group will lead the conference through this discernment process in the Winter and Spring of 2008-09.
8. The Strategic Planning Working Group will have a preliminary report for the Coordinating Ministry by June 2009. This report may include recommendations for a revision of the Mission Statement of the Missouri Mid-South Conference.
9. A Final report from the Strategic Planning Working Group will be ready for presentation and adoption at the 2009 Biennial Meeting.