

Congregational Check-ups



Purpose

Congregational Check-ups provide Mennonite Church Manitoba congregations the opportunity to reflect upon their current health and consider future focuses and actions. This experience is not solution-oriented, but invites reflection and a space for focused conversation with the goal of nurturing healthy congregational life. The role of the designated MCM staff facilitator is to create a non-threatening, safe place for the congregation to talk with one another.

Congregational Check-ups are intentionally flexible to allow for use in a variety of congregational situations. Whether your congregation is engaged in a pastoral/congregational review, doing some visioning or long-term planning, preparing for a new pastor, doing constitutional or policy revisions, or simply feels the need for a quick congregational health assessment—Congregational Check-ups can be part of the process.

Application Process

1. Have an initial conversation.

A Mennonite Church Manitoba congregation who wishes to explore the possibility of a Congregational Check-up should first have their lead pastor or congregational chairperson contact the MCM Executive Minister to discuss their situation and how they feel a Congregational Check-up might help them.

2. Submit a request.

If the initial conversation leads the congregation to believe a Congregational Check-up would be beneficial, the lead pastor or congregational chairperson can then formally request a Check-up by emailing the Executive Minister, outlining in writing the congregation's general circumstances, their specific hopes for what a Check-up will accomplish, and their desired timeline for this process. This request will also provide the name and contact information for the congregational coordinator(s) (normally a pastor or lay leader) who will work with the designated MCM staff facilitator to plan and implement the process.

3. Receive confirmation and make plans.

The Executive Minister will consider the congregation's request in light of the expertise and availability of MCM staff, and respond to the congregation. If the Congregational Check-up is approved, plans can be made to work through the stages of a Check-up outlined below.

Note that any of the MCM Executive Minister or Program Directors may be assigned to facilitate a Congregational Check-up; this decision will normally be made at the discretion of the EM. Depending on staff capacity, it is hoped that MCM staff can facilitate Congregational Check-ups for 3-5 congregations each calendar year. Congregations employing an Intentional Interim Pastor in a time of pastoral transition will not normally be offered this service as the IIP will typically do much of this work.

The Five Stages of a Congregational Check-up

1. Introduction for Congregational Leaders

The MCM staff facilitator and congregational coordinator(s) will arrange an introductory meeting between the facilitator and the congregation's pastor(s) and leadership group. The facilitator will work through the questions below with church leadership. Note that many of these questions will have been worked through in the application process with the lead pastor and/or congregational chairperson, but this is an opportunity to address these with the larger leadership group.

- What are we as a congregation being invited to embark on? What is the Congregational Check-up process?
- How would this experience contribute to our present priorities and work?
- What are our expectations? What outcomes might we hope for?
- What will the Reflection and Direction Sunday ask of us?

2. Invitation to the Congregation

Beginning 4-6 weeks before the Reflection and Direction Sunday, the congregational coordinator(s) will start communicating with the congregation about the Sunday, describing the purpose, hopes, and details of the experience. This could include weekly bulletin or email communication with specific prayer practices or focuses leading up to the R&D Sunday.

3. Preparation for the Experience

In consultation with the congregational coordinator(s) and other church leadership as necessary, the MCM staff facilitator will make plans for each component of the Reflection and Direction Sunday: Story Telling, Worship Service, and Table Conversations. This might also include planning for a Congregational Time Line that could be prepared in the weeks leading up to the R&D Sunday.

4. Reflection and Direction Sunday

See below for an outline of how the day could look.

5. Follow-up

The congregational coordinator(s) or their designate(s) will collate and summarize the notes from the Story Telling and Table Conversations. These will be made available to the MCM staff facilitator and congregational leadership.

From these notes and their own experience of the R&D Sunday, the MCM staff facilitator will produce a report summarizing their assessment, and submit this report to congregational leadership.

The MCM staff facilitator and the congregational coordinator(s) will arrange a meeting with congregational leaders. At this meeting they will reflect together on the report and their own experience: of the process “What did we hear? How did the Spirit move among us?”

Using the facilitator’s report as well as their own reflections on the experience, congregational leadership will then discern any specific goals and tasks for the congregation moving forward. Once these are discerned, church leadership will communicate their conclusions with the congregation and begin leading the congregation in the identified tasks toward their discerned goals.

Outline of a Reflection and Direction Sunday

1. Story Telling

- Intergenerational time for hearing significant stories from the congregation’s life; note that this should include at least the high school youth of the congregation, if not also younger ages. These short stories can be drawn from the congregation’s entire life span or another time-line can be chosen (decade, last five years, etc.). The intention is to remind folks of their congregation’s unique journey, gifts, and present realities. “What makes us ‘us’? Who are we now?”
- Suggested time frame: 5-6 minute short stories, offered by people from various generations and congregational history. Stories interspersed with 3 minute “turn to your neighbour” response times.
- This time could also include the creation of a Congregational Time Line. The Congregational Time Line could also be created in the weeks prior to this Sunday. This might include a future section, with hopes for what lies ahead.
- Hosted by a pastor or congregational leader; ideally this happens around tables so that table hosts (e.g. church council/board members) can guide conversations and take notes.
- Note: If the congregation’s practice is to have a Christian education time after the worship service, this could be done then.

2. Worship Service

- The service focus can be discerned by congregational leaders. Some suggestions:
 - What makes for a healthy church? (Perhaps based on the three dimensions of “organizational ethos,” “internal life/ministries,” and “outward engagement”; see the [Flourishing Congregations Institute website](#))
 - The call of the church: constant and changing. (What is core to Jesus’ call to us and how do we embody and express this in these days?)
 - What practices keep us healthy? (Congregational and individual spiritual practices)
- Suggested components: celebration/thanksgiving, confession, voices of each generation, naming of past and present ministry connections, notes of encouragement from another MCM congregation.
- The MCM staff facilitator will provide the sermon/meditation, shaped around the discerned worship focus.

3. Table Conversations

- A simple lunch/potluck with table hosts (e.g. church council/board members). An overall lunch time host is needed as well (pastor, lay leader). It is a good idea to split up congregational demographics among tables.
- Suggested questions for table conversation: If we hope to be a healthy congregation... 1) What do we need to pay attention to? 2) What are we already doing/being that we could build upon? 3) What could we explore and/or experiment with? What would be fun to try?
- Each table host guides the conversation, keeps track of the time, and takes notes.
- In the last 5 minutes of the conversation, each person is invited to finish this sentence on a card: I would love to see us... OR What I heard today was...
- Cards and notes are collected by the congregational coordinator(s), who will then collate and summarize them for church leadership and the MCM staff facilitator.