



Conference Ministers Report April 2020

Greeting in Christ,

We are in the midst of turbulent times. Much of what constituted our normal work schedule has been suspended. BCMB staff has been focused on supporting our pastors and churches as they face,

- **Isolation**
The very definition of church contains the idea of the gathered people of God (ecclesia) and we are in a time when “gathering” is prohibited and for good reasons.
- **Fear**
Driven by the constant stream of disturbing and often conflicting news reports and by the legitimate concern over the possibility of infection by this highly contagious virus.
- **Financial Uncertainty**
Many people have lost jobs. More people have lost savings. Churches and our ministries have been built with a dependence on our projected incomes and budgets. Churches as well as the Conference are now wrestling with stewardship when we have no reliable means to forecast income.
- **Lay offs**
Churches have laid off employees and cut programs in anticipation of reduced incomes. Our Camps are counting the cost of a lost season of rentals and campers. In all these hardships we are driven to our knees to seek the Lord for his leading and provision.
- **Opportunities**
God is teaching us a new dependence on Him and upon each other. Churches are adapting what it means to “gather” and are finding a strong sense of community in Christ. It turns out the Holy Spirit is helping our pastors and leaders to feed their sheep in new and innovative ways.

Pastors are reporting an increased participation in their online services as well as favorable response to pastoral care expressed by phone or by careful and appropriate visitation. People are increasingly open to prayer and the message of the hope of the

gospel. Youth pastors and children's pastors are using technology creatively and there are encouraging reports of engagement.

Churches are focusing on essential discipleship and finding a renewed opportunity to connect people into small groups for prayer, worship and time listening to God through Scripture.

Churches are also serving the marginalized in their communities both through informal neighbourhood outreach and through organized online formats.

Alpha online is being launched by churches during this time. A new 8-week course has been developed by Alpha to respond to the Covid crises.

Spiritual Health and Theology

BCMB has increased its communication with churches and among churches over the past month. Newsletters are being distributed on weekly basis seeking to encourage leaders in their faith and ministry and informing them of resources available.

Podcasts have also been increased to a weekly release to provide opportunities for support and connection.

Collaborative Partnership

Our partnership with the national and global MB community has also increased. BCMB has been a catalyst in initiating a national online prayer gathering which is led by Ingrid Reichard and has significant participation. (168 + across Canada) In addition Multiply has been hosting a global prayer gathering that we as Conference staff have been actively supporting. Our national ministry team is meeting biweekly as we collaborate with other provincial conference offices to support our churches.

We are disappointed to have to cancel several significant leadership development events for this Spring. Our Postureshift Conference will be rescheduled for fall of this year and our Pastors and Spouses retreat will be canceled until next year. (Lord willing!) Consideration was given to online options but for both these events we decided that we were better off waiting until we were once again free to gather in person.

Our convention will however be going forward in a virtual format. We will record and post a Friday evening May 1 worship gathering and then host a live online format convention from 8:30 until noon on Saturday May 2. Document and reports will be distributed in advance and an online tool for voting will be provided. Only essential business will be conducted in this condensed timeline.

Churches and pastors vary widely in the level and types of support that they are looking for in a time of crises. Predictably, our larger churches have the technology and people resources to shift into a "virtual" ministry mode. They are experiencing significant blessings through these efforts. More difficult for these churches is dealing with large and program focused staffing

issues. Denis Federau has been working hard to consult with reliable sources for the best HR advice in these matters.

The BCMB Stewardship

BCMB staff have worked through various financial scenarios and have provided the exec board with budgetary options. As we monitor the income we receive from the churches, we are seeking to minimize all expenses as much as possible.

Decisions about lay-offs and salary reductions are being considered by our exec board. Our desire is that we model good stewardship and financial restraint in a time when many of our churches and pastors may be also be facing reductions. Wisdom suggests that both the Conference minister and the Director of Resource ministry are important ministry posts during this time and that our churches expect that we will be fully available to them during this time.

I close this report with a confession and a conviction. My confession is that in so many ways I don't have answers or a plan going forward for what ministry will look like in the future. My conviction is that the Lord is at work testing and refining all of us through this season. For many of us, 2019 was a very difficult year with many relational challenges. We were hoping for some "smooth sailing" in 2020 and then the year began. Jesus said the world would experience "travail" in the days before his return. I believe we are going through birth pangs now. God is wanting to teach us a new dependence on him in prayer and moment by moment obedience. Our programs and ways of being the church have borne fruit, but they have also become "ministry ruts" out of which we rarely venture. God is taking us to a place where we feel uncertain and lost so that our eyes and dependence will be more focused on Him.

The real and present reality of sickness and suffering calls us to compassion, generosity and service. The church of Jesus Christ has always excelled when this call is put forward and I pray that we will not be found lacking in this hour. The secret to our effectiveness lies in the vitality of our connection with Christ. Let us draw close to him and serve our province well. For His glory.

In Christ,
Rob T