

## **Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre Long-Range Plan** (excerpts)

Final Report to the TMTC Advisory Board

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

At the 2005 Advisory Board meetings, it was agreed that leading a long-range planning process would be the primary assignment of the interim director of TMTC. The need for such a process was focused by the impending retirement of Jim Reimer, the founding director, primary faculty person, and tireless advocate. A transition of such scale is a crisis in which the very viability of TMTC is in question. Secondly, the “ownership” arrangement, by which Grebel is the steward of TMTC on behalf of seven other institutions represented on the Advisory Board, needed further clarification and development. At one point, it appeared that long-range planning would consist of delineating TMTC’s place within an endowed chair of Mennonite Theology at Emmanuel College.

TMTC’s unique structural model has been reflected in the process of planning. In the “Interim Report,” I identified two parallel tracks of planning: one involves program direction and basic vision, which is the primary concern of the Advisory Board. This track resulted in the “Interim Report” and a conference call in which it was discussed. A second track involves responsibilities that are the ultimate (but not sole) responsibility of Grebel—administrative and academic staffing, and financial viability. Here I produced two documents, a “Discussion Paper about Structures for TMTC” and “Discussion Paper on ‘Fair Share Funding’ for TMTC,” which were processed with the President and Academic Dean. (See Appendix B for a list of other relevant documents.) The relationship between the Advisory Board and Grebel is an ongoing issue that cuts across all of these discussions. The present report brings together these two (or three) tracks for further processing and action.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### II. Purpose Statement

*The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre helps form theological leadership for the church by providing and supporting graduate theological education, particularly at the doctoral level, from a Mennonite perspective in an ecumenical context.*

#### III. Program

TMTC should continue to exist. TMTC’s scope is bi-national, though its particular focus and location should remain at the Toronto School of Theology. TMTC is a forum through which all the partner institutions serve the church by collaborating in graduate theological education. Grebel will continue to be the steward of TMTC on behalf of a wider institutional constituency. The context for TMTC’s academic program is the affiliation agreement between TST and Grebel.

1. *Academic services:* This ought to remain at the core of TMTC’s mandate. Integrity in this area is the prerequisite for other programs. TMTC will more intentionally involve Mennonite faculty at partner or other institutions in the delivery of academic programs (e.g. sabbaticals, online courses, intensive courses, thesis readers).

2. *Formation of Mennonite graduate/doctoral students:* Given TMTC’s purpose, greater financial and administrative support ought to be devoted to this area. In particular, TMTC should initiate further professional development of Mennonite students as the kinds of leaders needed by church and academy (e.g., learning how to teach, curriculum development, communicating with church constituency). The

church should see these developing leaders as resources and, in turn, find concrete ways to bless and support them.

3. *Networking among Mennonite academic community*: This area of activity is a concrete expression of a bi-national mandate and has significant potential to impact the church. TMTC should increase the involvement of a wider range of faculty members in the Toronto-based program. However, while TMTC ought to remain attentive to the networking needs and opportunities, current programs should not be regarded as the exclusive domain of TMTC. TMTC will be open to discussions of if and when various networking initiatives should be done in partnership with other institutions, handed off to other institutions, spun off as self-sustaining projects, or wound down. A project such as the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network that aspires to serve individuals and associations from a variety of disciplines, could thus be lodged with an institution with a wide range of disciplinary and professional interests.

4. *Ecumenical presence in theological education*: This was part of the founding vision of TMTC and ought to so remain. This is achieved most significantly by the intentional presence of Mennonite faculty and students at TST. In addition, TMTC will continue to initiate particular events in order to engage members of different Christian traditions. While TST is the primary venue for these engagements, opportunities should be sought to relate to those of traditions not officially represented at TST. Ecumenism ought to be a byproduct and presupposition of everything TMTC does. Even when the conversation is only among Mennonite students, the premise is that such students are already being educated in an ecumenical setting, and that the addition of an explicit Mennonite component is important.

5. *Inter-faith relationships*: Through such relationships, TMTC will seek to promote the development of Mennonite leaders with experience engaging people of other faiths; build cultural and religious understanding as a means of peacebuilding; connect with Mennonite agencies whose work intersects with people of other faiths; and stimulate inter-faith efforts within the Mennonite church, and at TST. TMTC's involvement in the Iranian exchange is an excellent example of openness to opportunities that have led to new and fruitful directions. TMTC should strongly affirm the value of this experience while drawing back from a primary role and clarifying its particular capacities. That inter-faith relationships be named as a program area does not necessarily imply a plan to do more in this area than in the past. However, it does mean that as relationships and opportunities arise, TMTC will judge its future involvement based on capacities of personnel and finances, as well as whether the proposed activities serve the above purpose statements.

#### IV. Organizational Structure

1. *Academic*: A balance of the following: a. Grebel faculty; b. Mennonite faculty from other institutions teaching in some alternative format; c. TMTC Visiting Professorship (Mennonite faculty on sabbatical or recently retired). Continuity will be provided by the involvement of Grebel faculty. Given that b and c are newer directions, particular energy will need to be devoted to framing the nature of these involvements and making them happen.

2. *Administration*: There are three roles, which could be filled by two or three individuals. a. Director, responsible for the management of TMTC, student fellowships, and to support the provision of academic services; b. Academic advisor, the senior academic liaison with TST; c. Administrative assistant.

3. *Student Fellowships*: Two fellowships, each valued at \$5000 per year for two years. The purpose is to provide financial support as a tangible sign of the wider church's support of advanced theological education and to encourage the development of particular professional skills required of theological leaders, especially teaching, administration and church communication.

## V. Funding

In light of a list of proposed values, I recommend that the corporate members (CMs) and Grebel agree on what a “fair share” of the TMTC budget would be for the CMs (together) and for Grebel. It would not be the case that each institution would be sent an invoice for exactly 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the CM’s fair share. However, each institution would know what this “baseline” amount is and could respond with commitments in a way consistent with their resources, interest in aspects of the TMTC program, etc. The key is to find a middle way between a rigid assessment or “invoicing” of each CM on the one hand, and a free-will offering on the other. This funding model should involve a net increase in CM funding for TMTC.

I propose a general expense budget of \$50,000.

## VI. Role of the Advisory Board

I recommend that the Advisory Board assume a “leadership” role which is more than advice and less than governance. Such a move is appropriate if the people around the table are neither governing a program (although given the financial commitments of CMs to TMTC, the Advisory Board meetings need to be an avenue of reporting and informal accountability) nor merely giving advice about a program which is perceived as simply external. Rather, Advisory Board meetings should be understood as an opportunity for collaborating around a particular agenda (“...forming theological leadership...”), TMTC being an obvious but not exclusive expression of this collaboration. Grebel welcomes increased involvement from the Advisory Board in terms of discerning the church’s need for theological leadership, setting overall vision, and program planning. Furthermore, Advisory Board meetings may also be a place to discuss initiatives around advanced theological education that do not involve TMTC programs directly. TMTC’s mandate ought to include providing “space” for such collaboration. A leadership role includes monitoring a (non-exhaustive) list of strategic issues that have been generated by this planning process.

## **II. PROPOSED PURPOSE STATEMENT**

*The Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre helps form theological leadership for the church by providing and supporting graduate theological education, particularly at the doctoral level, from a Mennonite perspective in an ecumenical context.*

Some assumptions behind this statement:

- Toronto is at the “centre” but the mandate is not restricted geographically
- “church” is not only the Mennonite church, although this constituency is primary
- “for the church” includes church-related institutions
- “leadership” includes teaching, research, pastoral ministry, church-wide leadership
- the subjects of “formation” are not just students, but also scholars and leaders at all stages of life
- “ecumenical context” refers primarily to TST, but not exclusively

## **III. PROGRAM**

### **1. Basic Affirmations**

- TMTC should continue to exist
- TMTC’s scope is bi-national, though its particular focus and location should remain at the Toronto School of Theology
- TMTC is a forum through which all the partner institutions serve the church by collaborating in graduate theological education
- Grebel will continue to be the steward of TMTC on behalf of a wider institutional constituency
- the context for TMTC’s academic program is the affiliation agreement between TST and Grebel

## 2. Program areas

Note: there is overlap in all the categories below. Thus, each area is not so much a discrete unit as a particular perspective on a range of activities. However, it is important to clarify a confusion about the first two areas noted. Not all students who constitute the community of “TMTC students” are direct recipients of TMTC academic services (courses, supervision). And many recipients of these academic services, particular those from other Christian traditions, do not associate with the TMTC community in other ways.

### a. Academic services offered by TMTC faculty

#### Purpose

- develop Mennonite theologians, leaders, faculty members (including those who teach pastors)
- articulate Mennonite theology/theologies in an ecumenical academic setting in dialogue with other traditions
- promote theological research that advances Christian theology in Mennonite perspective

#### Sample activities

- regular courses; reading courses
- faculty serving on program, comprehensive exam, or thesis/dissertation committees
- faculty serving as thesis/dissertation supervisors

#### Recommendations

This ought to remain at the core of TMTC’s mandate. Integrity in this area is the prerequisite for other programs. TMTC will more intentionally involve Mennonite faculty at partner or other institutions in the delivery of academic programs (e.g. sabbaticals, online courses, intensive courses, thesis readers).

### b. Formation of Mennonite graduate/doctoral students (in Toronto and North America)

#### Purpose

- develop scholars, theologians and educators, primarily in the disciplines taught by the Toronto School of Theology (theology, Bible, church history, pastoral)
- form a community of scholars (in Toronto and N. America)
- re-invigourate Mennonite identity by promoting conversation about the plurality of Mennonite theologies and the diverse work done by scholars who are Mennonite
- foster and model interdisciplinarity
- connect students, scholars and institutions

#### Sample activities

- TMTC Fellows group
- student gatherings with external resource people
- Mennonite-Catholic student dialogue
- Mennonite Graduate Student Conferences
- A. James Reimer Scholarship
- Faculty Calling Project
- support/accountability groups for individual students
- TMTC Student Fellowships

#### Recommendations

Given TMTC's purpose, greater financial and administrative support ought to be devoted to this area. In particular, TMTC should initiate further professional development of Mennonite students as the kinds of leaders needed by church and academy (e.g., learning how to teach, curriculum development, communicating with church constituency). The church should see these developing leaders as resources and, in turn, find concrete ways to bless and support them.

### **c. Networking among Mennonite academic community**

#### Purpose

- develop a community of scholars; connect people, and people with institutions
- advance research and publication
- leadership development (theological, educational, church-wide, pastoral)

#### Sample activities

- Involving external faculty members in TMTC academic programs (e.g. sabbaticals, courses, guest lectures)
- Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network
- Mennonite Scholars and Friends events at AAR/SBL
- Consultations, symposia, conferences
- Mennonite Graduate Student Conferences

#### Recommendations

This area of activity is a concrete expression of a bi-national mandate and has significant potential to impact the church. TMTC should increase the involvement of a wider range of faculty members in the Toronto-based program. However, while TMTC ought to remain attentive to networking needs and opportunities, current programs should not be regarded as the exclusive domain of TMTC. TMTC will be open to discussions of if and when various networking initiatives should be done in partnership with other institutions, handed off to other institutions, spun off as self-sustaining projects, or wound down. A project such as the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network that aspires to serve individuals and associations from a variety of disciplines, could thus be lodged with an institution with a wide range of disciplinary and professional interests.

### **d. Ecumenical presence in theological education**

#### Purpose

- to add a Mennonite voice to ecumenical discussions and theological education; we believe we have gifts to share with the wider church
- to learn from the wider church, especially as this helps us have a broad understanding of our mission as a Mennonite church
- train Mennonite leaders with experience engaging other Christian traditions, and other Christian leaders with experience engaging Mennonite convictions

#### Sample activities

- classroom interaction among Mennonite and non-Mennonite faculty and students
- TST forums
- public lectures
- Mennonite-Catholic student dialogue

#### Recommendations

Being a Mennonite presence in ecumenical theological education was part of the founding vision of TMTC and ought to so remain. This is achieved most significantly by the intentional presence

of Mennonite faculty and students at TST. In addition, TMTC will continue to initiate particular events in order to engage members of different Christian traditions. While TST is the primary venue for these engagements, opportunities should be sought to relate to those of traditions not officially represented at TST. Ecumenism ought to be a byproduct and presupposition of everything TMTC does. Even when the conversation is only among Mennonite students, the premise is that such students are already being educated in an ecumenical setting, and that the addition of an explicit Mennonite component is important.

#### **e. Inter-faith relationships**

##### Purpose

- promote the development of Mennonite leaders with experience engaging people of other faiths
- build cultural and religious understanding as a means of peacebuilding
- connect with Mennonite agencies whose work intersects with people of other faiths
- stimulate inter-faith efforts within the Mennonite church, and at TST

##### Sample activities

- MCC Iranian exchange and conferences

##### Recommendations

TMTC's involvement in the Iranian exchange is an excellent example of openness to opportunities that have led to new and fruitful directions. The evaluation of this program highlighted some very positive results in terms of building cultural and religious understanding, as well as personal relationships. For some, the experience has been transformative. The evaluation also pointed to the danger of assuming a role without clear mutual expectations, and beyond the capacity of personnel and resources. TMTC has a very limited capacity to provide either the academic or the social support needed by the exchange students or to make Muslim-Christian dialogue a primary element of its student life. TMTC should strongly affirm the value of this experience while drawing back from a primary role and clarifying its particular capacities.

That inter-faith relationships be named as a program area does not necessarily imply a plan to do more in this area than in the past. However, it does mean that as relationships and opportunities arise, TMTC will judge its future involvement based on capacities of personnel and finances, as well as whether the proposed activities serve the above purpose statements.

## **IV. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Given that the immediate issue is that of a major transition in personnel—Jim Reimer's impending retirement—a key question is how TMTC's academic and administrative functions will be provided. This section answers these questions, and addresses the need identified above (III.2.b) for greater attention to student leadership formation.

### **1. Academics**

TMTC's academic services will be provided by a balance of the following three elements, overseen by Grebel, together with the TMTC Director and TMTC Academic Advisor (see IV.2), in conversation with the Advisory Board.

- a. Current Grebel faculty members, offering courses and/or supervision to students in Toronto
- b. Faculty from other (Mennonite) institutions who would teach in some alternative format (e.g. online, in several blocks throughout the year, or a summer intensive course). There are very few advanced degree courses offered during the summer (May-August). Many students take language courses at this time.

However, interest in the few non-language courses offered in May or June indicates that there may be a market for this.

c. Mennonite faculty from other institutions, on sabbatical or recently retired, who would occupy a TMTC Visiting Professorship. They would teach a doctoral seminar, participate in student gatherings, give a public lecture, and have full access to the research libraries of the University of Toronto. TMTC would provide office space and provide information on living arrangements. Academic accountability would be to Grebel's Academic Dean. Status would be adjunct professor at Grebel.

Further recommendations:

- As TMTC and Grebel leadership consider the ways in which TMTC's academic services should be provided, they ought to consider both the ways in which a. supports long-term relationships with both students and TST, and the ways in which b. and c. allow for a range of Mennonite faculty voices and the possibilities of providing mentors to a wider range of students, though possibly at the expense of continuity.
- The goal is to continue to offer one, and occasionally two, courses per year, plus additional services in advising and supervision
- As b. and c. are essentially new, the TMTC Director, TMTC Academic Advisor and Grebel Dean would need to actively define these roles and search for suitable persons to fill them
  - The research that a TMTC Visiting Professor undertakes here would be an integral part of the research contribution that TMTC can make to the Mennonite community and Christian theology
  - While TMTC Visiting Professors would often come from Mennonite institutions, Mennonite faculty who teach at other institutions should also be sought

## 2. Administration

There are three key administrative roles. They could be combined in various ways and done by either two or three persons. E.g. The roles of director or administrative assistant, or the director and the academic advisor, could be filled by the same person.

a. TMTC director. Ideally based in Toronto. 1/4 time. In addition to the primary administrative responsibilities currently assigned to the director, significant time and energy would be required to work with the Grebel Dean's office regarding the TMTC Visiting Professorship and to oversee student fellowship program, including pursuing a major grant for the fellowships. S/he would need to have some academic background and be able to operate in such a setting. Yet, s/he would not need to have the qualifications to actually teach at the advanced degree level. This person would be involved in "routine" fundraising activities, but would not be pursuing funds for endowments.

b. TMTC academic advisor. Based in Toronto or Waterloo. A senior academic who serves as the primary liaison between TMTC and TST. Qualified to teach and supervise at the advanced degree level. This person would almost certainly be a Grebel faculty member.

c. TMTC administrative assistant. Must be based in Toronto. 1/5 time (about the current allotment). This person would likely be a student.

## 3. Student Fellowships

The purpose of the student fellowship would be to

- provide financial support as a tangible sign of the wider church's support of advanced theological education
- encourage the development of particular professional skills required of theological leaders

Two fellowships would be available, each for two years in length. The amount of money would be significant (e.g. \$5000 per student per year) so as to help make doctoral studies possible. The obligations of the fellowship would be worked out with each individual recipient but would presuppose regular participation in TMTC events. The model is not to hire assistants to do particular tasks, but to give students the opportunities to develop professional skills in teaching, administration, and church communication. Possibilities include:

- Helping to plan and organize the TMTC Fellows group; the grad conference; or a particular event
- Being a teaching assistant in Grebel's undergraduate program
- Developing a half or full day workshop on one's area of research or study, for an audience such as a cluster of pastors, an academic institution, or congregations. Further funds may be available to present this somewhere in the constituency.
- Contributing a reflective article to *Canadian Mennonite*, *the Mennonite*, or *Vision: A Journal of Church and Theology*
- Other professional development activities

At least one of these fellowships would be available to TMTC students of any nationality (endowments for fellowships restricted to Ontario students qualify for matching funds from the Ontario government). A grant from Lilly or ATS may help to fund the pilot phase of these fellowships.

The A. James Reimer Scholarship will be an increasingly important way that TMTC supports students and recognizes their achievements, although that award will remain separate from these proposed fellowships.

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### **Ongoing issues**

A number of "strategic questions" have been identified in the documents and the discussion. These are collated below. These do not need to be resolved definitely and but rather constitute a *sampling* of questions that the Advisory Board should be monitoring in future years and periodically considering in greater detail. That is, a "leadership" role involves attention this kinds of issues.

- Are the right people around the Advisory Board table? Currently, the Advisory Board is representative of CMs, plus students. Do participants come with the right information about what kinds theological leadership is needed by the (Mennonite) church and institutions? Should others be invited on a one-time or short-term basis? Should new relationships be developed that might lead to new corporate memberships (e.g. proposed Chair of Mennonite Theology at Fuller Seminary)?
- What are the general needs and trends in Mennonite graduate theological education?
- Should the academic program be provided primarily by one individual, or many? In whatever academic configuration is decided upon: Is there adequate consistency and continuity? Does the program include a variety of perspectives and disciplines?
- What is TMTC's research mandate? How is it fostered?
- Should students be encouraged to communicate their work directly to the church during their doctoral programs?
- Is TMTC's primary academic mandate to teach *about* Mennonite theology to any and all who are interested—or is it to help train those *Mennonite doctoral students* who will teach in the theological disciplines? Put another way: what is "Mennonite" about TMTC—the theological content or the people?
- Is there a regular review process in which consideration is given to when and which programs

- might be terminated? Does the planning for new initiatives include consideration of duration?
- Racial/ethnic and gender diversity among TMTC students.
  - Appropriate ways of connecting with the global Mennonite church (e.g. host a conference on the theme of Mennonite scholarship and theological education in light of our global Mennonite reality)
  - What is the core that TMTC should initiate/own, and what should be encouraged elsewhere?
  - How are TMTC's ecumenical connections related to the ecumenical agendas of supporting denominations? Can TMTC be understood as an expression of the denominational mandates for ecumenism? If so, how does this affect which relationships are nurtured with which groups?
  - What is the general mandate and purpose for dialogue? How does one decide which dialogue to enter, and for how long?