

North East/Quebec Regional meeting notes March 14, 2017

Those in attendance: Montreal Mennonite Fellowship; Hunta MC; Ottawa MC and Petitcodiac MC; The Village International

Introductions were made and David opened the meeting in prayer.

David began the meeting by asking what folks knew about future directions, rating from 1 to 5 as to what each person knows.

- Hunta MC (Ryan) probably at a 1. Knows a bit about Re-learning Community; John (MFM) said around a 3, has read some of the documents and knows some info from Canadian Mennonite, rather than from MCEC or MC Canada; Cidney at a 1 or 2. In significant time of transition in terms of leadership. Has tried to follow FD conversations, but time has not allowed; Anthony (OMC) congregation at around a 3. Three members attended Assembly in Saskatoon, but have not been watching recent developments; Gordon (Petitcodiac) said he would be at a 3 ½, last year congregation spent some time discussing this.

David then gave a “thumb nail” sketch for folks: around 4 years ago David talked with Willard Metzger about the future of the Mennonite Church in Canada around questions: what can we afford? Is there places of duplication? If there were ____ things we could afford, what would we do? What is it we want to be doing? What is it that God is calling us to?

David mentioned a TED talk by Simon Sinek which centred around each organization needs to know ‘why’ they do what they do? MC Canada and Area Churches began asking themselves these ‘why’ kinds of questions. Very productive for national body and for regional bodies. Out of this conversation the Future Directions Task Force was formed. FDTF gathered info, did some research, wrote reports which then went to each Area Church for conversation and feedback. David admitted that sometimes in the conversation information was not always clear and understood. In fact, Canadian Mennonite did not portray the future directions conversation as accurately as was hoped.

David moved to describing this process like building a house – what are the values we want to have fill this ‘house’? That is essentially what the FDTF was trying to convey. The vision of the values of the Canadian Mennonite Church was communicated via the Final Report & Addendum which was discussed and met with feedback at Area Church AGM’s and then voted on at Saskatoon MC Canada national Assembly. It was voted on in favor. From this decision a proposal was written – “an artist’s rendering” of our building. The proposal is being looked at and discussed among Area Churches and offer their feedback. This feedback will provide more detail and refinement to the proposal which will then be voted on this October 2017.

David then showed those in attendance the futuredirectionsmc.ca website with all relevant information: proposal (full); Interim Council, Executive Staff Group; Working Groups, etc. David gave a brief overview of the documents, the various bodies (Interim Council; ESG, Working Groups). All updates can be found here at this website.

David shared 'why' a national/area church – significant changes to Canadian society – secular culture all around the church; therefore, concept of 'witness' is needed here locally and not only internationally. The local church – congregation must recognize its identity and role as doing mission and being missional in its local context.

This new model of an integrated national church with area churches being resourced by the national church and providing support and resources to the local congregations.

- John (MFM) raised concern re: resources. Does this new shift change how available resources will be for us as a local congregation? Will congregations provide their own resources? No, not really. The hope is that resources will continue to be made available for congregations and perhaps even increase as CommonWord for example is hoped to be one of the sources of (digital) Anabaptist/Mennonite resources for congregations. Perhaps CommonWord could be seen as the national platform for providing these resources.
- Gordon (Petitcodiac) shared the concern how we can remain "part of a family" is a real challenge especially for us churches that are distant. If congregations are going to be the focus how is that going to be transferred to those on the fringe? David responded that we want to be more efficient in engagement – so at a national study conference it could be proposed that a broader range of folks could take part. Congregation of Ministerial Leadership would be another way of resourcing leaders (paid and unpaid) across the nation. David invited the distant congregations to challenge MCEC to keep them accountable to making resources available and more accessible to all congregations. David mentioned that Conrad Grebel College University will hope to provide resources (workshops) even to congregations as far flung as Petitcodiac. These are some of the examples of how to gather distant congregations together with others.
- Gordon cautioned that there will be some folks who will want to discuss theology. David commented that typically national Assemblies have been more "family" reunions and tended to be more "white and Swiss/Russian" folks and unfortunately not reflect the diversity of our MC Canada family. Gordon hoped that there would still be good congregational involvement in the new model which is part of our Anabaptist ecclesiology. David explained, the national church agenda emerges out of the 5 Area Churches – the national church never creates its own agenda. If congregations come to their regional gatherings with certain concerns these will shape the national agenda

because regional church leadership will be collaborating together more often to see this happen.

- Ryan of Hunta MC commented on the values of the changing church structure and wondered what those values are. David responded by saying that Canadian society has changed from Christian to post-Christian: pastor has set roles; conference does mission – we give our money and they look after that. We have “professionalized” mission and put it in the hands into long-term mission workers, but we see that the biblical story invites us (Acts) to personalize our faith story and share that with others. The new model suggests that we shift mission back into the local context as well as doing that nationally and internationally. Each congregation to see itself as engaging in mission. One key value in this new model – mission.

David highlighted some of the national priorities (values) from the proposal: Canadian Witness, International Witness, Leadership Development, Higher Education (schools), Integrated Communication platform (Canadian Mennonite?), Sharing Resources, Maintain sense of national people hood as Anabaptist– study conferences, Support Services.

- Anthony (OMC) asked about Higher Education in new model. David responded that AMBS offers M. Div. Connect program (for example) which could be taught by a Conrad Grebel prof. Area Churches could collaborate better in terms of what schools are offering and cross-represent ideas and resources more intentionally. Witness Working Group doing good discussion around perhaps sharpening its focus around developing Anabaptist faith communities. Church Engagement would re-focus its work in the new model – closer engagement and ownership with and by congregations committing dollars to Witness work. One possibility David suggested is we have a group of Chin churches that are committed to sending its people back to Myanmar. Greater delegate engagement envisioned for Witness work and hearing about it as well. Jason added that not only will congregations have greater ownership in partnering with International Witness by contributing financially, but they will also have greater ‘buy in’ because they will help in the discernment of what will actually be done internationally.
- John (MFM) asked about how local congregational engagement will look like in the new model? Will there still be a Witness Council? David responded that MWC is envisioned as providing the kind of vetting of (International) opportunities that would come to Canadian Mennonite congregations. Every church will not provide its own mission initiatives – and yet some room could be left for local initiatives to spring up, such as some of our new Canadian

Mennonite churches. Church Engagement staff will bring the mission possibilities to congregations that have been vetted through MWC and the board (Exec staff).

- Ryan (Hunta MC) asked do we focus more locally since our finances are limited? Will there be training provided? David responded that each congregational context is unique and so must ask itself, what is God calling us to here? What does it mean to share our faith in our local context? One of the hopes of the new model is that we can keep a slim national overhead so that more dollars can be available for some of the smaller Area Churches – Sask and Alta. MCEC has traditionally kept 60% at home and send 40% on to the national church and can therefore do more at the regional level. Other Area Churches have kept less regionally and sent more on nationally.
- David asked the group: What is one hope or dream you have or wish for out of this restructuring? Appreciation expressed by Gordon (Petitcodiac) for this kind of face-to-face interaction. David indicated that we have the technology for this kind of interaction that can be ongoing. Ryan (Hunta) admitted that they are isolated and small and disconnected to southern Ontario. We are looking to revitalize our congregation. We need resources and are helpful only if they are utilized. David offered more increased interaction (like this video conference) if there are suggestions as to how that could be done he is open to hearing that. John (MFM) expressed concerns about more of the finances remaining at the regional level. He hopes for and affirms a more sustainable structure. John also affirmed the idea/concept of the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership – pulling together various leaders of all kinds. John also expressed some sadness on no attendance by Quebec churches. David indicated that there was an attempt to have them participate, but regrettably it did not work out. David also commented that MCEC is well-equipped yes, but that is not the case for other regions, some are quite small and needing further resources. Cidney (Village) expressed gratitude to hear from regional leadership and fellow colleagues and feels that she is better informed now after this evening's video conference.

David closed the meeting expressing much gratitude for everyone's interaction and willingness to meet this evening.