

GTA Regional Meeting Notes March 22, 2017

Congregations represented: Danforth MC, Hagerman MC, Rouge Valley MC, TUMC, Toronto Chinese MC, Toronto New Life

Tim Reimer began with a story with the MC Canada plaque. David also shared a story re: MC Canada plaque. Michele also shared a story about the MC Canada logo. Tim opened in prayer.

David opened the meeting, and each person introduced themselves. David gave a brief overview of our Canadian Mennonite family – our people hood – “we are people of peace, welcome (to refugees).” David invited congregation reps to purchase Welcome signs (from MCEC) and provided a brief explanation of its origins and purpose related to our current Canadian context. 1,300 of these signs have gone “out the doors” of 50 Kent.

David handed out copies of the Executive Summary (3 pages) and informed folks of the futuredirectionsmc.ca website – any new updates will be found there. David began by asking where folks are on a scale of 1 – 10 based on what their knowledge of the future directions process.

David gave a brief broad strokes description/background/current process of the future directions. Willard Metzger (Exec. Director MC Canada) contacted David re: beginning conversation about the future of the church in Canada – start with why? (Simon Sinek TED talk). Why MC Canada? Why an Area Church? Why a congregation? Why Christian faith (as an individual)? Future Directions Task Force tasked with these “why” questions, invited input, did research, asked questions, etc. FDTF discovered through this feedback, research – living in an increasingly secular culture, churches losing members, increased donor competition, etc. Report was put together and invited feedback from Area Churches (prior to 2016 Assembly).

Canadian Mennonite did not frame the Future Directions conversation well. The Final Report was misunderstood as a “blue print” for the future of the Canadian Mennonite Church. The report expressed values and not so much ‘detail.’ The current proposal that was put together post Assembly is understood as ‘an artist’s conception’ of the ‘new building’ – Canadian Mennonite Church. This proposal is being discussed and feedback being invited into it at Area Church Annual Gatherings across Canada. Working Groups gathering around each national priority outlined in the proposal are also discussing their respective areas of ministry and will speak into shaping the proposal further.

David further described our current post-Christian context – increasingly secular, giving examples from the UK and from the U. of Waterloo. We must begin looking at how we are the church here in Canada – a new focus on mission as a local church in addition to nurturing and

worshipping as its purpose. This proposal is inviting us to think more missionally both locally and internationally.

David invited folks to ask questions as they saw fit:

- Will our input make a difference? Asked pastor Tim Reimer. David responded by saying that there was not enough time for staff and congregations to live with the uncertainty of putting off changes until July 2018. Keith Regehr was brought in to lead this process. Keith has done well at listening to the input thus far. Keith is reading the notes from each of these regional meetings. “Yes!” the input around this circle will make a difference and will give shape to revision of the proposal.
- Tim Reimer affirmed that it is great that the proposal begins with the Vision Healing and Hope statement. Tim also commented on the national gathering for decision making (pg. 8 of 25). Tim wondered if the congregations would in fact have increased voice? Tim felt that the decision making is happening at various levels and was concerned about this. Where is the congregational voice in this new structure? Since congregational reps will no longer be present at future annual meetings. We should watch what is happening within our congregations – noting EVANA – passionate energy. Why focus on restructuring the national level if the congregation ‘is the foundational unit’ of the church? Tim also affirmed the statement about the congregation as the ‘foundational unit.’
- David responded to this by explaining how the relationships had functioned between individual congregations and the Area Churches and the national church – both bodies tried to connect to congregations but it was unrealistic. Face-to-face relationships will be held at a regional level (area churches with congregations) and the national church as the equipper/supporter of the area churches. National church agenda will be birthed out of closer relationship - the Area Churches will be hearing from their congregations what they need to be engaged in mission locally and if this ‘need’ is expressed by all regions it becomes a ‘national’ priority. More engagement at the Area Church level is envisioned in this new model – let’s do the work ‘closer to home.’
- Ethiopian churches in MCEC have international mission initiatives and have invited other local Mennonite churches to donate, said Tim.
- Dave Burkholder affirmed that as an individual member he will feel more strongly connected to the Area Church given what he is reading in the proposal
- Willard shared re: MC Alberta AGM and what he said to them he also shared in this group – you will have greater congregational representation in the new model than currently is the case; in Saskatoon (Assembly) there was only half (50%) representation of churches across Canada. More congregational engagement because regions are envisioned to be closer to congregational life

- What is happening at the regional level? How will Area Churches be attentive to the needs of the local congregations? What are the 'safe guards'? asked Michele Rizoli. Willard responded that the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership gathering would happen alongside the National Annual gathering – everyone in attendance will have influence and voice.

What is changing in the Area Churches that there will be more congregational representation? asked Michele. Those participating in the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership, indicated David, will be church leadership not just paid pastors, could be a congregation's leadership team. Tim was concerned about the function of the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership referring to it as a "magisterium" – Michele indicated that she is on the Working Group and this is still being formed. David indicated that the Regional Church AGM's need to be re-vamped – let congregations know more about Witness, invite feedback from congregations what is needed. MCEC keeps more money 'at home' than other Area Churches do. Michele noted that there needs to be increased equality among Area Churches. Western Area Churches have had fewer resources to engage their respective congregations. The new model envisions greater engagement with each local congregation. Michele noted that Area Churches are facilitating and not manufacturing theological engagement – that must happen across the country.

- Where is the most effective forum for congregations to share their hearts for ministry? Asked Dalton. Willard re-framed the question – you as MCEC congregations need to ask: How will MCEC ensure that it hears from you as congregations what you are passionate about? David responded asking, How can we revamp our clusters to facilitate that conversation? Dalton shared, how do we as a congregation tie into what is happening on a wider scale? David responded, the Area Church is responding to what it is hearing from congregations. Everyone wants a vibrant connection to international Witness, said David, adding that some of our new Canadian churches are sharing their desire to go back to their home land do mission there. Could they invite congregations across Canada to be supportive of their international mission? That is what is being envisioned in the new model.
- Adolfo expressed that secularism is wonderful. What we need to ask is what do people want? What are people in church saying? People don't care about church structures. What do people in the pew really want? What do people on the street need? We must address the needs of the people otherwise we will be out of touch with the reality of church and non-church folks. We need to listen to each other; take the time to have meaningful conversation together. We seem to 'go in circles' in our lack of conversations with each other. We as the church walk in 'privileged' circles with the government, but perhaps we should be willing to not walk along with the government.

We could be more prophetic in our message if we were free from our close relationship with the government.

- Willard responded that structure changes – most people do not care about these structures. However, we cannot do anything without delegate approval to make needed changes. The genuine hope is that we can minimize our structure to do the very things Adolfo highlighted – what God calls us to do. David added, honestly we as a church should be asking ourselves these hard questions and the new model invites us to do that. My hope is that international Witness will be done differently. How can we be more effective in doing international Witness? The new model suggests utilizing MWC's expertise so that we can serve our international brothers and sisters more effectively and hopefully less 'colonial' in nature.
- Mike expressed concern about the time frame for implementation. The Annual Meeting structure envisioned seems like it will take too long for things to happen. Mike went on to express questions/concerns of 'power' in board decisions being influenced by policy. Model proposed re: board level makes MCEC and MC Manitoba more vulnerable, expressed David. A fair degree of 'trust' will be needed in this new model re: board decisions. Board cannot go 'rogue' and what has been already witnessed thus far is an incredible amount of 'goodwill' amongst Executive leadership and Moderators in working together. There is potential for 'veto' in the new model – but national agenda is only what all 5 Area Churches have agreed on. A partnership among a few regions could be envisioned, however that would not be a 'national' agenda.
- Congregations have lots of room to take initiative in ministries of interest – churches are currently 'doing their own thing,' and even in the new model will continue to do so.
- The minority churches are not representative here tonight, lamented Adolfo. TUMC and Toronto New Life is an example of two different congregations working together. We must figure out how to work together better. Having said that, there has been some engagement in this process by our new Canadian churches.
- Andrew indicated that the 94% approval does have some authority, and so he will submit to the delegate discernment, but still not clear how this new model will strengthen how we can work together more effectively; doesn't seem realistic to him. David responded that there is a risk to this model. My hope is that Area Church leaders and some staff will collaborate, share resources more so than in the past, and if we cannot do that we have a problem. Willard also added, currently we are 6 partners, the new model will mean however – 5 regions covenant together to make up the national entity – the success of the national priorities will be dependent on the agreement of the all 5 regions.

- Tobi commented and cautioned that in the past a similar model did not seem to work, lost energy and passion; she has more hope because new things are coming – her new role at Canadian Mennonite for example.
 - Adolfo cautioned and challenged how we can leverage our Mennonite involvement in government to be used in our current context
- Brian Quan closed the meeting in prayer.