

Notes from K-W and K-W Perimeter MCEC Regional Meeting March 29, 2017

Congregations present: Waterloo North MC, Rockway MC, St. Jacobs MC, Wanner MC, Preston MC, Steinmann MC, Grace Lao MC, Calvary Church Ayr, Sterling Ave MC, First MC, Breslau MC, W-K UMC

Gordon Allaby gave a welcome to all present and prayed to begin our evening.

David thanked all for attending and for providing the key leadership in the church. David shared that his hope from tonight is that those present understand the vision of the FD proposal and to hear feedback.

David asked where folk's familiarity with the future directions (on a scale of 1 – 10)? Most in attendance felt they were at around 4 – 7 on the scale, with a handful at 8 – 10 and a few at the initial awareness of the process. David let folks know where to find details, info, persons involved at futuresdirectionsmc.ca

David then gave a “thumbnail” sketch (background) of the process. Willard Metzger contacted David initiating some conversation around the coming changes of the Canadian Mennonite Church. Initial conversations centred around income – what can we afford? Maybe the real question is Why are we doing this? David quoted Simon Sinek (TED talk) start with why.

Why have an Area Church? Why a national church? Why local congregations? Began re-framing the “why” questions and began naming some of the significant changes occurring in society: increasing secular society, loss of donors, loss of denominational loyalty, etc. Where is our “mission field”? What about our local neighborhood?

At that time the Future Directions Task Force was convened to consider these questions. Reports were written. David shared about the FDTF Final Report being like a builder's drawing not a detailed blue print. That is what was voted on at the Saskatoon Assembly. After delegates voted in favor of the final report a proposal was drafted from that. Last December the current proposal was drafted.

The wisdom of the delegates indicated that a body of leadership was needed to guide this process – Interim Council and Executive Staff Group. If we wait too long congregations will disconnect with their finances. Since 2012 MC Canada staff have lived with uncertainty – they need to have a sense as to where things are at. A special delegate Assembly is planned for October 2017 to vote on a further developed proposal.

Keith Regehr as Transition Coordinator was hired to lead the Transition process. The current proposal is being discussed and feedback being invited from delegates. All Area Churches are doing this all but MCEC has so far. Within MCEC, there will be as many as 7 gatherings to

discuss the proposal. A Listening Group of about 40 members are offering feedback to this transition process. And, Working Groups are meeting together around specific topics – International Witness, Canadian Witness, Congregational Vitality, Communications, etc. Important to remember also, that the transitioning will continue beyond the October Assembly for example; International Witness – changes implemented will require a longer time line to hear from International partners, etc.

It did start around a conversation about finances, but the Church is ripe to discuss its role, its mission, its purpose – the vision of the proposal is to look at how Area Churches will share their riches and wealth of knowledge with each other and for local congregations to examine their vision.

David invited folks to ask questions, provide affirmations:

- Rebecca Yoder Neufeld (pg. 16) – International Witness: Are we engaging only in partnership in international mission where there is an already established national church? David responded that MWC could assist us in doing future international mission and know who we could work with. Rebecca also asked: What mechanisms within MWC are there for Canadian churches to partner (to match interests) with International brothers and sisters? True, not at this point. Proposal does not provide too many details in this regard. There are 70 different global Anabaptist mission agencies currently at work around the world, Willard reported. He had conversation with MWC president Cesar Garcia who said that he would like a greater level of intentionality of collaboration among agencies rather than having 70 separate agencies working individually and just reporting what they are doing to each other. Our preferred platform – according to the proposal – is to work through MWC. Cesar asked, wouldn't it be wonderful if we collaborate together in the future, asking various international churches what they could offer. Rebecca added in closing: Are we making all kinds of assumptions to what MWC can offer? Willard and David nodded in acknowledgement.
- Ivan Unger – intrigued all his life about global missions, he is more aware of non-denominational agencies at work in the world, what about working with non-Mennonite service agencies? They are hearing from God too! We need to look beyond the confines of our 'narrow' Mennonite structures. David responded that some of our new Canadian churches could help us envision international mission and think more broadly.
- Ron Matthies wondered if some broad strokes comments could be made re: changes that have been made since the Assembly. Willard responded that what is happening so far is a "fleshing out" of what was approved in principle – FDTF Final Report & Addendum. Congregations will be members only of a Regional Church. The National Church has been a separate entity from Area Churches. There is a covenant between the

5 Area Churches that would make up the national priorities. Congregations would mirror what has been happening in MCEC – congregations would give to their Regional Churches and the Regional Churches would fund the shared national priorities. Ownership for the national agenda would then be presented as owned by the regions.

- Tom Yoder Neufeld was quite concerned that David did not mention the “Addendum” at all in his opening presentation this evening. Tom continued to assert that the Addendum was quite helpful and enabled folks to vote in favor of the process especially at the MCEC AGM last year. What the Addendum indicated should be taken seriously. And where is the content about the congregation being the foundational unit? What is driving this thing? There doesn’t seem to be time to ‘chew on’ the content of this proposal, unless this meeting here tonight is that. David responded that the Addendum was taken seriously in this process and is concerned that Tom felt it wasn’t. David apologized if Tom heard that it wasn’t being taken seriously. David indicated that in the new model executive leaders will meet more often around the table and that will be a good thing. And he has already experienced this good collaboration among executive leadership. David’s sense was that the Addendum did shape the process. The Addendum addressed the whole feedback process that we are currently working at.
- Kevin Duerksen indicated that the document speaks to governance and accountability structure. His encouragement is that we create a structure that will provide leadership that will be the church together, and not some bureaucratic structure. We are still calling out ecclesial leadership. He hoped to see more ecclesial language rather than structure language. He is on the Listening Group and it has not worked well so far because of the tight time line. David responded that the transition process will likely go beyond the October delegate Assembly. Have to be gracious in this process.
- Mike Hostetter – affirmed David speaking of beginning with ‘why’ – Sinek. Structure is built to assist that “why” and the vision. My hope is that we invest what it takes to reach the “why” to make it happen. Mike was encouraged by Tom’s comment about us being cells of the church. David responded that in Winnipeg during a gathering, young adults were asked: ‘why’ is a national body important to you? These young adults named the importance of the national entity. Mike added that too much has been said about the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ in this process and pleased that David pointed to the “why.”
- Palmer Becker – sits on the Witness Working Group. The Witness Working Group wants to interview and hear from our new Canadian churches and ask what is their connection to back home? What do you think should be 2 or 3 of our national priorities? Hearing from them is so important. Palmer remembers the LIFE process, and asked, Have we broadened ourselves enough by hearing from other groups that have a rich purpose and vision? Willard responded that MC Canada is part of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and Canadian Council of Churches and is hearing that the Christian Church in

Canada as a whole is experiencing significant changes, but there has not been a formal conversation happening about comparing notes. David indicated that the role of the denomination is to equip its local congregations who are 'on the ground.' How do we learn from each other? And how can we help congregations thrive?

- Brent (SJMC) asked a question about congregations being involved in the new structure. David responded that this process is leadership being attentive to what its hearing from its local churches, driven from the bottom-up not from the top-down. We as Regional Churches will be taking ownership for International Witness more than we have had to in the past. What is the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership? Asked Brent. Every-other-year gathering, where more than just paid pastors, but leaders (lay as well) to hold study conferences where conversation around papers written to discern together across the country. Glyn indicated that this idea is not practical. We can't get folks to attend our MCEC Annual gathering. David gave the vision for the Congregation for Ministerial Leadership – how do we talk to each other more, study together more? David spoke affirmatively the "Dusting off the Bible" conference from Vancouver where the bulk of it was a 'study' conference. Willard added, yes it may not be practical but the vision was to
- Janessa Otto – Our AGM is in April, but wondering what have we heard from the other AGMS? Not a lot in the proposal about International Witness, how do we maintain the continuity with our international partners? Willard responded that the Witness Workers have been informed that the time line for them is July 2018. We have many variations of international partnerships as you know and it is difficult to determine what will be done. Willard responded to what has been happening at the other AGM's: BC AGM – BFC has been a critical issue there. Overall good conversations. Some gaps have been identified in the process and leadership is listening. There are many questions around our International Witness work.
- Rudy Baergen – study conference in Vancouver was put together by the Faith and Life Committee, wondering if that kind of intentionality is needed for creating that kind of gathering again. Expressed concern around what was said re: International Witness we do not go anywhere we are not invited. David did not mean to indicate that. Rudy added that National churches need to know who they will talk to. Willard responded, not a lot of specifics yet, and a smaller staff contingent. Yes, there will be someone who will respond to our international brothers and sisters. There will be staff, only fewer. As this process continues on we want to correct misunderstandings around international Witness and other topics of interest.
- Mark Diller Harder – affirmed board membership however greater diversity needed. What would have a BFC process looked like in this new entity? Willard responded that this question has been asked across Canada. Perhaps a similar kind of conversation (like

BFC) could be brought to the Congregation of Ministerial Leadership or the study conference. David responded, he would see more engagement as Area Churches would be closer to congregations.

- Question was raised by Wally Regehr re: revision to the Confession of Faith: Where would that sit in the future model? David responded that this is a bi-national agenda, as is the new hymnal. What about the Canadian Mennonite – what will happen in the new entity? David responded that MCEC has been very supportive of Canadian Mennonite. Canadian Mennonite receives one of the larger pieces of finances from both MC Canada and MCEC. We need a national voice, but we need to look at how the church works more collaboratively in communication. Willard responded that perhaps the question is more open – If this is the amount of money we have for communication is Canadian Mennonite the best platform for our communication? Question was raised: Do we want to have an independent press? David responded that it would depend on what the church wants. Perhaps making it subscription based would be a good way to approach this. The Canadian Mennonite helps us create our national family feeling, indicated individual. Ron responded that much has changed in communications since the Canadian Mennonite covenant was created in the mid-90's. We may have to spend more on communication in the future model and not ask ourselves what we can afford. Canadian Mennonite is a "treasure" for our Canadian Mennonite family, would not want to see it disappear.
- Ivan Unger affirmed Mike Hostetter's comments re: why and said that pg 22 refers to why we do what we do. Perhaps we need to re-write the Vision of Healing and Hope statement. In the past as families we prioritized going to national assemblies. Regarding the covenant between Area Churches (pg. 22 of proposal) Ivan commented on re-wording the statement in "(f)" to say "Foster a Kingdom of God identity in the most wholesome expressions of our Anabaptist heritage." Ivan also commented on Naming (pg. 9) and that using terms which are more familiar would be helpful for folks. He went on to highlight a few examples of "familiar" and more "self-explanatory" terms he felt would be most useful: General Board could be named "National Council" leaving out "Governance" for brevity. Area Church could be named "Regional Conference" to minimize confusion with the commonly used term "church." And he thought it best to keep "Mennonite Church Canada" rather than a "national church" or "national denomination" because these seem to speak to geography and not as much to fostering Anabaptist identity.
- Gudrun Matthies – expressed anxiety about some of the details that need to be worked out and addressed. David responded that this transition will take time to implement. Change is constant. Constant adaptation is something that we as the church need to be prepared to make.

- Carrie Martens – sits on the Congregational Vitality Working Group and knows that we can do better at “story-sharing.” What does it mean to not only resource, but share stories effectively for the ‘average’ member of our congregations to be able to share what is happening nationally?
- Rebecca Yoder Neufeld questioned the process about International Witness – why are our International partners being left out? She is concerned about “sweeping” statements heard about characterizing Witness work as ‘colonial.’ David responded by apologizing for any comments he may have made in that regard and for any staff who may have perpetuated this incorrect characterization of current MC Canada Witness work.
- Tom Yoder Neufeld asked: What happens in the new structure when Area Churches become alienated from each other? Concerned also that MC Canada will have less standing in the new model – no longer a partner alongside the 5 Area Churches. David responded that the new model does create an opportunity to work better together with more intentionality. He hopes that trust will be built between congregations and Area Churches. Willard responded that there is some risk that when new persons come into their role they may not have the same level of engagement and commitment as the prior holder did. No structural system has any guarantees.
- Muriel Bechtel said that the financial resources that are available is a very real question. MCEC has many resources, but that is not the case across Canada. David responded that in the new model there will be additional dollars for Area Churches that have less staffing, resources, etc. David hopes to see some “leveling out” of the financial question.