



Future Directions Task Force

Formed by:

Mennonite Church Alberta
Mennonite Church British Columbia
Mennonite Church Canada
Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
Mennonite Church Manitoba
Mennonite Church Saskatchewan

Discernment Guide

For Assembly 2014

May, 2014

"If we don't know deeply why we have the faith within us, how can we have a serious dialogue with others" theologian Douglas Hall once asked. And, it might be added, nothing is so serious as when winds of change about us shake familiar reference points on how to tell the story in the church, and live the story in the world. That's when one asks the kinds of core questions shaping the work of The Future Directions Task Force:

- What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21st Century?
- What are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow?

Readers not familiar with the work of the Future Directions Task Force are encouraged to review two brief documents in preparation: *Interim Report I* (www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2337) released 11 October 2013 and included in this Discernment Guide, the report in the Assembly Report Book summarizing more recent work to date, and a 2013 news story on the work of the FDTF at www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2003.

During Assembly 2014 we invite participants to help the Task Force discern responses to a number of important issues arising from our work to date in two plenary sessions and two workshops. A brief summary of each follows.

Plenary I

Rethinking Foundations: The 'Who' and 'Why' of 'We'

We tell our story as a people of faith in the context of God's continuing story. We invite you to consider: What do you hear that resonates with the story of your congregation? What is different? How does the story of your congregation connect with the Mennonite Church Canada story?

Leaders: April Yamasaki, Gerald Gerbrandt

Plenary II

Rethinking Strategies: The 'How' and 'What'

In this session we ask: "What story do we, as a people of God, want to write in the future?" The Spirit of God is surely in our midst, even though the many changes about us have sown uncertainty. In this Plenary we invite you to speak to: what is your dream of what our church could look like in the future? And, what can a wider church contribute to that dream?

Leaders: Chad Miller, Rebecca Steiner, Aldred Neufeldt



Seminar I

Re-imagining the Congregation.

"Can these bones live?" asked Ezekiel (37:3) a few thousand years ago. Today, many congregations are concerned about changes in membership, financial resources and retention of younger people. Some congregations are adapting to current trends and remaining active and vibrant. Others struggle with change and look for options to keep their communities alive. Yet, in the midst of today's realities and challenges, new faith communities are being born. This workshop explores: What makes for life and health in the congregation of 2014? What changes foster and nurture strong congregational mission today?

Leaders: Anita Retzlaff, Ken Warkentin

Seminar II

Re-imagining the Wider Church.

"There is a need for congregations to bond together in a larger body for both theological and practical reasons;" and, "an integrated, simpler, yet sounder structure is needed" are two of six propositions advanced in *Interim Report I*. Both were strongly endorsed by constituents. This workshop explores what these propositions could mean, building on plenary presentations and discussions. What could God's Spirit be telling us on how to be an integrated, simpler, sounder structure? How can congregations better work together at what we are called to do? Participants will be invited to share freely of their ideas on these and other questions.

Leaders: Terry Keller, Aldred Neufeldt

Submitted by the Future Directions Task Force, May, 2014

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