



**GOD  
FAITH  
PEOPLE**

*Mennonite Church  
Canada Assembly  
Saskatoon, Sask  
July 6-10, 2016*

# Discernment Guide

This is the covenant... I will write it on their hearts;  
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.  
- Jeremiah 31:33



## Assembly 2016: *God~Faith~People* Theme & Scripture

This is the covenant... I will write it on their hearts;  
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

JEREMIAH 31:33 (paraphrased)

This year's Assembly logo reminds us that Faith is our connection between God and the People (Jeremiah 31:33). The dove of peace is our common symbol across Mennonite Church Canada and of the peace building work to which we are called. The segmented globe reveals the Cross at the centre. The hands reaching to each other symbolize how God yearns for his people to love, support and join one another in the redeeming work of Christ. The colours reflect the harmony we seek in the midst of our diversity.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Guidelines & Statements	
Resolutions Procedures .....	2
Statement Regarding Change to Fiscal Year End .....	3
For Discernment/Decision	
Being a Faithful Church 7 .....	4
FDTF Submission to Assembly 2016.....	8
FDTF Final Report .....	13
An Addendum to FDTF December 2015 Final Report.....	18
Resolution on Israel/Palestine .....	25
Resolution on the Doctrine of Discovery.....	28
Budget 2016/2017 .....	30
Election Slate .....	33
Reporting Back.....	36
Schedule .....	40

## How To Use This Discernment Guide

This booklet contains the discernment topics we will address.

Please read through these discernment topics carefully and come prepared to participate.

A more detailed agenda can be found in the Program Book, which will be available onsite, and in advance electronically via [www.mennonitechurch.ca](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca).

We hope that you find this Discernment Guide to be a helpful way of visualizing the depth and breadth of your national church and the work that we do together.

## Assembly Purposes And Goals

The primary purposes of the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Assembly are to:

1. Provide opportunities for participants to build up and nurture the church by:
  - a. Forming faith and Christian identity from an Anabaptist Mennonite perspective, in children and adults.
  - b. Learning about and discerning Mennonite Church Canada's participation in God's work.
  - c. Debating issues facing the church and issuing statements as appropriate.
  - d. Worshiping and building community with people from across the national church.
  - e. Learning through seminars, displays and special events, which highlight available resources.
2. Conduct the business of the organization as described in the Mennonite Church Canada bylaws<sup>1</sup> by:
  - a. Reviewing the work and ministry of Mennonite Church Canada.
  - b. Accepting or rejecting the budgets and financial statements of Mennonite Church Canada.
  - c. Appointing an auditor.
  - d. Accepting, rejecting or removing area churches as members or as provisional members.
  - e. Electing its officers, boards, councils, and committees.
  - f. Amending the bylaws of Mennonite Church Canada as needed and monitoring adherence to those bylaws.

Approved by Support Services Council March 6, 2009

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<sup>1</sup> These are summary statements. See Part III, Section 8 of the Mennonite Church Canada bylaws for a full description of the duties and powers of voting delegates.

# Resolutions Procedures

From area churches, congregations, or individual delegates in Mennonite Church Canada Assemblies

1. We (want to) recognize that all our discussion and decision-making in the church is an attempt to discern God's will and to align our energies with what God is doing.
2. We want to create ways for the members to raise concerns and recommendations and to share/test insight into God's will and a prophetic word.
3. We accept the process of introducing discussion and testing ideas through the presentation of motions, discussing those following (a modified version of) Robert's Rules of Order, and recording an action either by identifying a consensus or recording a vote.
4. We want to respect the time of the delegates, to use it efficiently.
5. We want to respect the churches and the delegates by giving them opportunity to consider in advance the issues that will be discussed on the assembly floor.
6. We believe we can best manage the resolutions initiated by members through an ad hoc Resolutions Committee. This committee can work best if it receives resolutions in advance, and can serve the delegates and churches best if it makes the resolutions available in advance.
7. In order to serve the delegates well, the Resolutions Committee is given responsibility to decide which proposed resolutions will be debated. Some proposed resolutions may be combined with others or modified for presentation and some may be referred to the General Board or other body.
8. If the delegates disagree with a decision of the Resolutions Committee they can, with a majority vote, determine to bring a motion to the floor.
9. The attached statement defines the processes which guide the Resolutions Committee in its work.

## Guidelines for Presenting and Processing Resolutions at Mennonite Church Canada Assemblies

1. The Resolutions Committee shall consist of one member of the General Board and two or three persons not on the General Board.
2. The Resolutions Committee will be appointed by mid-March and will begin its work in advance of the assembly.
3. Congregations will be invited, when the assembly registration materials are sent out, to submit anticipated resolutions by May 31. The Resolutions Committee will consider and, as appropriate, edit the resolutions and will make them available to delegates by posting on the web site and sending to each congregation (via email or fax if possible) no later than June 15.
4. During the assembly, the Resolutions Committee will be seated at the front of the meeting room at a specially marked table during the business sessions. It has three tasks:
  - a. It prepares procedural resolutions such as recommending floor privileges, thanking hosts, etc.
  - b. It formulates motions when asked by the delegate body or the moderator.
  - c. It receives resolutions from delegates, and ensures that they are clear and appropriate. Delegates have asked that resolutions be worded in plain English, avoiding formality and lengthy introductions.
5. Resolutions from delegates will normally be directed to the Resolutions Committee for processing. Delegates will be made aware that resolutions need to be submitted in time for the Resolution Committee to process them adequately and for moderators to schedule them into the business sessions.
6. A resolution should include the names of the mover and seconder. The Resolutions Committee does not move actions.
7. The Resolutions Committee has the prerogative to combine resolutions with others or modify them for presentation; to refer a resolution to the General Board or other body as an alternative to delegate action, or to rule a motion out of order. Wording changes need to be checked with movers and seconds.
8. The Resolutions Committee will seek counsel from the Moderator and the General Secretary on all impending resolutions both for appropriateness and to plan for timing of presentation.
9. If the delegates disagree with a decision of the Resolutions Committee they can bring a motion to the floor. In that case, the moderator will call for a vote on whether to debate the motion. This vote will require support of a simple majority of the delegates.
10. An effort will be made to publicize forthcoming resolutions well before inviting a floor discussion of them. This will be done either through the newsletter, through special distribution, or public announcement.
11. Resolutions which have program or budget implications should be checked with the affected board or commission to determine what effect they will have on their activities. If further research and testing is needed before a decision can be made, it will be referred to the appropriate board or council with instructions to bring it forward for discussion at the next assembly. There may be times when the Resolutions Committee will decide, however, that the resolution should come to the floor for immediate discussion.
12. The Resolutions Committee has the prerogative of ranking the resolutions for presentation to the delegates. If any resolutions cannot be discussed because of lack of time they will be published for the information of the delegates and referred to the General Board for consideration and action.

## Statement Regarding Change to Fiscal Year End

At the Delegate Assembly of 2012 a motion was raised and adopted that would see Mennonite Church Canada change its bylaws to alter the Fiscal Year End from January to October.

The implementation of this change did not proceed. Upon further review, and in light of new information that arose at the previous assembly, it was strongly recommended by Financial Policy and Audit Committee not to go through with a fiscal-year-end change due to the consequences it would have on our internal reserves and the communications/constituent relations challenge this would present, along with all the additional internal costs and audit fees resulting from a change.

The General Board recommends that Mennonite Church Canada postpone implementation or reversal of the decision until the completion of the Future Directions Task Force process which has the potential to alter organizational structure and direction, and in any case, to bring the issue back to the Assembly by 2018.

John Goossen, General Board Treasurer

On behalf of Mennonite Church Canada General Board

May 2016.

## Notes

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# being a faithful church 7

2015

General Board  
Mennonite Church Canada



## Summary and Recommendation On Sexuality 2009-2015

### I. Background

In 2007 the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada embarked on the Being a Faithful Church (BFC) discernment journey which would eventually include matters of sexuality. The first BFC paper was processed and approved by the delegates in 2009. The decision to walk toward this discussion was in response to ongoing ferment around the reality of committed same-sex relationships in our midst, continuous calls at national Assemblies to readdress MC Canada's position on committed same-sex relationships, and the desire to honour the Saskatoon Resolution on Sexuality of 1986 which called for ongoing discussion.

The discernment methodology used by the Task Force has consisted of six cycles of preparing a document, sending it out to congregations and asking for feedback on specific questions. On the basis of the responses received, the Task Force, with General Board approval, has determined the next step in the discernment, resulting in a new round of preparation and response. Over the process of the discernment, 145 churches have submitted responses, as well as groups and individuals. Compared to normal response levels, the discernment feedback can be considered very strong. This final document, BFC7, is based on the entirety of the responses received over the seven years. It is our conviction that the methodology has been consistent with an Anabaptist ecclesiology in which discernment of God's will should happen through the study of Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the context of the people of God in local congregations and gathered assemblies. The Task Force is confident that we have heard the prayerful representative voice of our constituency.

The early BFC documents established that discerning the will of God is the ongoing task of the church and the Christian Scripture must be foundational in this discernment. On the basis of this discernment the church speaks again and either confirms what it has said before, modifies what it has said, or changes what it has understood. Early in the process of discernment, the goal was set to speak again on the matter of same sex-relationships at the Assembly in 2016. It was stated that it is important to discern in a "churchly way," and focus on that, rather than pre-determine our final conclusion. We claimed the promise that God's Spirit will guide our discernment.

BFC 4 gave special attention to the question of how to best use Scripture in discernment and this resulted in what has been referred to as the 'Paths and Ditches' document.<sup>1</sup>. The document articulated twelve paths we want to stay on in discernment and described the ditches we need to avoid. BFC4.1 brought the focus of discernment more directly to matters of sexuality, which led to BFC5, "*Between Horizons: Biblical Perspectives on Human Sexuality*." The responses to that paper and to the follow-up tasks resulted in BFC6<sup>2</sup>.

### II. What have we learned as a Task Force in the seven year BFC process?

Following are some of the observations and reflections offered by the Task Force after these seven years of denominational discernment:

1. Our congregations deeply value Scripture, yet we differ dramatically in our biblical interpretation. The "Paths and Ditches" is a remarkable document coming out of our congregations which leaves us with a good tool for ongoing discernment.
2. The status of the Bible among our people cannot be taken for granted and needs continued attention. We claim to be a biblical people but sometimes have difficulty in knowing how to use the Bible in discernment.
3. We have trusted in the leading of the Holy Spirit and we have wondered what it means that we have not yet been brought into a place of agreement.
4. We value the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, although the status that it is given in discernment varies. The BFC process has revealed that we do not have an appetite to change the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. This sentiment was particularly evident in BFC5.
5. We value unity in our National and Area Churches, yet we are also congregational and we cherish diversity. In the course of the discernment we have noted a growing realization that unity in Christ is not the same as agreement on all theological, biblical understandings.

<sup>1</sup> BFC4, "Testing the spirits in the Midst of Hermeneutical Ferment: Using the Bible in Helpful and Unhelpful Ways." (<http://news.mennonitechurch.ca/paths-ditches>)

<sup>2</sup> BFC6, (<http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/17279>)

6. We have diversity in our family of faith that can overshadow our common core. The diversity is found within our congregations as well as within the larger Body.
7. We are a people who value individual conscience which leads us to different faith and ethical positions.
8. If we want to be one Body we must also learn to honour those persons with whom we disagree.
9. Congregations, individuals, and particularly pastors are deeply committed to discernment in the church and have given abundantly of their time and energy.
10. We have discovered that the church has the capacity to discern difficult topics together.
11. Our capacity to deal with controversial issues varies from congregation to congregation depending on our particular circumstances.
12. Congregational discernment around difficult issues is not easy for us. Many responses came from groups or individuals within the church who clarified that they were not able to speak for their whole congregation.
13. In spite of the best efforts of the Task Force to plan a process that did not have a predetermined outcome, some still have understood the process to be biased. Communal discernment is complex.
14. Our plan for discernment, when we are open to the Spirit, might take us in unexpected directions. This seemed to happen in BFC5.1 when we discerned a shift from focusing on a specific same-sex question to questions around unity.
15. We are all on a journey when it comes to understanding and responding to the reality of same-sex attraction.
16. Choice of words and terminology is a sensitive matter in discernment. Language carries connotations that we are sometimes not aware of.
17. Accurate, effective communication is critical during times of discernment.

### III. Reaffirming our denominational polity guiding discernment

BFC3 already laid out a framework and plan to guide our discernment in Mennonite Church Canada on matters of sexuality. That document gives detailed attention to questions of responsibility, authority and process within our denomination in any discernment process. Some review of the general division of responsibilities is important as we move forward.

The task of discernment is the function of the whole church. This includes individual believers, congregations, and the larger collective Body – all informed by our context and guided by the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. Recognizing that while some dimensions of this discernment belong to the larger Body, much of the on-going discernment and practical implementation is best done in the context of the relationships within the local congregation because:

- i. The community of the congregation provides the pastoral response.
- ii. The community of the congregation provides the context of mutual accountability
- iii. The community of the congregation holds the expectations of discipleship towards growth in Christ

Practically speaking, responsibilities of the congregation include:

- i. Calling of gifts from within the congregation in collaboration with the Area Church.
- ii. Formation, calling to baptism and membership in the congregation.
- iii. Mission and outreach to the community beyond the congregation.
- iv. Calling of leadership to serve the congregation.
- v. Hiring policies of church staff.
- vi. Blessing of marriage.
- vii. Sending of delegates to Area and National Church Assemblies.

Area Church responsibilities include:

- i. Matters of ministerial credentialing and Area Church policy and documents.
- ii. Hiring policies of Area Church staff.
- iii. Maintaining relationships and providing support to congregations involved in matters of discernment.
- iv. Articulating Mennonite Church Canada's position on various matters of faith and practice to the outside world in the Area Church context.

Responsibilities of the National Church include:

- i. Hiring policy of national church staff.
- ii. Appointment of Board members.
- iii. The ownership and care for national policies and documents.
- iv. Articulating and fostering a sense of corporate identity.
- v. Providing resources for matters of on-going discernment.
- vi. Articulating Mennonite Church Canada's position on various matters of faith and practice to the outside world in the national and international context.

## IV. Providing spaces for testing

We have learned throughout the BFC process, but particularly in BFC 5 and 6 that we cherish sets of values which at times find themselves in tension with each other. We deeply value unity and we also value diversity and forbearance even when it leads to differences among us as we seek to be faithful to our understanding of God's will. Our people also have a long history of valuing and acting on conscience in their deep desire to live faithfully.

As we seek to be faithful, we pray that our unity will not be fragmented by our differences. These two foci in dialogue with each other both need to be acknowledged and given consideration. The dissenting voice, after all, may be a prophetic nudging of the Spirit to the entire church, to which we need to give space within our Body for testing, to see whether it is of God or not. Both Scripture<sup>3</sup> and our Confession of Faith<sup>4</sup> call for new insights and interpretations to be tested in the faith community. How can such space for testing be built and shaped in our denominational family while we hold on to our deep desire to remain faithful and united?

## V. Recommendation

Based on what the Task Force has heard in our discernment process concerning same-sex committed relationships, and in the spirit of the church speaking again, the General Board has approved for consideration at the 2016 Delegate Assembly, the following BFC task force recommendation:

- One of our foundations of unity has been the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. We recommend that it continue to serve the church in the ways suggested in the Introduction of the Confession itself.<sup>5</sup>
- We call upon our family of Christ to respectfully acknowledge that there are those among us (congregations and individuals) whose careful study of Scripture and prayerful journey of discernment lead them to a different understanding on committed same-sex relationships than is commonly assumed<sup>6</sup> by readings of Article 19 in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.
- We recommend that we create space/leave room within our Body to test alternative understandings from that of the larger Body to see if they are a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God.
- Since continued discernment will be required after Assembly 2016, we recommend that Mennonite Church Canada and Area Churches develop a mechanism to monitor the implementation of this recommendation.

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<sup>5</sup> “How do Mennonite confessions of faith serve the church? First, they provide guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture. At the same time, the confession itself is subject to the authority of the Bible. Second, confessions of faith provide guidance for belief and practice. In this connection, a written statement should support but not replace the lived witness of faith. Third, confessions build a foundation for unity within and among churches. Fourth, confessions offer an outline for instructing new church members and for sharing information with inquirers. Fifth, confessions give an updated interpretation of belief and practice in the midst of changing times. And sixth, confessions help in discussing Mennonite belief and practice with other Christians and people of other faiths.” Confession, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Many understand that the statement, “We believe that God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life” while made in reference to heterosexual divorce and remarriage, also prohibits committed same-sex marriage.

<sup>3</sup> I Thess 5:19-22; I John 4:1.

<sup>4</sup> Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. 1995. Waterloo: Herald Press. pp. 20, 22.

## VI. Call to Next Steps Post Assembly 2016

Mennonite Church Canada will continue to use the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* in accordance to the ways suggested in the Introduction to the Confession.<sup>7</sup>

Mennonite Church Canada will acknowledge that after careful study of Scripture and a prayerful journey of discernment some congregations have been led to a different understanding of committed same-sex relationships than is commonly assumed<sup>8</sup> by readings of Article 19 in our *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

Area Churches will determine how they create space for testing alternative understandings which might be a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God within their congregations.

Congregations will determine how to create space for testing alternative understandings which might be a prophetic nudging of the Spirit of God within their midst.

## VII. Conclusion

The Being a Faithful Church process has been a rich – sometimes frustrating – journey that has challenged our capacity to discern God's will. We have worked hard at this as congregations for seven years. From the beginning (BFC1, p.3), it was indicated that such a spiritual exercise of discernment must be done in an ongoing context of spiritual disciplines. And this has, indeed, happened. We have worshipped, prayed, studied, and dialogued in our congregations and together at our Assembly gatherings. We have confronted, cried, and come to new places together. It must be acknowledged that some have felt excluded or not heard in the process. Even so, we have persevered together in an arduous process.

BFC1 underscored the importance of such discernment in the normal life of the Church. There we wondered whether our ecclesial muscles were strong enough to withstand the pressures of such an exercise. We asked whether we can be the church in its ongoing vocation of discernment in our time and generation.

We now know. Yes, we do want to be God's church in our generation. We do want to be a church that is united across cultural lines and the geographic, rural and urban regions of Canada. We do want to continue to be a biblical people. We do want to be disciples of Jesus, and to recognize Jesus as our Lord. We do want to take seriously the polity that has grown out of our Anabaptist identity, and yes, we do want to engage in vibrant ministry and witness to our Lord in our immediate contexts and to our wider world.

For these, and other reasons, this process of discernment has been worth it. The process is worth it because the church is worth it.

As a Task Force we have worked together now for 7 years. We have listened to hundreds, maybe thousands, of comments. We have read hundreds of responses. We have compiled, sifted, and summarized the wisdom that we have heard from our churches. We have identified and recommended the next steps of our discernment. We have requested your participation as congregations, individuals, and organizations. The recommendation before us now is a faithful representation of the lengthy discernment that has happened. We are confident that this recommendation reflects the wisdom of our Body. We believe that the Holy Spirit has accompanied us in our discernment. The Task Force and the General Board commend the fruit of this process into the hands of the delegates of Mennonite Church Canada.

We pray again that in God's grace and mercy, we can together forge our way ahead. The road may not be lit all the way to the horizon, but we do have enough light to move ahead, because we can see enough of the road to do so in confidence. We know that God is with us.

May God continue to bless us in our desire to be a faithful Church.

September , 2015

<sup>7</sup> See footnote #5.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote #6.



## 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

# Future Directions Task Force

## Submission to Assembly 2016

### Introduction

The Future Directions Task Force was commissioned in November 2012 by Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada) and the five Area Churches (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Eastern Canada) to address two questions: What is God's Spirit calling us to in the 21st Century? And, what are the best ways (programs, structures, strategies) for the church to thrive and grow? The Task Force grew out of awareness that our church faced new challenges in a fast changing post-Christendom secular society marked by a growing number of congregations with declining and aging membership, the role of church in society being questioned, and declining funding for work of our wider church. We also knew we weren't alone; these challenges are being faced by all denominations.

Previous reports mention the research, input from a broad range of groups and experts, and conversations with countless individuals that informed a number of interim documents for testing of ideas, principles and directions with constituents at area church and national assemblies in 2013 and 2014. In November 2015 a penultimate draft of its Final Report was submitted for review by the General Board, accepted in principle, and released in December for consideration by our nation-wide church body (a copy follows).

Its longer supplement *the Backstory* and related material, along with previous documents, are available online at: <http://www.commonword.ca/Browse/2092>.

At its heart, the *Report* sets out a series of propositions as a guide to address our yearning as a church for: strong, healthy and vital congregations as centres of worship, faith formation, supportive communities and mission; strong regional churches connecting, supporting and empowering congregations in ministry locally and in the larger church; and, a strong national church that resources area churches for ministry locally, regionally and internationally, and fosters strong national identity as a Mennonite Anabaptist faith community. To lead, it proposes a simpler, more integrated organizational structure.

Starting in early February and ending late April, all five Area Churches brought the *Report* to their respective annual meetings for delegate consideration, debate and action. Four approved the *Report* in principle, and one (Alberta) decided not to decide until it had more information addressing its particular needs. The *Report* is now brought to Assembly 2016 for final joint review and action.

### Incorporating feedback into consideration of the report

*Release of the Final Report was followed by critical scrutiny, conversation and, sometimes, intense debate on various propositions. As the Task Force observes, that is as it should be. It's in engaging with content of the report that clarity emerges. These conversations informed Area Church discussion and decisions.*



## Future Directions Task Force

### Submission to Assembly 2016

*Task Force members listened to the views expressed, both as received and responded to in a large number of written and an untold number of oral conversations. In early May it reviewed the main themes of critique, and prepared an Addendum speaking to them for General Board consideration. Specifically, the Addendum speaks to what was heard in six main areas of concern: process, structure, national identity, international relations and witness, vulnerable area churches and financial and emotional sustainability, each concluded by a recommendation (see below).*

*On reviewing the Addendum, the General Board decided the provisions of these be added to its resolution recommending approval of the Report for delegate action at Assembly.*

#### If we say 'yes', what then?

*Some have asked, 'what will happen if we say 'yes'? Is that a blank cheque?'*

*The answer is 'no'. The Report is not a blueprint. It proposes directions for us to take in this uncertain time for the church, with propositions to be carefully considered and details to be worked out. The General Board's motion is to accept the Final Report in principle, taking into account provisions identified in the Addendum. The details need to be worked out in a transition time during which a number of important decisions will have to be made.*

*The General Board and Area Church leaders anticipate a transition time of up to two years. If done well, such a transition time should be a time of renewal, even as we lament changes to once treasured programs.*

*The major tasks, along with process as conceived so far, may be summarized as follows, and in the illustration following.*

#### Major tasks

- Covenant. Prepare and finalize a covenant binding our regional bodies to a common vision (global, national, regional, local), common regional priorities (with allowance for variation), national priorities, shared ministries, governance, costing and flow of funds, polity and related matters.
- Work Plan. Prepare and implement a work plan that considers changes in the program emphases proposed in the Report, each involving a:
  - Review of what is currently done
  - Consideration of alternative approaches that hold promise for strengthening church ministry
  - Gathering input from 'stakeholders'
  - Developing costing/funding and implementation scenarios, and
  - Prepare a plan for review and approval



## Future Directions Task Force

### Submission to Assembly 2016

#### **Leadership:**

- An Interim Council (IC) of moderators of each area and our national church bodies would take on the mandate to negotiate a covenant binding area churches to common directions, establish the work plan and timelines, arrange funding and provide oversight to the process.
- The work would be led by a Transition Team of 3 persons reporting to the IC of moderators, each member with a complementary area of expertise, all with a love for the church.
- Senior staff of area and national church bodies would conduct necessary research and develop implementation proposals for consideration. Some of this research might be done by working groups of constituents (see below).
- An experienced 'project manager' would be hired to coordinate work, facilitate research and preparation of written reports or proposals, and other activities required to assure timelines are met.

#### **Constituency involvement**

- A Listening Group of diverse voices to receive draft reports and proposals prepared by the Transition Team for consideration by the IC, providing their input and advice for the IC to consider.
- Working groups to research specific topics (e.g. international relations and witness) are likely to involve constituents with relevant experience and knowledge.
- Larger constituency feedback loops back to area church boards and, for some issues, back to congregations, are anticipated for important matters.
- Major decisions with policy implications would be referred to delegate assemblies.
- Regular feedback to all congregations and interested members on work in progress via joint communication channels



## Future Directions Task Force

### Submission to Assembly 2016

#### **Recommendation for action on the FDTF Final Report**

The General Board has considered the robust conversation on the *Report* leading up to and at Area Church meetings and given particular attention to core concerns raised; it affirms the recommendations addressing these concerns as prepared by the Task Force in an *Addendum*; and it notes with appreciation how Area Churches wrestled with these issues at their delegate assemblies, followed by delegate action approving the directions proposed by the *Report* (Alberta not deciding).

With that as context, and keeping in mind the challenges faced by not only our own denomination, but all denominations in our post-Christendom time, the General Board recommends approval of the directions outlined in the *Report*, and expanded on by the *Addendum*. We believe it points to directions that will strengthen our identity and capacity as an Anabaptist Mennonite church in Canada to be a healthy, spiritually vital part of the world-wide body of Christ at this time in history.

#### **Resolution for Delegates:**

*Whereas the General Board has heard the robust conversation on the Future Directions Task Force Final Report prior to and at the five Area Church spring meetings, giving particular attention to concerns raised; and,*

*Whereas the General Board has reviewed and affirmed recommendations from the Task Force Addendum to the Final Report on ways to recognize and address core concerns raised on process, structure, national identity, international relations and witness, vulnerable area churches and finance;*

#### **The General Board moves:**

*That Mennonite Church Canada approve in principle the directions proposed by the Future Directions Task Force Final Report, and collaborate with the five Area Churches (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Eastern Canada) in developing a more integrated nation-wide church body along the lines envisioned to better resource all levels of our church in responding to God's call to live out and share the peace of Jesus Christ with local through global neighbours.*

#### **In approving this motion, it is understood that:**

- Prior to implementation there will be opportunity to vote on a more fully developed proposal no later than July 2018, with ongoing consultation with congregations in between;
- The final proposal will incorporate some form of area church delegate involvement in the governance of national agenda and priorities;
- The final proposal will include provision for national gatherings for study, fellowship, worship and discernment;
- Formal conversation will be undertaken (e.g. via working group, conference or other means) to review our future vision and strategy for international relationships and witness, addressing questions in the Addendum and related ones, to be completed by December 2017;



## Future Directions Task Force

### Submission to Assembly 2016

- The final proposal will include concrete provisions that recognize and respond to the vulnerability of smaller area churches; and
- Formal conversation will be undertaken (e.g. via working group, conference or other means to build on the Report and engage congregations to: (a) dream about how to live out the gospel of Christ locally, across Canada and abroad; (b) think creatively on how congregations can resource our common life together in being the church; and, in the short term, (c) work together and generously support our mutual ministry and transition from where we are to where God invites us to be.

## **2. Supplemental Resolution, if the above resolution is approved**

*That Mennonite Church Canada authorizes the General Board, in collaboration with Area Church boards, to proceed with transition planning along the lines outlined in the FDTF documents. Further, to provide latitude in re-envisioning program approaches in this interim period, parts of Mennonite Church Canada's General Bylaws be suspended (those referring to the Faith and Life Committee and Christian Witness, Christian Formation and Church Engagement Councils<sup>1</sup>), with the understanding that during the transition period one or two individuals from each body will continue on the General Board to ensure representation of each ministry perspective.*

### **Preparation for decision-making at Assembly**

Two types of events are planned to assist a process of an informed decision on the Report and directions proposed.

1. **Workshops.** Two workshops are planned. The intent of each is to help delegates gain clarity of content in the Report and what was intended. Each will start with a brief introduction, followed by a Q & A session with Task Force and Board members. The first will focus primarily on clarifying program and ministry related propositions in the report (e.g. witness, congregation of ministerial leadership, educational strategy, communication, etc.). The second will focus primarily on questions of structure and implementation.
2. **Plenary Sessions.** Two plenary sessions will encourage reflection and debate, with round table discussions and floor debate. Each plenary will have a different focus.
  - Plenary 1 will focus on vision for the church and program related aspects of the report.
  - Plenary 2 will focus on how we work at being church, considering structure and implementation implications raised by the report.

Debate and action on a Motion to accept the report will be at a separate time.

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, Parts XI (Faith and Life Cttee) and XII (Ministries of MC Canada) of the General Bylaws.



## 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

# Future Directions Task Force Final Report

07 December 2015

## WHAT IS GOD'S SPIRIT CALLING US TO IN THE 21st CENTURY?

### GOD'S SPIRIT IS MOVING

Two nurses coordinate shifts so they can share lunch together and watch a you-tube video about rediscovering what life would look like with Jesus as the centre. Their discussion continues even during their next break.

Although most people at First Mennonite Church choose to worship on Sunday mornings, other times of community worship are regularly offered, and revised annually, to help encourage connection and discipleship in the midst of people's diverse schedules.

An early morning jogger listens to a podcast sermon from a local Mennonite church about current violence in the world and what it means to love our enemies. An email address follows to contact the nearest Anabaptist small group.

A public transit commuter glances at the daily text message and is reminded that the Spirit of God is at work among those who know Christ and in the world at large.

Broadway Mennonite Church has become more and more open to its surrounding neighborhood with many community activities taking place in the church building. Among the active participants, only a handful have any kind of historic Mennonite heritage, with the majority from many different ethnicities and diverse backgrounds. Together, they form a welcoming and energized faith community.

Anabaptist community members regularly participate in missional teams both locally and internationally. A website lists a rich variety of options that are updated regularly.

Reflecting the ethnic diversity of Anabaptist communities of worship, multicultural teams provide the necessary leadership.

Clusters of Anabaptist Christ followers form around shared activities and events, like hosting faith conversations *with spiritual seekers*, playing hockey, gathering in coffee shops, taking morning walks in shopping malls.

Persons who have been in Anabaptist community all their lives are freshly invigorated by the experience and testimonies of newer Anabaptists.

Calloused hands and tender hearts share good work and conversation during weekly service projects.



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

The church is changing. Some things we have not yet imagined will emerge. Some things we have always done will fade. In this final report of the Future Directions Task Force, we set out both strengths to build on and recommendations for creatively engaging God's calling. For further details and background considerations leading to this report, please see *The Backstory*. God's Spirit is moving, and the future of the Anabaptist Mennonite expression of Christian faith and ministry will be a movement of Christ followers with

**Vibrant faith      Renewed community      Creative mission**

### **STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON<sup>1</sup>**

1. Grounded in Scripture as inspired by God and spoken to in our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, three core convictions have been treasured by Anabaptist Mennonites: 1) **Jesus** is the centre of our faith; 2) **Community** is the centre of our lives; 3) **Reconciliation** is the centre of our work.
2. Our identity as **an 'upside-down' kingdom people** means sharing the good news of Jesus and extending the peace and reconciling love of God to all people; nurturing followers of Jesus to grow in relationship with God; cultivating loving, caring and praying Christian communities; living out our faith in Jesus as a people of integrity, with simplicity, and generosity in sharing time, talents, money and goods.
3. The **congregation** is the foundational unit and expression of God's work in the world and the primary setting for worship, being a caring community, discernment, and mission. At the same time, because the body of Christ is not limited to any one congregation, for most effective mutual support and witness, congregations are best served by partnering together in congregational clusters, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

### **CREATIVELY ENGAGING GOD'S CALLING<sup>2</sup>**

4. We envision **vital and spiritually healthy congregations** led by gifted, empowered and inspired leaders. Together they:
  - **Invite all to follow Jesus**, whether for a first-time commitment or renewal, for those outside of the church, within it, and on the margins;
  - Draw near to God in **worship and prayer**;
  - Find new and creative ways to engage young, middle and older people in **forming faith**, increasing biblical literacy, and enhancing their sense of Christian community and identity;

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1 For more detail, see *The Backstory*, pp. 4 - 5.

2 See *The Backstory*, pp. 6 - 10



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

- Nurture a **loving and caring community** of support;
- **Partner with other congregations** for mutual support, resourcing, and accountability;
- Encourage **Individuals and families** to take part in worship, faith studies at home, small groups and congregational programs using existing and creative new resource materials;
- Engage in **missional outreach initiatives** to share the good news of Jesus beyond our faith communities, and to encourage young, middle and older people to align themselves with God's activity in addressing injustice and working together with disadvantaged and disempowered people;
- Encourage and develop **different leadership gifts** for ministry; and
- **Affirm people** for their commitment of faith and generosity of spirit, time, energy and resources.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

5. To support and encourage vital and spiritually healthy congregations, we envision **each region as a catalyst to:**<sup>3</sup>

- Encourage **congregational clustering to share** information, support one another and imagine together where joint mission might be undertaken;
- Encourage 'missional catalyst teams' of volunteers to bring **creative new ideas for mission/service** aligned with God's activity in the world;
- Encourage **ministerial leadership teams** in all congregations including those who are more experienced and younger, men and women, paid and unpaid;
- Establish **best practices in discerning, calling, training, and empowering gifted leadership** both paid and unpaid;
- Establish criteria and accountability for **credentialing**;
- Encourage **greater diversity** (ethnic, racial, economic) within congregations and through congregational partnerships.
- Support **development of alternative, innovative models** of being congregation to complement more traditional models.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 10 - 13



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

**6.** We envision that our current model of area churches and a national church working independently be replaced by a **simpler and integrated body with regions covenanting to work together** on common priorities including to:

- Proclaim that **the good news of Jesus** is the reconciliation of the whole world. Towards that end, our task is to **facilitate domestic and international opportunities** that engage young, middle and older people in witness/service that extends the peace and reconciling love of God beyond our congregations.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage **church schools and camps** as an intentional resource for congregations in creatively shaping faith and identity of children through adults, developing leaders, engaging mission beyond our communities and learning from each other through exchanging ideas and collaborating across Canada.<sup>5</sup>
- Develop and maintain a **common virtual Resource Centre and network** that curates content for Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, age-appropriateness and other criteria, with the capacity to facilitate idea and information exchange networks;
- Form a **Congregation of Ministerial Leadership**, a collegial gathering of paid and unpaid ministers (i.e., members of the congregational ministerial leadership teams), perhaps with individuals from church schools and other bodies involved in theological study and leadership development, that meets regularly (e.g. biannually) for purposes of studying ethical and theological issues, fellowship, networking, discerning vision on theological matters the denomination might consider, mutual encouragement and support;<sup>6</sup>
- Create an **integrated Ministerial Leadership Development plan and program**, focusing on the formation and training of both paid and unpaid ministerial leaders for diverse congregations;<sup>7</sup>
- Provide consultation and deliver **support services** to regions and congregations on human resources, governance, legal issues, finances (e.g., pension plans), etc., possibly with an arms-length Support Services Agency.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

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4 See *The Backstory*, pp. 13 - 16

5 See *The Backstory*, pp. 16 - 18

6 See *The Backstory*, pp. 18

7 See *The Backstory*, pp. 19 - 20



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

7. To **integrate the work** we do together, we envision a simpler, sustainable structure where:<sup>8</sup>

- Each **congregation is a member of a region**, to which it sends delegates for annual assemblies for worship, inspiration, setting regional direction, etc.;
- **Regional leaders meet together regularly** for aligning vision, theological identity and programming;
- An **Executive Minister** works with an integrated board to provide spiritual oversight and vision for mission, including development and pursuit of common priorities, and to represent our collective voice in ecumenical relationships and international partnerships;
- An **integrated identity** reflected in name, logo, and web presence;
- An **effective communication plan** with a unified flow between congregations and the integrated body;<sup>9</sup>
- A unified flow of **financial resources**, with a covenant determining the allocation of regional/national/international initiatives, with some consideration of an equalization of resources to make similar programs possible across the regions and opportunity for congregations to allocate funds to specific programs.
- A **covenant** to pursue common priorities with room for regional variation, allocation of financial resources, mutual accountability, etc.
- Discern and set **tangible measures and accountability**, with specific goals and time-lines for these ministries.

To prepare transition plans and finalize organizational arrangements we recommend a **Transition Team** of 1-3 constituents, led by a chair, be appointed conjointly by area and national church moderators. The transition process led by the Team, working with 7 senior staff (1 from each area church [presumably the Executive Director] plus 2 from the national church) would prepare the covenant and transition plan (including details of program transitions, staffing and budgeting) within 6-12 months for final approval by our existing area and national boards; implementation of transition plan to take place within 2 years. More detail is provided in *The Backstory*.

As a Future Directions Task Force, we respectfully submit this report with our **prayers for the present and future church**. May God's Spirit continue to guide us as we seek to follow Jesus, and may God be glorified in our congregations, wider church and world. **Amen.**

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<sup>8</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 22 - 24

<sup>9</sup> See *The Backstory*, pp. 20 - 22



## 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

# Future Directions Task Force

## Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

### An Addendum to the Future Directions Task Force Final Report May 2016

#### Introduction

Six months ago or so, the Future Directions Task Force submitted its *Final Report*. The good news is that this report stimulated very significant exchange. Members of the task force have had countless conversations and written exchanges with individuals and groups since. Mennonite Church Canada General Board, Area Church leadership, and denominational agencies have reacted, the *Canadian Mennonite* has given it significant attention and, perhaps most significantly, delegates at the five Area Church assemblies have had very meaningful and constructive interaction with the report.

It is difficult to summarize all reactions, but it is clear they included both positive affirmation and expressions of concern and critique. That is as it should be. The future directions report is not meant to be a blueprint with absolutes; rather, it is meant to set out directions and markers as a guide through an uncertain time. It's in the wrestling with these that clarity emerges on specific steps to take. While the report has been written, submitted, and voted on in area church delegate sessions, and thus not subject to change at this point, we as a Task Force have prepared this addendum to share some additional reflections acknowledging what has been heard and expanding on what was said.

It is understood the General Board will recommend to delegates in Saskatoon that the *Report* be approved in principle. The Task Force continues to support that. But, as a way of taking the conversation of the past number of months seriously, we suggest adding to that recommendation a number of provisions arising from feedback received.

In our assessment, six main clusters of concern were raised having to do with: process, structure, national identity, international relations and witness, vulnerable area churches, and financial and emotional sustainability. Following is a brief summary of main themes heard within each, and suggested responses.



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

### 1. Process

The Task Force has heard significant concern on adequacy of process and consultation. While the Task Force sought to initiate serious conversation on some of the issues over the past few years by way of interim documents, we recognize that too little of it occurred until the *Final Report* was released.

Concerns on release began with a few public voices with opposing arguments – some that acceptance of the report was a ‘done deal’ because the outcome was prescribed and financial matters were paramount, others that much more detail was needed before a decision could be made. As initial response gave way to engaging with content in the report, debate became more focused on several topics in particular (international witness, organizational structure, several theological topics), other topics less so. The over-riding question became: do we have enough time or information to consider, debate and respond to these issues. Area Church meetings to consider motions of acceptance in principle gave urgency to these debates.

That a large number of people in our church constituency wish to be engaged with and have a say on the range of topics covered in the *Report* is a good sign. That they wish to have continuing input as and when issues raised by the Report are addressed in the proposed transition time is a sign of continued commitment. That a sizable number of people in many congregations have become engaged in these debates, and thereby more knowledgeable about the larger church of which they are a part, is the best sign of all. It promises the beginning of a change in how people in congregations think of themselves in relation to the work we should/must do together as church beyond congregational walls, an outcome the Task Force desired.

To embrace this interest and speak to the concerns, we propose that provision be made for a formal vote of congregational delegates on a more detailed proposal along with consultation during development of that proposal. The transition team, if approved, would determine how this consultation might take place, but it might even include sending specific questions to congregations for their reaction.

It might be noted this proposition is consistent with the statement added to the resolution approved by MCEC in April, and seemingly with the sentiment of many delegates at other Area Church meetings.

**Recommendation:** That prior to implementation there be opportunity to vote on a more fully developed proposal no later than July 2018, with on-going consultation with congregations during the transition phase on development/refinement of major program directions.



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

### 2. Structure

Despite broad acknowledgement that change is necessary, reaction to the report often questioned the direction of the change recommended. There were concerns that the proposed model could lead to regional self-centeredness at the expense of the national, and that essential functions provided by the national body could be lost, as could our identity as a country-wide Anabaptist Mennonite people. Some understood the recommendation as implying the demise of a national body. Small area churches in particular felt themselves vulnerable, given they depend heavily on the national body for support.

The intention of the Task Force was not that Mennonite Church Canada come to an end, but that the area churches would take on direct ownership and governance of the national agenda. The goal was a simpler, more effective organization which could strengthen congregations as centres of mission even as it retained a strong national family of faith (see #3 below).

The debate over how to do this is a healthy one, and will continue. If the direction is agreed to in principle, the next step will be to prepare a covenant binding our regional bodies to a common vision (global, national, regional, local), common regional priorities (giving allowance for variation), national priorities, shared ministries, governance, and flow of funds, amongst other considerations.

It should be noted that although the report recommends that the area churches become the owners of the national church, it does not address **how** they will do this. It does not assume that this is managed strictly by area staff, but could very well include a form of delegate sessions.

**Recommendation:** That the final proposal incorporate some form of area church delegate involvement in the governance of national agenda and priorities.

### 3. National Identity

A Task Force statement that has received considerable reaction is the affirmation of the congregation as the foundational unit of the church. Unfortunately this affirmation has been taken to imply a de-emphasis of the larger church, whether the national denomination (i.e., Mennonite Church Canada), or the church beyond that (Mennonite World Conference, world-wide body of Christ). The intention of the original statement was not to de-emphasize the larger church, but rather to highlight that this larger church consists of local communities. It thus becomes paramount that these local communities understand themselves as kingdom cells within that larger body.

The commitment of the Task Force thus is for a strong national denomination through which congregations participate in, dialogue with, benefit from, and contribute to the larger church. The national church serves as the passageway between the individual congregation and the larger church through which resources, wisdom and identity flow both ways. In addition to resourcing the congregation, the national church provides the larger identity for the congregations, and the



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

setting within which larger dialogue takes place.

The Task Force report recommends a few features with the goal of strengthening this larger church identity (e.g., Congregation of Ministerial Leaders, a national program and strategy for leadership development, a national strategy for higher education, unified communications and branding). Regular national gatherings for study, fellowship, worship and discernment could play a further significant role in shaping this larger peoplehood.

**Recommendation:** That the final proposal include a provision for national gatherings for study, fellowship, worship and discernment.

#### 4. International Relations and Witness

Perhaps the most intense response of all those received or made public at area church meetings was to the proposition "...we envision a shift toward more local and domestic witness/service, and toward more collaborative, shorter term international assignments in response to invitations from global partners" (p. 15, *the Backstory*).

Relatively few comments were made in relation to domestic witness; and, of those that were, they were affirming. But, on international witness, many voices argued in particular the importance of long-term over short-term arrangements (some equating 'short term' with 'tourism'), the importance of national leadership in partnership development and in evaluating and screening invitations for mission partnerships, and questioning the idea of congregations becoming involved in a 'confirmation of call.' Over time, the tones on the latter became more muted to speak in terms of congregations needing to become more aware and engaged.

Such strong affirmation for international witness is a testament to the work that's been done, and speaks to the international connectedness many within the church feel with our international church family. International witness manifests a commitment of the churches of Canada to the world-wide body of Christ.

The Task Force affirms the conversation the report has instigated, and suggests a more formal conversation should take place. In such a conversation questions like the following could be considered:

- How do we best relate to the national churches of other countries?
- What is the focus or emphasis of our international contribution?
- What are the pros and cons of short-term and longer-term assignments?
- Where does domestic witness fit into this picture?
- How do congregations most effectively engage in international witness?

**Recommendation:** That a formal conversation be undertaken (e.g. via a working group, conference, or other means) to review our future vision and strategy for international relationships and witness, addressing the above and related questions, to be completed by December 2017.



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

### 5. Vulnerable Area Churches

If only all five area churches had a similar mass and resources. But that is not the case. Concern was expressed that the governance model proposed by the Task Force places additional stress on those area churches with fewer congregations, and fewer financial and human resources. It thus becomes critical that in developing the detailed proposal concrete provisions be included which take that disparity into account.

**Recommendation:** That the final proposal include concrete provisions that recognize and respond to the vulnerability of the smaller area churches.

### 6. Financial and Emotional Sustainability

Prompting formation of the Task Force was concern that programs, services and structures once serving the church well were no longer sustainable emotionally or financially in the rapidly changing context of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a Task Force, we have tried to respond prayerfully and thoughtfully, both with vision for the future and attention to practical functions such as communication and many other tasks we take for granted.

Since release of our Report, feedback on financial issues has been modest, with most seeming to take it as a given. Comments included words to the effect that: 'money was driving the report too much'; or a more neutral 'money is a problem'; or, 'how do costs of the new model compare with what we're doing now'; or, 'money is not the real problem, the real problem is peoples' priorities.'

Knowing the combined costs of our ministries is helpful as a benchmark, which we expect will be worked on during the transition time if the Report is approved. What seems important now is to continue the conversations begun after release of our Report, engaging members of our congregations in dreaming dreams of being church at this time in history, and catching a vision of the gift we as a Mennonite Anabaptist people have to build on and share with others – a vision of daring to live out the gospel of Christ in a hurting world.

**Recommendation:** That a formal conversation be undertaken (e.g. via a working group, conference or other means) to build on the Report and engage congregations to: (a) dream about how to live out the gospel of Christ locally, across Canada and abroad; (b) think creatively on how congregations can resource our common life together in being the church; and, in the short term, (c) work together and generously support our mutual ministry and transition from where we are to where God invites us to be.



## Future Directions Task Force

# Final Report

ADDENDUM - MAY 2016

### Conclusion

Recognizing and acting on these six clusters of concern promises to be a first and important step in a longer transformation process. Other concerns undoubtedly will gain prominence in the days ahead. Our encouragement is that each of these be considered carefully in their turn, whilst keeping our eyes on discerning what it means to be the body of Christ in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Respectfully submitted

**Task Force members:**

April Yamasaki (BC)	Ken Warkentin (MB)
Rebecca Steiner (ON/MB)	Anita Retzlaff (SK)
Aldred Neufeldt (Chair)	Chad Miller (AB)
Terry Keller (ON)	Gerald Gerbrandt (MB)

*Ex officio:*

Hilda Hildebrand (Moderator)      Willard Metzger (Executive Director)

## Additional Notes

## Resolution to Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery

# The Church and the “Doctrine of Discovery”

## WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY?

### *THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY IS BOTH A WORLDVIEW AND A LEGAL FRAMEWORK*

- The worldview has ancient roots; much of the history of Western Christendom is grounded in the idea that Christians are superior to non-Christians, that individuals and cultures of other religions or belief systems are in some ways less—less valuable, less worthy of rights and privileges, less human.
- Beginning in the 1400s, European monarchies and church leaders organized this worldview into a legal framework. European governments sponsored expeditions to “new” lands around the globe, lands full of resources and opportunities for European domination. The Christian Church legitimized this expansion by formally declaring that the monarchies had a right to claim these lands and their resources in the name of Christ: sovereignty (the right to rule) and title (land rights) belonged to the European monarchies by divine right. The Church named all non-Christians as “enemies of Christ,” therefore subject to the domination of whichever Christian monarchy could claim and hold the land.
- Today, the Doctrine of Discovery is recognized by Western courts as the legal precedent for land and resource rights. Settler governments and courts dictate First Nations, Metis, and Inuit rights and privileges, and Settler-controlled corporations and institutions determine the best use of material resources and management of the environment. Systemic racism and discrimination continues to undermine the dignity and well-being of Indigenous Peoples around the globe. All of these are tied to the Doctrine of Discovery.

### **repudiate?**

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/repudiate>

- 1: to divorce or separate formally from
- 2: to refuse to have anything to do with : disown
- 3a : to refuse to accept; especially : to reject as unauthorized or as having no binding force  
*<repudiate a contract>* b : to reject as untrue or unjust *<repudiate a charge>*

## RESOURCES

CommonWord Resource list: [www.commonword.ca/go/533](http://www.commonword.ca/go/533)

*Doctrine of Discovery: In the Name of Christ* documentary by MC USA: [www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/48/17903](http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/48/17903)

“The Doctrine of Discovery and Canadian Law” by Jennifer Reid: <http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/43/18518>

*Wrongs to Rights: How Churches Can Engage the UN Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:*

<http://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/2/18343>

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Calls To Action**

*“49. We call upon all religious denominations and faith groups who have not already done so to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius.”*

## IN CANADA NOW

### *HOW IS THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY STILL IMPACTING US?*

**Sovereignty** – Who owns the land and resources and who decides what to do with them? Who enforces treaty agreements and adjudicates disputes? Whose interests do our political leaders represent?

**Human Rights** – Why are there differences in standards of housing, education, food and water security, etc between many First Nations communities and Canadian norms? Who decides how problems are addressed?

**Systems of Justice** – Why are Indigenous people disproportionately represented in Canada’s prisons? How do cultural norms impact policing and correctional standards and practices? Who defines and protects justice and fairness?

**Assimilation and Appropriation** – How do we understand and value Indigenous cultures within the larger Canadian context? Who controls and directs institutions like education, politics, and religion? What is our shared vision for the future of Canadian society?

**Worldview** – What assumptions and stereotypes underlie the way we understand ourselves and each other as Settlers (descendants of European explorers) and Indigenous peoples? How often do we consider those relationships? What are our blind spots and what might we learn from one another?

## WHAT COULD REPUDIATION LOOK LIKE?

...naming and challenging settler privileges

...working to undo historical and ongoing violence done in the name of the church

...publicly bringing attention to current abuses of human dignity and rights

...walking in equal relationship with Indigenous Peoples as fully valued humans

...listening, learning, and growing in surprising ways

# A Resolution to the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Assembly July 2016: The Church and the Doctrine of Discovery

Submitted: May 2, 2016

## **Background:**

Mennonite Church Canada is committed, to reconciliation efforts with the First Nations and Indigenous communities in Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has recently presented its final report which included 94 calls to action along the path of reconciliation. A number of those include work the churches can do.

One of the key recommendations is the acknowledgement and repudiation of the “Doctrine of Discovery”. To “repudiate” the Doctrine of Discovery is to make clear that we reject its concepts as false and harmful and are seeking to understand and undo its influence in our ways of thinking and being, as individuals and as the Church. This “doctrine,” beginning in 1452, laid the political and religious ground work for the claiming of all lands where there were no Christians, in the name of the monarch in whose name the land was “discovered”. This doctrine empowered governments *“to invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens [Muslims] and pagans whatsoever and other enemies of Christ ... and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms,... (and) possessions...”* More than just a Catholic doctrine, the Doctrine of Discovery formally reduced non-Christians to sub-human status in order to take their lands, property, and lives-in the name of Christ.

This Doctrine of Discovery has been a part of the western legal framework and, in many cases remains the basis of the North American legal system in regards to Indigenous peoples. By enforcing European standards of civilization and proper use of land resources, the Doctrine of Discovery discounts Indigenous culture, spirituality, and especially land rights in order to justify colonialism.

Christian denominations in North America are working to repudiate this doctrine.

## **It is the recommendation, supported by the individuals, congregations and Area Churches below:**

- 1. That Mennonite Church Canada repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery as it is fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and our understanding of the inherent dignity and rights that individuals and peoples have received from God.**
- 2. That a working group be formed by representatives of Mennonite Church Canada and Area Churches to begin by reviewing the church related recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, make the appropriate study material available to congregations, and make further periodic recommendations to the General Board/Area Church Boards on steps along the path of reconciliation.**

**Co-sponsored by:****All five Area Church Executive Boards/Councils**

Mennonite Church British Columbia Leadership Board; Mennonite Church Alberta Executive; Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Council; Mennonite Church Manitoba Board; Mennonite Church Eastern Canada Executive Council; and Mennonite Church Canada Executive Council.

**Congregations:**

Community Mennonite Church- Stouffville, Ontario (MCEC);

Grace Mennonite Church, Prince Albert, Sask. (MCSask);

Hagerman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ontario (MCEC);

Hope Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba (MCM);

Langley Mennonite Fellowship, Langley British Columbia (MCBC);

Mount Royal Mennonite Church, ( MCSask);

Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask. (MCSask);

Ottawa Mennonite Church, Ottawa, Ontario (MCEC);

Petitcodiac Mennonite Church, Petitcodiac, New Brunswick, (MCEC);

Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham, Ontario (MCEC);

Stirling Ave. Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario (MCEC).

Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask.(MCSask)

**Group**

Walking the Path Committee (Individuals from MCSask)

# A Resolution to the Mennonite Church Canada Delegate Assembly July 2016: Palestine & Israel

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Resolution title: **Resolution on Palestine and Israel**

Submitted on 2016-30-04 by

**BYRON REMPEL-BURKHOLDER**  
**WINNIPEG, MANITOBA**

Area Church or Congregation Name:

**HOME STREET MENNONITE CHURCH, WINNIPEG**  
**A CONGREGATION OF MENNONITE CHURCH MANITOBA**

Moved by: **Byron Rempel-Burkholder, Home Street Mennonite Church, MCM**

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Seconded by: **Palmer Becker, Waterloo North Mennonite Church, MCEC**

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## Preamble

North American Mennonites have lived and studied, ministered and served in Palestine and Israel for nearly 70 years. Many partnerships have formed over these years, particularly through Mennonite Central Committee, our various denominational mission boards and Christian Peacemaker Teams. Thousands of Mennonites from Canada and the US have participated in learning tours and exchanges facilitated by Mennonite educational institutions, service and mission agencies, and tour operators. Most recently, Mennonite Church Canada has sent workers to serve at Bethlehem Bible College and Serve Nazareth.

This resolution emerges largely in response to the plea of Palestinian Christians that the global church come alongside the Palestinian people as they suffer under Israel's 49-year military occupation of their lands: the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. Their concerns are expressed in the 2009 document entitled *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*<sup>1</sup>, issued by the churches of the region, through a cooperative effort known as Kairos Palestine.

Whereas:

- We are called to “follow Christ in the way of peace, doing justice, bringing reconciliation and practicing nonresistance” (Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, article 22);
- We believe God calls us to speak truth to power, urging our governments, institutions, and businesses to take peaceful and nonviolent action against injustice where it occurs;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kaiospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document>

- We hear continued pleas from Palestinian Christians that Western Christians take notice of the suffering of all Palestinians under Israeli occupation;
- We believe it is God's will that Israelis and Palestinians live with one another in peace, justice, freedom, and security;
- We lament Israel's ongoing and increasingly entrenched military occupation and settlement of Palestinian lands in contravention of international law, including its violations of Palestinians' rights to movement and self-determination;
- We hear Palestinian Christians urging us and fellow-believers around the world to exert economic pressure on Israel - through boycotts, divestment, and sanctions—as one of the few remaining options to end the occupation and facilitate a just peace with the Palestinian people;
- Even as we address the situation in Palestine and Israel, we confess our own complicity in the colonization and oppression of the Indigenous peoples of Canada, as well as our history of racist attitudes and behaviours toward Jews—

**BE IT RESOLVED:**

- We look to the gospel of Jesus Christ for guidance and grace in our responses to the Palestine and Israel context;
- We commit ourselves to ongoing prayer, searching, and discernment concerning the ways in which we as congregations, communities, and church members are impeding or facilitating, ignoring or promoting, the quest for a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis.
- We affirm the efforts of Israelis and Palestinians who are committed to non-violent ways of overcoming the injustice in their region;
- We urge our member congregations to deepen their understanding of the Palestine-Israel relationship through the study of educational materials on the topic and through participation in learning tours to the region;
- We ask the Mennonite Church Canada General Board, regional churches, congregations, and members to avoid investing in or supporting companies that do business with Israeli settlements and the Israel Defense Forces, and companies that are profiting from the occupation of the Palestinian territories; and
- We encourage the government of Canada to support measures that put pressure on Israel (including through economic sanctions) to end the occupation and work for a just peace, in accordance with international law.

**Mennonite Church Canada**  
**Budget 2016/17**

	FYE 16 Actual	FYE 17 Budget
Total Budgeted Donations	<b>3,065,908</b>	<b>3,065,908</b>
Recognized Deferred Contributions	<b>70,159</b>	<b>81,110</b>
Total Other Budgeted Income	<b>207,612</b>	<b>514,567</b>
Sub-total Program Income	<b>3,343,679</b>	<b>3,661,585</b>
Partner Programs Income	<b>508,103</b>	<b>346,817</b>
Related Organization Income	<b>719,496</b>	<b>443,000</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>4,571,278</b>	<b>4,451,402</b>
<b>Christian Witness Council</b>		
Executive Office	<b>138,489</b>	<b>114,682</b>
National Ministries Admin.		
Christian Service Ministry		
Multi-Cultural Ministry		
Native Ministries	<b>141,477</b>	<b>142,562</b>
International Ministries	<b>1,312,707</b>	<b>1,037,623</b>
<b>Total Witness Council Expenses</b>	<b>1,592,673</b>	<b>1,294,867</b>
Severence Expenses		<b>113,889</b>
<b>Christian Formation Council</b>		
Executive Office	<b>285,173</b>	<b>76,977</b>
Resource Centre	<b>163,283</b>	<b>106,781</b>
Lease Payment for Commonword		<b>12,000</b>
Min. & Cong. Leadership	<b>94,386</b>	<b>114,526</b>
Youth Ministry	<b>5,396</b>	<b>9,000</b>
Youth Assembly	<b>6,215</b>	
Young Adult Ministry		
Education & Nurture Ministries		
Worship & Spiritual Formation		
CMU Grants	<b>180,090</b>	<b>175,000</b>
<b>Total Formation Council Expenses</b>	<b>734,543</b>	<b>608,173</b>

Severence Expense		<b>2,603</b>
<b>Church Engagement Council</b>		
Executive Office	<b>91,958</b>	<b>92,048</b>
Communications	<b>269,465</b>	<b>284,023</b>
Development	<b>206,605</b>	<b>184,694</b>
Canadian Mennonite	<b>121,269</b>	<b>119,631</b>
<b>Total Church Engagement Council Expenses</b>	<b>689,297</b>	<b>682,999</b>
<b>General Board</b>		
GBD Administration	<b>333,436</b>	<b>276,935</b>
Severance Finance		<b>107,744</b>
Finance	<b>293,306</b>	<b>141,190</b>
Operations	<b>306,209</b>	<b>229,256</b>
Annual Assembly	<b>8,137</b>	<b>422,700</b>
Mennonite World Conference Grants	<b>28,500</b>	<b>28,500</b>
<b>Total General Board Expenses</b>	<b>969,588</b>	<b>1,206,325</b>
<b>Sub-total Program Expenses</b>	<b>3,986,101</b>	<b>3,792,364</b>
<b>Partner Programs</b>		
Misc. New Initiatives	<b>34,671</b>	<b>20,000</b>
Christian Peacemaker Teams		
Company of 1000	<b>56,309</b>	<b>35,500</b>
NAVMF	<b>67,988</b>	<b>56,000</b>
Italy Partnership		
Riverton Partnership		
Philippine Partnership	<b>14,447</b>	<b>22,500</b>
MVSA	<b>2,279</b>	<b>5,000</b>
Kherson Partnership	<b>8,490</b>	<b>8,520</b>
Learning Tours		
Mennonite Women Canada	<b>27,582</b>	<b>20,200</b>
Der Bote		
MHC Archives	<b>120,189</b>	<b>54,160</b>
MHC Gallery	<b>113,616</b>	<b>94,937</b>
Legasse Ethiopia Partnership		
IM Short Term Ministry	<b>37,838</b>	<b>30,000</b>
<b>Total Partner Programs Expenses</b>	<b>483,409</b>	<b>346,817</b>

<b>Related Organization Programs</b>		
MMN	<b>46,341</b>	<b>42,500</b>
MC USA	<b>7,952</b>	<b>10,000</b>
AMBS	<b>69,581</b>	<b>70,000</b>
CMU	<b>96,305</b>	<b>90,000</b>
MPN	<b>24,117</b>	<b>60,000</b>
MKC	<b>450,153</b>	<b>125,000</b>
EMM	<b>16,449</b>	<b>37,000</b>
MWC	<b>165</b>	<b>1,000</b>
MCEC	<b>7,502</b>	<b>7,500</b>
<b>Total Contributions to Related Organizations</b>	<b>718,565</b>	<b>443,000</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>5,188,075</b>	<b>4,582,181</b>
Operating Surplus/(Deficit)		<b>(130,779)</b>
Transfer To Reserves		
Transfer from Reserves		<b>156,819</b>
Transfer To Capital Reserves		<b>(26,040)</b>
Transfer from Capital		
Surplus/(Deficit) Before Discontinued Operations & Extraordinar		<b>0</b>
Discontinued Operations (Net)		
<u>Witness Transitional Wound-down Programs</u>		
Total Discontinued Operations (Net)		
<b>SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) AFTER DISCONTINUED OPERATIONS</b>		<b>0</b>
Extraordinary Items & Non-Budget Bequest Income		
Bequests - Portion to Transfer to MFC		<b>-</b>
Extraordinary Income - USA Asset Distrib.		
Total Extraordinary & Unusual Items (Net)		<b>-</b>
<b>ENDING SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>		<b>0</b>

# Nomination Election Slate



**Calvin Quan**

## NOMINATED

### - Moderator

Raised as a second generation Canadian to immigrant parents, Calvin found faith in God as a first generation Christian through the outreach of the Mennonite Church. He is a professional engineer, and has worked in product and process development for technology companies

over the past 20 years. As a member of the Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church for 30 years, Calvin has held various past leadership roles, including chair of the church board, and vice chair of the finance commission at MC Eastern Canada. He currently serves as treasurer of the Victoria Education Center board, a community based preschool. Calvin lives in Toronto with his young family. They attend a vibrant urban church that serves the community and worships in three languages.



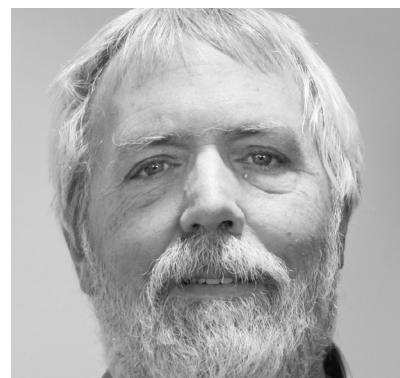
**Allan Hiebert**

## NOMINATED

### - Treasurer, Chair of Financial, Policy, and Audit Committee (FPAC)

Allan holds an MBA from the University of Manitoba and a PhD in Electrical Engineering from the University of Alberta. He has experience in leading large teams in engineering software design, development,

support and training. He has volunteered as chair, vice chair, board member, and trustee with numerous organizations including MCC Thrift Stores (Calgary), Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Foothills Mennonite Church (member since 1997), and was an officer of a publicly traded company for 12 years.



**Harold Peters Fransen**

## NOMINATED

### - Recording Secretary, General Board

Harold is currently serving as the pastor at Elim Mennonite Church in Grunthal, MB. Harold has spent many of his pastoral years as the interim pastor of a wide variety of congregations in Canada.

Position	Name
<b>GENERAL BOARD</b>	
Moderator	Hilda Hildebrand
Vice Moderator	Aldred Neufeldt
Secretary	Karen Sheil
Treasurer	John Goossen
Member at Large	Laura Loewen
Member at Large	Kate Janzen
<b>FAITH AND LIFE</b>	
Chair	Doug Klassen
<b>CHURCH ENGAGEMENT COUNCIL</b>	
Chair	Vince Friesen
General Board Rep	Dori Zerbe Cornelsen
<b>CHRISTIAN FORMATION COUNCIL</b>	
Chair	Lisa Carr-Pries
General Board Rep	David Driedger
<b>CHRISTIAN WITNESS COUNCIL</b>	
Chair,	Norm Dyck
General Board Rep	Lynell Bergen
<b>AREA CHURCH MODERATORS</b>	
Moderator MCBC	Lee Dyck
Moderator MCA	Dan Jack
Moderator MC SASK	Ken Warkentin
Moderator MCM	Peter Rempel
Moderator MCEC	Paul Wideman
<b>FINANCE, POLICY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE (FPAC)</b>	
Chair	John Goossen
	Ewald Boschman
	Ed Heide



NOMINATIONS FROM THE FLOOR  
Nominee Information  
Saskatoon, SK  
2016

For: \_\_\_\_\_  
Please print which Board / Council this nomination is for.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) Fax: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Church Membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Education/training: \_\_\_\_\_

Past/present involvement/positions in local church:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other church or related vocational/volunteer experience:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Special interests that might be relevant to your work on a MC Canada council or board:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are your visions/goals for Mennonite Church Canada?

(You may use the reverse side for a response of 50 words or less)

Signatures of 5 supporting Mennonite Church Canada members: (Please print and sign your name.)

- |          |                     |
|----------|---------------------|
| 1. _____ | City/Province _____ |
| 2. _____ | City/Province _____ |
| 3. _____ | City/Province _____ |
| 4. _____ | City/Province _____ |
| 5. _____ | City/Province _____ |

*Please return the completed form to one of the Nominating Committee Members (see report book for picture and names) or to Coreena Stewart at the Mennonite Church Canada Office.*

# Reporting back to my congregation

## The decisions we made together as Mennonite Church Canada

**How these decisions will impact my home congregation**

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**What inspired me personally?**

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**The new appreciation I have for the work we do together as Mennonite Church Canada**

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**The questions I expect my congregation will ask me about the assembly**

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**What opportunities will I have or can I create to report back to my home congregation?**

Wednesday July 6 <sup>th</sup>	Thursday July 7 <sup>th</sup>	Friday July 8 <sup>th</sup>	Saturday July 9 <sup>th</sup>
		Prayer Room 8:00 - 8:30	
		Morning Worship 8:30 - 9:00	
	Plenary Session 9:00 - 10:00	Future Directions Task Force (FDTF) Presentation & Table groups 9:00 - 10:00	BFC Vote joined by youth 9:00 - 10:00
		Break 10:00 - 10:30	
	Mennonite Women Annual Meeting 10:30 - 12:00	FDTF Presentation & Table Discussion 10:30 - 11:15	Business Session 10:30 - 11:00
	Mennonite Men Annual Meeting 10:30 - 12:00		FDTF Vote joined by youth 11:00 - 11:45
	Seminar 10:45 - 11:45	FDTF Responses & Feedback 11:15 - 12:00	Worship / Announcements 11:45 - 12:00
	Lunch 12:00 - 1:00	Worship / Announcements 12:00 - 12:15	Lunch 12:00-1:00
	Witness Worker Luncheon 12:00 - 1:00	Lunch 12:15 - 1:15	CMU Luncheon 12:00 - 1:00
	Canadian Mennonite Luncheon 12:00 - 1:00	AMBS Luncheon 12:15 - 1:15	*Saturday Tours 12:30 - 5:00
	Seminar 1:00 - 2:00		Seminars 1:00 - 2:00
	Transition 2:15 - 2:30	Seminar 1:15 - 2:15	Transition 2:00 - 2:15
	Being a Faithful Church (BFC) Presentation 2:15 - 2:45	Transition 2:15 - 2:30	
	BFC Table Discussion 2:45 - 3:15		Seminars 2:15 - 3:15
	Break 3:15 - 3:45	Seminar 2:30 - 3:30	Break 3:15 - 3:45
	BFC Focused Table Discussion 3:45 - 4:30	Break 3:30 - 4:00	Transition 3:45 - 4:00
Registration 4:00 - 6:00	BFC Feedback (mic time) 4:30 - 5:00	Plenary Session 4:00 - 5:15	Seminars 4:00 - 5:00
Supper 5:00 - 6:00	Announcements 5:00 - 5:15	Special Events	Announcements 5:15 - 5:30
Opening & Welcome 6:00 - 6:45	Supper 5:30 - 6:45	Evening at Camp Shekinah 5:30 - 9:00	Supper 5:30 - 6:45
Worship 6:45 - 7:30	Business Session 6:45 - 8:30		Business Session 6:45 - 8:15
Business Session 7:30 - 8:45			Announcements 8:15 - 8:30
Closing 8:45 - 9:00	Worship and Closing 8:30		Closing Worship 8:30 - 9:00

All delegates are encouraged to attend events shaded in Grey.

Sunday July 10 <sup>th</sup>	Combined Worship 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM Caring for God's Good Creation 2:00 PM – 8:00 PM
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### \*Saturday Tour Schedule

Friends on the Prairie Tour | 1:00 PM – 6:30 PM  
Mennonite Village & Hague Museum Tour | 12:30 PM – 5:00 PM  
^ \*TRANSPORTATION FOR THIS TOUR LEAVES AT 12:30 PM SHARP ^  
Stoney Knoll Tour | 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM