

**Frequency of Assemblies
Discernment Session, Assembly 2009
Friday, June 5, Block 3 (evening session)**

The Purpose and Goals statement is located on page 4 of the Report Book.

Assembly Purposes and Goals Statement

The primary purposes of the Mennonite Church Canada Annual 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 MC 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 MC Canada bylaws¹ by:
 - a. Reviewing the work and ministry of MC Canada.
 - b. Accepting or rejecting the budgets and financial statements of MC 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 MC Canada as needed and monitoring adherence to those bylaws.

¹ These are summary statements. See Part III, Section 8 of the MC Canada bylaws for a full description of the duties and powers of voting delegates.

June 11, 2009

Page 2

Introduction and Background:

We would like to begin this discernment session by reviewing the Assembly Purpose and Goals statement as approved by the Support Services Council in March of this year and accepted by your General Board. This statement is located on page 4 of the Report Book.

Review the statement.

The topic of the frequency of Assemblies has been discussed several times in the past few years. The more extensive discernment time took place at the Winkler Assembly in 2004. There was no conclusive unanimity coming out of the discussions.

A further discussion took place at the Charlotte Assembly in 2005. It was decided that we would continue with annual Assemblies until the year 2010, at which time, the General Board would present a proposal for a decision. To prepare for that proposal, we are bringing this question to the floor of this Assembly, not for a decision but rather, requesting further response and insight, so that a proposal can be brought to Assembly 2010 for a decision.

We would like to give you a brief summary of the previous discussion, plus present some other ideas for you to consider.

1. Advantages and disadvantages of an annual Assembly:

Advantages:

- **Connections and continuity:** the frequency is crucial for organizational unity, fellowship, communication, worship.
- **Discernment** An annual opportunity for dialogue and discernment
- **More frequent involvement of host area conference:** cycling through MC Canada areas takes five years with annual meetings. The host area feels more connected to the larger church.
- **Fundraising:** If congregations are connected they will feel more involved in project/program of the larger church.
- **Identity:** annual meetings are necessary to define our identity
- **A Ministers Conference** is important on an annual basis.
- **An annual meeting is good for an organization.**

Disadvantages:

- **Unwise stewardship of financial and staff resources**
- If held too frequently, **they can become boring**
- Annual assemblies **seem to foster a “family reunion” type of gathering.**

Now we move to the Advantages and Disadvantages of biennial Assemblies.

2. Advantages of biennial meetings:

- Potential to **strengthen area churches** – they can meet more often – more appropriate for a congregationally-based conference.
- **Easier to fit into a schedule** – many conferences and assemblies to go to; difficult to get delegates; some are “conferenced out” or can’t afford to go so often.
- **Interest:** less frequent meetings are more interesting; people would make more effort to come.
- **There is alternative media** (e-mail, etc.) can be used to communicate with churches about urgent matters; good communication is possible even with less frequent meetings.
- **Biennial meetings can be successful** (our youth do it.)
- **Flexibility:** Allows more creativity in deciding how to spend the off years.

3. Disadvantages of biennial meetings:

- **Can lead to a centralized, hierarchical structure** with too much power for the general Board (lack of accountability and not enough local involvement by congregations (delegates).
- **May not actually lead to long term savings** in finances or staff time; meeting annually is worth the money and time spent.
- **Slows down broad based decision making** and responses to (and healing after) crisis and world changes; makes it more difficult to deal with issues.
- **Lower attendance:** Fewer individuals may attend biennial conferences; churches may forget to attend if we meet so infrequently if the rhythm of annual meetings is interrupted.

The question has also been asked, “If we would go to a biennial Assembly, what would or could we do in the off year”. There are various creative ideas that have been expressed.

June 11, 2009

Page 4

1. **A Formation event could be scheduled for the off years** in each of the Area churches. This could be in a workshop format on the day following the Area Church's annual meeting. This event could be attended by the delegates to the Area Church meeting and others. It could feature workshops, information sessions on various topics, with resource people from MC Canada.
2. **A larger Worship service could be planned** in each of the Area churches, either combined with the Area Church Assembly, or at another time and place.
3. **Various other creative events** could take the place of the Annual Assembly.

We would now like to move to table discernment discussion. To keep the discussion focused there are only two questions. Following about 10 minutes of discussion, we would like to ask several tables to respond back to the whole body in response to these questions:

1. What are the two or three most compelling reasons for continuing with an annual Assembly?

Conversely

2. What are the two or three most compelling reasons for making a change and holding biennial Assemblies?

There is one further question at the bottom of the recording sheets located on your table as follows:

What is the feeling (a non-binding vote) at your table

_____ In favour of Annual Assemblies

_____ In favour of Biennial Assemblies

_____ Abstain

Frequency of Assemblies at a National Level
Discernment Session
Friday, June 5, 2009
Table Discussion Sheet

1. What are the two or three most compelling reasons for continuing with an annual Assembly?

a)

b)

c)

2. What are the two or three most compelling reasons for making a change and holding biennial Assemblies?

a)

b)

c)

What is the feeling (a non-binding vote) at your table

_____ In favour of Annual Assemblies

_____ In favour of Biennial Assemblies

_____ Abstain