



Mennonite  
Church  
Canada

Resource Centre

# From our Churches

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## Paths and Ditches

Dramatization of *Being a Faithful Church 4.0*

[www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1816](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1816)

### Cast

**Ditch reader** - *hidden from view, speaking into a microphone projected into the sanctuary.*

**Signpost readers** - *scattered throughout the congregation next to the **Signpost statements** (already posted in the sanctuary on posts to engage the congregation as they assemble for the morning's service).*

*Two readers walk into the sanctuary from a back or side approach. They alternately address the congregation and each other as they dramatically present the key concepts contained in "Being a Faithful Church" document 4.0.*

- 1: We are a group of people who gather together to worship on a regular basis.
- 2: We are a small part of a much larger group of people who worship together all over the world.
- 1: Up until now we have been quite comfortable with a shared assumption that the Bible is a very important source of our beliefs. We are proud of the role the Bible has played in our history and in the early beginnings of our church.

*(Arrive and stop at crossroads signposts with words – How, Why, Where, When, What, Who pointing in different directions.)*

- 2: But now we are at somewhat of a crossroads. We are trying to figure out how, why, where and when the Bible is still relevant for our lives today.
- 1: For our FAITH today.
- 2: The problem is that our lives and our issues are so modern.
- 1: And the Bible is so old.
- 2: Can it still speak to us?

- 1: How can we discover the message that is meant for us today? And will we be able to agree with what that might be?
- 2: You and me?
- 1: Not just the two of us - but everyone in our group, our church, our Area Church, Mennonite Church Canada?
- 2: Agree about what?
- 1: The Bible! How should we read it, understand it, apply it to our lives?
- 2: Do we have to? ... agree, that is?
- 1: Well, a joint framework, some common ground, some shared insights and mutual practices will sure come in handy, don't you think, if the going ever gets tough and we run across some obstacles.
- 2: OK, so how do we start?
- 1: By dusting off our Bibles and beginning to use scripture together as a group.
- 2: Do you think we're ready for that? (*Look around the whole congregation.*)
- 1: Ready as we'll ever be.
- 2: (*with somewhat forced bravado – emphasize each phrase*) Yeah! A scripture referencing, issue addressing, discussion provoking **adventure!**
- 1: Exactly.
- 2: So what do we do? (*start walking to signpost #1*)
- 1: Identify a problem or issue for which you require a biblical response.
- 2: Like whether communion should be open to everyone in the church?
- 1: Sure.

**Signpost 1: The life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus are central** to our interpretation of scripture.

- 2: Hey, what was that?
- 1: We seem to have signposts along our way, giving us guidance, helping us stay on the path.

**Signpost 2: Context makes a difference** to our reading of the Bible. We need to consider both when the scriptures were written and our time and place today.

- 2: So, are we advised to think about Jesus' **whole life and the culture and traditions of his day** when we read the Bible?
- 1: Yes.
- 2: But what if I don't know what life was like 2000 years ago in Jerusalem or Bethlehem or Golgotha?
- 1: You have a couple of choices: do some reading in other books, take a course, Google it, ask someone who knows.

<b>Ditch 1: DO NOT LEAVE JESUS WITHOUT A CONTEXT.</b>
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- 2: Ok, ok. What was that?
- 1: Sounds like a warning to me. Like a ditch we should watch out for. If we want to stay on the path we should beware of certain pitfalls. Here comes another.

<b>Ditch 2: DO NOT ASSUME YOUR CONTEXT IS EITHER NORMAL OR UNCHANGING</b>
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- 1: It sounds like we're being reminded that **our reality** is not fixed, but changing constantly, and that no one's life is "the standard" or "normal". What's normal for us could be very bizarre to someone from another country or culture or background.

**Signpost 3: Scripture interprets scripture.**

**Signpost 4: Jesus interprets scripture.**

- 1: We need to notice how different passages of the Bible relate to each other.....  
2: AND how Jesus is shown to interpret the Old Testament.  
1: Kind of like a role model in scripture reading.

**Signpost 5. Take the whole canon.**

- 2: Take what canon? Are we going to blast away those who disagree with us?  
1: No, "the whole canon" means "the whole Bible" – Old and New Testament together. Each smaller part of the Bible makes more sense when all parts are taken together.  
2: That sounds like a HUGE task. How can we remember the whole Bible every time we read one little part?  
1: Good question. But the New Testament came out of the Old Testament, so they rely on each other.

**Ditch 3: DO NOT LEAVE OUT THE OLD TESTAMENT.**

- 2: I'm still going to have a hard time figuring out how all of the plagues and pillage and plunder of the Old Testament fit with the loving, forgiving image of Jesus.

**Ditch 4: AVOID PROOF-TEXTING.**

- 1: I think this ditch is warning us about taking a single passage out of context, quoting a text without considering its context and purpose.  
2: So, just because Jesus shared the wine and bread with his disciples, that doesn't mean that only male, bearded, ex-fishermen, about to observe their leader being crucified, can take communion?  
1: Something like that.

**Signpost 6: Scripture is a living Word** in a world in need of redemption.

- 2: So, does that mean that if I read a great scientific news article about how humans are impacting the environment, then I might understand the Genesis creation story better?  
1: I think so.

**Signpost 7: The Holy Spirit guides us.**

- 2: I've been thinking that it would be great if a huge finger of God could point out which Bible verses we should be reading in different situations.  
1: Divine proof-texting? I don't think the Holy Spirit works that way. It's more of an open minded approach, to allow the Holy Spirit to make the words of the whole Bible come alive for us.

- 2: What if I'm not having that kind of "aha" moment on my own? Does it count if I find new insights while studying the Bible with other people?
- 1: Sure it does. We can really gain from each other's knowledge and experience, each other's own witness to the Holy Spirit's working in our lives.

#### **Ditch 5: DO NOT FORCE GOD TO FIT YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

- 2: So we're supposed to be receptive to the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to new ideas, but at the same time, avoid making God fit into our beliefs. How will I know the difference? Am I having a Holy Spirit inspired epiphany or..... moulding God into an idea that I like?
- 1: Not sure. Maybe one's feelings of humility or discomfort or smugness can be a guide? You know, you can always go back to the group to check out your ideas. You can be sure there will be people who will tell you if you are on the path or in a ditch!

#### **Signpost 8: We are part of a larger story**

- 1: People from all ages have wanted to know God better. If we think of these shared experiences as part of the same, large story – the same long path – means that our present circumstances are but another chapter of an ongoing sequel.
- 2: A running story we could call "God's Love Affair with the World."
- 1: Yes.

#### **Signpost 9: Knowing is doing**

- 2: Oh, so now we also must change our actions to reflect our knowledge of God? Loving others, seeking justice, sharing our wealth, offering forgiveness – that's asking a lot. Why can't we just learn more about God and continue living our lives the same comfortable way that we did before?
- 1: Well, that would be like saying we're hiking when in fact we're just sitting on the ground looking at the map. We need to put our faith into practice to really understand it.

#### **Signpost 10: Scripture is a delight**

- 1: A delight that gets better when shared with others.

#### **Signpost 11: Be aware of other hikers**

- 2: This path **is** very worn. It makes me wonder how many people went ahead of us on this trail, how many are on the trail right now and how many are going to come after.
- 1: Don't forget that there are also spiritual hiking paths being explored all over the world.
- 2: Does that mean we're all on the same journey?
- 1: I see it as parallel journeys with a similar destination. "Spiritual trekking for dusty souls seeking God."

#### **Signpost 12: God intends to bring wholeness to Creation**

- 1: I'm guessing that means that the goal of scripture is to bring peace, reconciliation, and healing especially to those who are the least advantaged and the most needy.

2: The wholeness of creation, the whole canon, the whole story. This journey seems rather all inclusive.

#### **Ditch 6: AVOID GENERALIZATIONS**

2: Wow, these ditches are pretty hard to avoid.

1: I guess all we can do is move forward together, in faith. Do you think we can remember and practice everything we learned here today?

2: Not on my own I can't.

1: I think the idea is to work on this together as an interpretive community and a body of discernment.

2: Sounds like a plan. Hey, do you know where this path ends?

1: I'm not sure. Let's keep walking together and see where it takes us.