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Periods of Dramatic Change

Change is always occurring. But when that change appears more dramatic than usual, it can feel frightening. I wish there was an emoticon for anxiety to accompany my thoughts on change.

I think that the Christian Church across Canada is experiencing such a time of dramatic change. Although the Mennonite Church Canada family has been navigating this period of change through the work of the Future Directions Task Force, the need for modification is not unique to us. The Canadian context is significantly different than when our current church structures and programs were developed.

In a recent conversation of a small group Bible study I am engaged in, we reflected on the work of the church. For many, it has often felt like spending energy keeping things alive, just for the sake of keeping things alive. This has become a tough sell for many people.

I must admit, I have often felt uncomfortable with the enterprise of Christianity. Worship has become a retail commodity. Representing God has become an occupational career. When individual achievement becomes ingrained in this spiritual movement, is it any wonder that much of Christianity has become addicted to growth and success?

Do not misunderstand me. I think God is very active redeeming the world. But has sharing the Good News of Jesus become a means to assure the ministry and financial sustainability of an institutional church?

That would seem misguided to me.

I see a different future: a future where people are invited to discover their own vision through Christ rather than keep the dream of the church alive. I am not advocating for rampant individualism. But individuals must be able to see themselves as integral to a communal expression.

I have seen the importance placed on debates that many people consider irrelevant. I have heard a panic expressed that has made the concerns of the church feel self-focused.

I see a different future: a future where the transforming wonder of God's grace is experienced by those who have historically been rejected. In a growing secular society, people are aching for spiritual meaning and connection. Our debates should not be dictated by secular society. But our debates should be relevant to the spiritual aching of society.

I don't think we have gotten it all wrong. But much of our wisdom is bound by culture and context. Wisdom is constrained by what we know. The Spirit of God is active in the realm of what we do not know.

In this season of dramatic change it is important for the church to display an unshakable confidence in the God who knows what we do not know. Only then can we push away the fear and despair that always accompanies times of dramatic change.