

Theology Committee Meeting #11-02
Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC)
Wednesday, September 14, 2011
Morrow Gospel Church
755 St. Anne's Road, Winnipeg MB

PRESENT: Amy Giesbrecht; Ben Klassen (Region 3); Dale Dueck (Region 3); Terry Hiebert (Region 2); Daren Redekopp (Region 2); Diedrich Dyck (Region 6); Stephen Sheane (Region 4); Dale Doerksen (Region 1); Terry Penner (Region 3) joined the meeting in progress.

1. Session One:

- 1.1. We began with a discussion on ordination. Dale Dueck explained some of the history of ordination and why it was revamped 20 years ago. We needed a process of ordination that was uniform across the denomination and some accountability between ordained ministers and a local EMMC church. It seems that the ordination process has not been very active in recent years. Some concern was expressed that if we ordain pastors and set them apart for ministry, we are sending a message to lay people that they are not ministers, and goes against the priesthood of believers. Many churches have commissioning or covenanting services that affirm people for ministry, that function much like ordination services. We must remain sensitive to our history and what people understand ordination to be, a calling of God, but at the same time allow churches to call it commissioning or affirmation for ministry. For some churches/Regions the office of ordination is significant and needed, other churches/Regions may prefer commissioning/affirmation and want to avoid the word "ordination".
- 1.2. Conclusions: It is important to tie the ordination/affirmation process to active service in a local church to provide accountability and closures. We suggest tying affirmation to ordination, using the words together. It would be helpful to tie ordination to the hiring process. Ordination/affirmation should be an opportunity for vetting a candidate's character, theology and gifting.
- 1.3. We referred to the doctrinal questionnaire and ordination interview documents: The doctrinal questionnaire seems a bit lengthy and cumbersome and maybe overkill. Our recommendation: Have the candidates read through our Confession of Faith and write a short paragraph on each section. This would include questions the candidate may have or affirmations, etc. We then ask them some leading questions to determine orthodoxy in their doctrine. It would also be helpful to ask questions regarding character and gifting.

2. Session Two:

- 2.1. Core Values/Mission Statement discussion:
- 2.2. Stephen handed around a related article by Kevin Harney entitled "Leading the Church to Change." There are three critical questions we must ask if we want to facilitate change: 1) Does your church believe and follow the teaching of the Bible? 2) Does your church love people and long for them to know Jesus? 3) Are people in your church willing to sacrifice to joyfully embrace change? Churches in our conference seem to have a hard time reaching beyond our own ethnic group. Only churches that have more than 20% of non-Mennonite people attending are being successful at reaching out to their community. How do we help people see the need of those outside of our culture? Can we emphasize evangelical Anabaptism (a theological position) without calling ourselves Mennonite (a cultural reality)?
- 2.3. The old system says how can the EMMC equip churches for ministry, but shouldn't the Holy Spirit be equipping us? We need to think outside the box. All of us are

called/ordained/commissioned for ministry, not just ordained clergy. Maybe we need to change this at a more grassroots level. Give tools to people to help them disciple someone else, that will help our churches grow. Or provide a process for churches to help them move people from being consumers to being disciplers, develop a thought-out, clear discipleship strategy. It would be helpful for churches to have a diagnostic tool to evaluate the health of a church or the make-up of our community and how to effectively reach them. We must help people see that the Word of God is to be transformational not just give information. Can the conference help the churches ask good questions? It is the churches job to plant other churches. But the conference needs to spur churches on to this. Could Conference help us by forcing us to ask questions like should you add on or plant another church? Would people in the community feel welcome in your church? If not, what needs to change?

3. Session #3

3.1. The core values document is okay, but how much play is it getting in our congregations? Is there a way of structuring the document so it is more useful? Can we use questions to help flesh it out or work with it at a deeper level? The present document is too cumbersome to be usable. We have too many tag lines, and need to narrow it down more. Break it down to a few key things in a simpler format. Go Mission! – Making Disciples – Connecting Churches is a better example of something short and more workable. We need to come up with a clear statement, without using loaded terms, and put it in a format that our churches can use. This document was confusing for us as a committee to interpret, it seems geared to pastors, etc. so we really don't believe anyone will really use it. These core values are okay but we don't really think they describe us or are something that will resonate with us. Shared values come from listening to all the various regions and hearing what they have in common. Because this document feels like it was forced on us from the outside it doesn't fit. Core Values statement would be a great vision statement of what we would like to become, but does not appear to reflect our core values. We should start with our mission statement and go to core values from there.

3.2. Suggested Mission Statement for the Conference:

3.2.1. "To Encourage and Empower churches for Effective ministry in the world."

4. Question: Is this Theology Committee simply supposed to discuss the ordination procedure or do you want us to draft an actual ordination procedure?

5. Recommended Responsibilities

5.1. We recommend the Theology Committee take on the following responsibilities:

5.1.1. "To meet yearly to assess the theological health and vibrancy of our churches" – We are okay with this.

5.1.2. "To identify and provide resources in responding to the theological threats facing the church" – What kind of resources do you mean? This sounds slightly like a watchdog role. Is this what you mean?

5.1.3. "To be familiar with our present Confession of Faith and keep it as a living document by providing resources for living it out" – What do you mean by resources? Are we going to have to write up papers or simply work with our current resources (ie. Living Truth, Christian Life)

5.1.4. "The Theology Committee member(s) from each region will work with leaders within their region to work out the application of the theological truths" – We recommend omitting this one.

5.1.5. "This committee could also take some special interest in guiding the Discipleship Discussions on the Web page" – We recommend omitting this one. The website doesn't seem like an effective way of facilitating theological conversations. We recommend that the Go Mission! webpage be used only for providing informational articles and not as a

place for theological discussion. In its present form it seems to cause disunity and misunderstanding more than helpful discussion. We recommend that any articles that are not informational be removed. Unless the web page can be monitored more effectively and the discussions brought to a better conclusion, we feel it produces more confusion and disunity than helpful theological discussion.

5.1.6. Draft, implement and monitor the ordination procedure.

6. Affirmation

6.1. As a group, we are prepared to make the following affirmation if it would help restore trust and promote unity.

6.2. Theology Committee Affirmation:

6.2.1. We affirm that we are Evangelical – People of the book – committed to the Word of God

6.2.2. We affirm that we are Mennonite – We appreciate our historical roots/heritage

6.2.3. We affirm that we are Missional – Committed to reaching our world for Christ

6.2.4. We affirm that we are a Conference – Committed to doing together what we cannot do alone.

6.3. Terry Hiebert will draft an initial statement, send it by email for critique, once agreed on it will be sent to the office to be put into the Recorder.

7. Next Meeting

7.1.1. July 5, 2012 in Winkler before the bi-annual convention.