

To: Delegates of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite conference
From: Missional Leadership Team
Re: What we heard in delegate meetings
April 25, 2016

124 delegates to conference from 37 of 61 congregations gathered on March 5 in Grand Rapids, Mich., or on March 12 in Kokomo, Ind. The days began and ended with worship, signaling the first point of a new vision, “focusing conference life around Jesus.” Delegates engaged in conversations for a significant part of the day, reviewing and offering counsel on “Pieces of a vision” and “Regarding breadth of variance,” and the draft spending plan for next fiscal year, July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017.

This document is organized into three sections:

- What we will do
- What we heard
- How we understand what we heard

Section 1: What we will do

1. Create a FAQ sheet to address many key questions raised at delegate meetings
2. Revise the two documents – *Pieces of a vision* and *Regarding breadth of variance* – for distribution ahead of Annual Sessions. (Hopefully around mid-May.)
3. Draft a covenant document.
4. Invite congregations into relationship with one another. While we recognize a cultural trend toward individualism, MLT wants to move us towards a collaborative polity that involves more shared accountability.
5. Consider ways to draw on others beyond MLT to refine some of the under-developed items, such as qualified teachers, covenanting process, i.e. task groups or open space technology.
6. Outline a process for moving forward.
7. Consider delegate feedback regarding 2016-17 proposed spending plan.

Section 2: What we heard from delegates

2a. Pieces of a vision

Centering conference life around Jesus

- Positive appreciation for the work in creating something that looks forward. While there were questions about details, we did not hear negative responses to the general direction.
- A strongly affirmative response to “centering conference life around Jesus,” and encouragement to be Trinitarian.
- We should be involved, living out our faith more than trying to define it.
- A desire to hear stories that illustrate what God is doing, that draw us together in following Jesus.
- In reality, congregations are pretty independent of each other.

Key Documents and Shared Spiritual Practices

- Most focused on *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. Mixed affirmation for drawing key documents from Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite World Conference.
- “Core beliefs” was a term mentioned several times. Not clear people always meant the same things, so difficult to know how to interpret the meaning.
- Agreement that belief and practice do belong together, though sometimes difficult to accomplish.

- A desire to be part of a church [and conference?] where “formation” and “discipleship” are happening, though the words “formation” and “discipleship” were not specifically used very often.
- Comments that Mennonites are good at doing and not so good at articulating beliefs that undergird the actions.

Discernment Process

- General affirmation for the process, but with anxiety and many questions. This process could have a high cost: energy, time, emotion for congregations and Missional Leadership Team.
- Questions of clarification: What is a “qualified teacher”? Doesn’t this give a lot of power to Missional Leadership Team? Who decides when a process should begin?

Covenant for Congregations and Pastors

- Comments jump over question of whether we should have a covenant, to questions of clarification about covenanting.
- Appreciation for intentionality of covenant. There is value in renewing “vows,” commitment. Gives an opportunity to reevaluate the congregation’s relationships.
- How often would we re-covenant? 1 year? 2 years? 5 years?
- Are the lists of activities suggestions or requirements? What if a congregation doesn’t covenant?
- Does someone monitor?
- Can covenant be smaller than the “Pieces of a vision” document?

2b. Regarding breadth of variance

- More tension with this document than the other. Good to separate this from *Pieces of a vision*.
- Why is MLT addressing this issue?
- Should we define between identity and practice?
- The document tries to honor some concerns on all sides. Mixed response as to whether this is good.
- The three thoughts were: too conservative for some, too liberal for others, and too wishy-washy for others.
- Mixture of feelings about how connected IN-MI Conference should be to Mennonite Church USA as we find our way.

Section 3: How we understand what we heard.

- Given the overall response, we are optimistic that God’s Spirit has been at work across conference, creating space in us for the emerging vision.
- There is a yearning for a common and positive bond within conference; and more trepidation as it creates expectations on congregations.
- Response to centering conference life on Jesus has many levels:
 - A natural Mennonite reflex; who can disagree with focusing on Jesus?
 - A Jesus focus leans naturally in the direction of activity, which seems most comfortable for Mennonites.
 - Any alternative to the tension of same-sex relationships is appealing.
 - An absence of appreciation for the Holy Spirit’s activity and for what is out of our control.
- The many good questions indicate a genuine level of investment. Some were questions of clarification. Other questions wondered about implications. Others were questions of disagreement.
- IN-MI conference members hold wide range of perspectives. Amidst the affirmation for moving forward, tension remain about breadth of variance, such that no one option pleases everyone.