

INDIANA-MICHIGAN MENNONITE CONFERENCE ANNUAL SESSIONS
SUMMARY: TABLE WISDOM
June 19, 2016

Questions

1. *Did you have any “night thoughts” (i.e. new awarenesses, revelations) since yesterday’s table conversation around the “Renewing a Vision” document?*
2. *How will your congregation process this document? Do you think your church will adopt this document and sign the covenant?*
3. *How might your church start to live into this document over the next year?*
4. *Does the timeline seem feasible to you that our first “covenant signing ceremony” would be 2017 Annual Sessions? Do we wait to first vote on the document at 2017 Annual Sessions or sometime PRIOR to next summer?*
5. *Advice/counsel to MLT? (including feedback from any key issues identified on Thu)*

Table 1

1. Went back to re-read document—need to center around Jesus. Our church has done a poorer job of connecting with conference. Perhaps this will help renew congregational relationship. This will challenge our time. A.M. presentation helpful to recall church’s struggles—how might history speak to us? Comments on congregationalism helpful perspective.
2. Hopefully review document—with time; do not know if congregation will sign covenant. How do we engage younger people in the conversation—feel issue is disconnected. Youth find (college age) this discussion as a turn off. Share with Church Board; let church Board process and give a recommendation; allow congregational feedback. Board will then set a direction. Our church would sign—but can we follow through on commitments.
3. n/a
4. concur that first vote happen prior to 2017 Annual Sessions—2017 should be a celebration of covenanting.
5. Thank you for a good work—may the H.S. continue to guide.

Table 2

1. Romans 14 reflections. Appreciated hearing Bob review all the feedback, seemed like he shared a greater intensity of concerns than what was held by this table. Like Nelson said (in morning story-telling), God separates the wheat and the tares, this is God’s church and yet we have so much to say right now—we need to relax and listen to God.
2. It will probably be a no-brainer to sign, but will have to be intentional to live it out. Every congregation will be different in how it is lived out, document seems rigid, but if know there’s flexibility it will be more likely to be approved/appreciated, will process around tables and give feedback to church leaders, Breadth of Variance will be the sticking point. This process is on the congregational agenda for Fall.
3. Will be very organic, doing many of the shared practices, so how do we do more to grow more—and yet do people want to grow because there are growing pains and people are tired, some fear developing relationships because people leaving has been painful and personal.
4. Logistically, how could they implement it sooner? Affirmation for webinars again for more time to process; need to adopt document prior to signing; maybe accept in regional meetings and do at Annual Sessions or in congregations in worship, and then present those congregations at Annual Sessions, can’t vote on it at AS and then sign at the same AS.

5. Our sadness with the “Renewing a Vision” is that the document is excellent, but may not be adopted because of the Breadth of Variance page at the end of the document. (We wish we had more time with this—it felt rushed.)

Table 3

1. Many night thoughts, too complex, the church’s transition from hierarchical (e.g. bishop) to congregational/lay decision-making has made decision-making more complex. (centering on Jesus is easier said than done. We need to help each other!; difficulty in moving from top down decision-making to largely (democratic) way. Messy.)
2. n/a (yes, I think our congregation will take this seriously and sign the covenant; we’ve already done surveys etc. on LGBTQ-related beliefs/practices so I have a good sense of what we will likely do. I think adoption is pretty likely for us.; I don’t think so; will not sign in its present form.; probably not)
3. n/a (looking at the spiritual practices; could bring it to congregation for discussion and straw poll; removing the LGBT modified statements)
4. n/a (I think, based on trying to lead a discussion at my table, that more conversations/discernment might be necessary—although maybe it’s time to move ahead anyway? There were some folks unwilling to consider any of this as anything other than a ploy to get us to accept GLBTQ folks. However, we could all agree that part of this messiness relates to moving away from hierarchical authority, which we had various opinions about!; based on our table discussion it may be different to agree on many things; better get decision/congregations going many directions; doesn’t look like it according to what I have heard. It is probably actually too late.)
5. not enough time to get this handled (folks on both ends of the spectrum seem very frustrated right now; our conference will lose more congregations; take time to relax, try finishing)

Table 4

1. some difficulty matching “Renewing a Vision” with MC USA’s document. The Breadth of Variance is a lot to process—many churches haven’t had a chance to process.
2. Need to process—churches at different places (pastor transitions, etc.). Many elders/pastors are supportive, but congregation needs more info/education.
3. No real ideas—first we need to start process... Churches need more education on this document. Need to get it out to members.
4. Not sure if churches would be ready by Summer 2017 (no earlier than that). More prayer needed. ☺
5. Simplify and shorten document for better understanding.

Table 5

1. Like “centering around Jesus”
2. Majority of congregations at table have not had an intentional discernment process on LGBTQ issues. Question for congregations is not marriage issue, but whether willing to live with other congregations with different perspective. Do we have same understanding of Jesus? Are we willing to support each other in understandings of Jesus!
3. Ask each other “who is Jesus” – reframes question
4. n/a
5. n/a

Table 6

1. The concept of a document that strengthens relationships is healthy. Some doubts reflect fears of being overworked. It could be life-giving.

2. Where do we go from here? May result in congregations leaving and not being judgmental. Maybe going ahead in faith is the best way to go. Feels good that people with different views are listening. Has more hope. How to convey the discussions to the congregation. 1 church will not adopt in its present form. The changes fit one church better. 1 church the delegate thinks it will accept even if they don't agree with everything. 1 church delegate says LGBTQ is not an issue. The document is fine. 1 church doesn't know, but is apprehensive. 1 person sees signing the covenant will not force a congregation to give permission to other congregations to be at variance. 1 person sees it differently.
3. n/a
4. n/a
5. How do you have community without having a fence? There needs to be a short version to these documents for the people in the pew! Way too long for most people. 2 pages tops. Does the Breadth of Variance need to only address the LGBTQ issue? Should it address all variance?

Table 7

1. Could we vote on whether the Breadth of Variance should be included in this document? Maybe not vote, but should MLT separate them. No censure, but shouldn't there be discussion because of variance?
2. 1. More than one congregation would have significant # disagree with #1 and #2 in Breadth of Variance (50/50?). 2. Not sure. 3. Wouldn't want to take draft instead of final approved document to congregation.
3. Unity starts on the personal level.
4. 1 year is too short for our church. Vote on document must be before covenanting signing ceremony. General feeling seems to be that timeline needs to be adjusted (longer).
5. n/a

Table 8

1. we understand and accept the "opt in" concept rather than being "grandfathered in"; Who has further conversation on behalf of IMMC with a congregation that doesn't covenant? MLT by default?
2. Don't know how it will be processed. One congregation probably would, another very unsure.
3. Processing this is enough for this year...living into it will not really start this year but go into coming years.
4. Overall feasible...we may need a hard push to keep moving...shouldn't wait beyond summer 2017...didn't discuss timing of voting on it.

Table 9

1. Perhaps in our life together, we need to do more celebrating of what we have in common. Rather than three spiritual disciplines we have named, which are more general to all Christian groups, we should name spiritual disciplines unique to Anabaptists: focus on discipleship, peacemaking, servant leadership, consensus/community decision-making. Keep Christ at the center and because of that we yield to one another and are gracious to one another in differences.
2. Our congregations have not looked at this yet. Some of us wonder how we can do more or process more in the congregation. However we do think all pastors and congregational leaders need to take this seriously.
3. We are less likely to take conference for granted. We want conference to succeed.
4. Next summer for covenant signing seems good to our group.

5. Our expectations of conference need to change or we will burn out staff and volunteers.

Table 10

1. What is the commitment—how much, what is goal? Need a trial period, does it just get around the LGBTQ issue? How do we get congregations on board
2. We live with diversity on other issues, why is this different?; Picnic? Involvement with Area Councils; like the intentionality, are we resolving debate and moving on or are we just being fuzzy – what is good discernment?; too much material – can it be condensed?
3. Can we just propose “working relationships”? two things going on (credentialing, bringing in everybody...they can’t, but they can); using “polity” to avoid being conflictual; two ways – top down, congregational
4. SIMPLIFY IT; just a couple things to do...find common ground, don’t agree with everything

Table 11

1. Being part of IN-MI is part of my DNA; feels strange to be asked to choose to be part; can’t imagine leaving. The presentations this morning were helpful (by Rich [Preheim] and Nelson [Kraybill in morning story telling]). Note (we are aware) of diversity within congregations.
2. 3 “probably yes”; 1 “maybe yes”; 1 “most likely not.” No process in place yet (for most of our table).
3. n/a
4. keep the process moving; don’t wait til next summer
5. n/a/

Table 12

1. A simple covenant around the bylaws might be better.
2. It will vary by congregation! People under 40 may not yet even know about it. (one congregation)
3. It will vary by church! Through teaching, but a church will be able to handle about one big thing a year (of six practices).
4. Some say yes, but some say no. It will depend on the final form of the covenant (half and half).
5. The covenant should be a lot simpler (maybe centered around bylaws). The variance process looks good. Disagreements at the table on the policy changes regarding sexuality.

Table 13

1. So involved with this issue that we can’t get on with other work. Lets continue to understand and name our contexts and give congregations the freedom to live and minister as they see fit in their context. Context makes a huge difference in how we see this issue and how important it is to us. There’s a gap between city churches and county churches. Surprised by how ??? hasn’t been done. We’re still confused. Haven’t changed much/enough. Been glad that we haven’t rushed. Grateful for UVTG sharing and modeling listening to each other. This is a white, Middle class issue. Spending so much time on this issue that we don’t have time to reach out to other groups in our community.
2. Probably would but we would lose people because of it (1). Yes (5). I hope so (1).
3. n/a
4. Seems like a reasonable timeline to most. Need to get it done. Need a goal—all congregations work through document and let us know what you think before 2017 Annual Sessions.
5. n/a

Table 14

1. 1. Emphasize church unity. 2. Cultivate consciousness of our captivity to culture. 3. Western church has dualistic worldview. Makes discernment harder
2. Probably easy passage. Little investment. Some see passing “Breadth of Variance,” pt. 1 and 2, as affirming (for themselves) the moral validity of same sex relationships.
3. These are not new practices. New is variance piece.
4. Not discussed.
5. Poor Christology and no discussion of church in document.

Table (15??)

1. Where does patient ferment come in? Affirm the change in #2.
2. Leadership level only (2), congregational meeting (3), already processed – divided (1)
3. Not too likely until it gets affirmed
4. Should be over time; churches won’t be ready to sign this fall
5. Move in the direction of encouraging LOVE

Table 16

1. Continues to question logistics, but understands why we might say we want to be a covenanting conference. What happens if a congregation doesn’t sign? It’s presented as an invitation, but that goes against what a covenant is.
2. This may not be a straight forward process. Some congregations may vote, some will let the leadership team determine what to do, some will discuss during Sunday school or over lunch. Keep in mind that a process at church expects a definitive conclusion.
3. Are we expected to sign up, or if congregational process is needed, then congregations will be in a time of limbo.
4. We need to vote on the document before there is a signing ceremony. If there are lots of questions, they need to be answered before there is a vote.
5. We need a definition of covenant. What does it mean in this context? Is it a legal document? If pastors have to sign, then it’s legal. We need more, sustained, time for discussion. The pieces of the document need to be separated and discussed. This is a big conversation. We need more time if congregations are to take this seriously. We need more congregational feedback to create a workable document.

Table 17

1. There are steps needed to be completed in each individual churches. (Realization how difficult this process is to be implemented; yesterday I felt anxious about how differences might be “worked out” or not in the proposed process. Then I remembered that God is in the process and I trust God will lead us all; this document potentially lends to significant inter-congregational counsel/discernment. Can we commit to something that is unknown to time and effort required?)
2. God is in the process. (processing will need to be determined at our church; our church is in the middle of pastoral transition and also a new church structure. I don’t think the congregation can add processing this document until the church plate has more room on it; our church may have a group study/”conversation café” to review and process the document. I believe that we will adopt and sign the covenant; since it is tied to LGBTQ relationship/descent, that will cloud in some ways approving the document. We have some work to do in our church about the inclusion/exclusion of LGBTQ folks.)

3. n/a (educate our church about these documents. Make decisions on individual basis of person(s) involved; try to be more intentional about meeting with and working with the congregations in our "North Goshen" neighborhood; take steps to do inter-church discussion with the churches closest to us.)
4. n/a (consider voting online before next summer 2017; it seems prudent to have a vote at 2017 Annual Session and then a signing sometime after that; I don't know if 1 year from now will give enough time for those who have strong questions.)
5. Keep reaching out to congregations lay people and not preachers and go slow and no make a final decision in 2017. (ask our church pastors to bring these items into discussions at small groups.)

Table 18

1. Need for clearer and concise presentation repeatedly so all are aware of the full detail. More expansion on answers to FAQ. It was helpful to hear "this is an invitation, not a mandate."
2. Not sure how an interim/transitional church should approach or begin this process. The larger document is too much for an even stable church. Needs to be boil down before delegates take it back.
3. n/a
4. possibly at, but not prior; yes at 2017 AS; some congregations will want/need a more concise document to process this. Some will be ready, some may join later as they are ready.
5. Taking a tone of "trial" for a period of years. Bless it as an experiment with an evaluation (at the 3 year mark).

Table 19

1. n/a (I feel like the challenges that we will face is the different congregation location is very different from each other; that this document can be revised as a SIGN of assurance that a congregation will be patient and not about to drop out of conference.)
2. not everyone agreed with signing the covenant (because of the age differences it's going to be a little hard to agree, but I can see my congregation signing the covenant; probably at elders meeting. Maybe at council. The congregation as a whole (with exception of a few people) are not interested in this discussion/conversation about Variance and will not want to process. Given that said, I think we will adopt; I am sure we will adopt and sign. I assume we will have a church-wide meeting.)
3. n/a (as for the vision itself, the congregation would affirm; We are soon to have a new co-minister, so a new vision process can be part of a renewal)
4. n/a (yes)
5. n/a (The MLT should come up with an update of what "Christ centered mean" that both young and old will adopt;