

Summaries of Delegate Feedback Phoenix 2013

Christian Formation

Many of the table groups reported that the traditional Sunday School programs in their congregations are declining in attendance and ability to find leaders for classes of all ages. Many congregations at the same time reported new ways for formation happening in mid-week times for people to gather and connect, often in less formal ways.

Besides using the Uniform Bible Study produced by MennoMedia, congregations are exploring many new ways to engage in scriptures, including Bible memory of all age groups, the 12 Scripture Project, Dwelling in the Word, commercial programs focusing on a systematic study of the Bible, as well as congregations developing their own version of Year of the Bible. Christian formation in many congregations increasingly uses technology and video means to compliment traditional books and paper. Several tables noted the effect terms of Christian service have on the Christian formation of persons in the church. There seems to be an increasing awareness of the need and positive effect of spiritual direction in the local church.

Tables expressed a general awareness of the fact that the challenge of Christian Formation is not with the youth and young adults of the church, but with their parents' generation who have not continued to seek and model formative Christian practices and relationships. Many report a loss of youth and young adults and struggle to find a way to connect (attract) them to the church. One constant challenge from many table groups was the ability to intentionally invite persons to faith in Christ.

Numerous tables communicated energy around providing opportunities for persons from across generations to connect and participate in formation work together. Mentoring was very often reported as a positive initiative of local congregations. Tables noted a need not only for materials to help in the Christian formation of youth but for adults who come to church from different or no church background.

These delegate responses not only spoke accurately of the challenges our congregations face, the also spoke of the joy of watching and experiencing Christian Formation happening in their own lives and congregations in positive ways. Thanks be to God.

Summary compiled by Terry Shue
August 9, 2013

Summary of Delegate Table Comments on Holistic Witness

Discussion questions:

What new possibilities for a missional peace church presence of service, witness and worship might God be calling us to? What could you do in your context to pursue these possibilities?

Delegates shared a wide range of examples from their congregations and conferences that reflect creative outreach and witness: starting a community garden, a congregationally based peace center, men's ministry, a deaf fellowship, Indonesian, Hmong and Ethiopian church

plants and much more. Some new church plants are already thinking about the next church they will help plant. Even small churches can plant churches. Some churches are exploring multi-site worship.

A number of tables discussed the importance of shifting from an attractional approach to an incarnational approach (from building a church and expecting people to attend to being sent into the world and being a Jesus-presence in all those places where people live, work and play). Others discussed the importance of being open to experimenting with new forms of worship (time, place, format, leadership style etc.).

Some tables affirmed the language of nurturing a “peace church” presence. This reflects our commitment to the gospel of peace, and offers a unique witness in a diverse religious landscape. Congregations that focus on Jesus will leave a “wake of peace” one table observed, though peace can also be divisive.

Some tables underscored the importance of faith formation in our own churches in order to be able to be a missional peace church presence. Churches need help both in being bolder in sharing faith in Jesus and in deepening their gospel peace convictions.

Summary compiled by Andre Gingerich Stoner
September 2, 2013

Summary of Delegate Table Comments on Immigration

increase the biblical content: (many, many similar responses)

Danny Carroll’s presentation brought new insights, very powerful.

make it central

God’s call for our response to the oppressed is very clear. We need to bring more of this scripture into our statement.

include theological reflection

increase resource information / action ideas

our action list needs to be different from our local Lions Club/Kiwanis Club sponsored actions! should reflect our faith!

include how to communicate our opposition to massive accelerated militarization of the Mexican border in current legislative reform proposals.

organize forums to learn and hear current debates

learning/educational experiences/delegations

listen to special speakers: Dr. Carroll and Anton Flores-Maisonet highly appreciated
Mennonite employers pay just, living wages

hear personal stories

have easy access in the electronic version of the statement to links to
resources/connections

intentional inclusion of immigrants/undocumented persons at Mennonite Church USA
conventions with financial support included

churches post online (Wiki page, etc.) what specifically they are doing with this
statement

looking for something more to sink teeth into (hiring undocumented immigrants, little more pushy, another level of commitment)

partner with MCC

congregations call forth “immigrant advocates”

build relationships with immigrants

Mennonite Church USA congregations form relationships/partnering with churches that are primarily immigrant/undocumented peoples (including ecumenically)

congregations across the country link with congregations on the border - hear from churches in South Florida (Apopka and Ft Myers)

provide guidelines about employment of undocumented persons

something should be added to the statement analogous to the Creation Care Resolution about cultivating witness to governing structures.

Mennonite Church USA send statement of belief to the government

care for the mental health of immigrants

develop denominational curriculum on this issue, resources, bibliography

tuition for undocumented students (link to Scholarships A-Z)

keep relationships with persons deported - find out why they are risking so much to come study foreign policy as well as domestic policy

disciple and witness to immigrants, as well as learn from immigrants

advocate for fair wages for undocumented workers

commitment to learn about and invest with the root economic causes of immigration, causing human and environmental damage around the world

ways to give money to agencies working on these issues

Mennonite employers can be influential in creating justice, even though they are in a tight spot

engage the area 25 miles around our churches - meeting the needs geographically around us brings awareness and personal connection

learn about policies and choices made by our government and our own choices that down the road effect and cause migration - the systemic implications of policies is huge -

address that. Address unjust economic structures. Fair trade policies affect people dramatically.

address housing needs

add mission teams at border to greet migrants, give sanctuary

share the load with churches on the border

commitment to prayer in the context of our current legislation - example: Prairie Street, Elkhart, IN, coming together with other churches for an ecumenical prayer service..

lifting up current legislation and hearing immigrant stories from the community

share our own immigration stories with each other.

learn about the economic issues facing immigrants in our own communities

soup kitchens, food banks, thrift stores

host fundraisers for people working on border issues

understand immigrants pastorally and their losses

Open Community Center for undocumented folks (Seattle)

Pastor Vern Rempel (Denver) involved in Connect-Colorado Advocacy work

VA welcomed 2-3 new immigrant churches into the conference

Mountain States welcomed new Hispanic church with primarily undocumented work ecumenically

change the language from us/them to show we are all in this together

so that sense of the European Mennonite Church as central is lessened

i.e. steer away from language such as “joining us”

immigration is “our issue” - change us/them language

language to move immigrants from marginal to interconnected parts of our lives and who we are in this statement

we are all immigrant people

we want to see a “we” that includes our undocumented brothers and sisters in the “we” of Mennonite Church USA.

Include “Christian Churches Together Statement on Immigration” and its components.

Name it as an additional affirmed statement.

acknowledge our own history as immigrants

desire for follow-up, accountability - who will oversee carrying this forward? -

create goals to work at between now and next convention

concern that not much has happened in the church on this issue since last statement -

hope for more action

Other repeated input/feedback:

take the “our commitment” section to a more serious level, so that we support each other when God’s law calls us to conflict with our government

address root causes of immigration

update data and stats

keep the anti-racism link to immigration - name racial profiling - connection to Jim Crow

acknowledgement of those in our congregations who do not support or affirm the

Mennonite Church USA statement on immigration - acknowledge disagreement - those

who do not “see” immigrants (invisible)

include help with how to respond to immigration reform legislation

“weed out political talk” / help needed to handle “politics in the church” / stay separate from politics / we should not get drawn into the politicized reality of our society

define role of church / role of government

connect to Purposeful Plan

how do we view our government?

Q: Is this statement for all immigrant groups or only Hispanics?

omit references to specific presidential administrations

statement needs to separate drug traffickers, terrorists, from people moving due to fear and poverty

statement needs to sound more urgent - Borderlinks trips made a deep impression

disturbed greatly by increased militarization of border

we want to be part of a church that is trying to be on this journey and trying to find its voice on an issue of justice

acknowledge the effects of NAFTA on migration

Include DREAMERS

add positive vision - what do we want to see?

Summary compiled by Tina Schlabach, Aug. 2013, from 30+ pages of delegate session minutes and table group responses

Summary of Delegate Table Comments on Leadership Development

Though some table groups spoke of their congregation through a voice of scarcity, not enough money or people to do anything, there are many who spoke of congregations which are currently doing quite innovative and effective initiatives as well as pointing towards important concepts to consider. Many congregations are providing practice based experiences for young persons to test and develop their leadership gifts and skills. While most of these are informal initiatives as mentoring, worship leading, or teaching Sunday School classes, increasingly congregations are making room for more formalized programs of intentional internships, complete with budget line items. Some of these internships are in partnerships with schools, many of them are totally within the congregation. Voices at some tables mentioned they need to try congregational practice based approach, but did not have anyone to lead the process. Delegates expressed a desire to see young persons allowed to try, test, explore their gifts in a safe a local congregational setting.

Delegates spoke of needing new models of leadership development which are accessible to persons not within reach, for a variety of reasons, of higher education at our schools. There is strong support for the schools developing leaders for the church, even while there are voices offering reservations of our schools being too expensive and liberal. The price of formal education in our schools was something which received many comments along with voices asking for the development of (more) scholarships to provide for members to go to our schools for little or no tuition fees. Training church leaders in a variety of ways, and less formally at many levels was affirmed by the delegates, such as MIP, Journey, PSDE, STEP, IBA, Explore!, Values Based Leadership Program, Gateway and others.

Delegates seek more organic partnerships between congregations, schools, conferences, agencies and denomination. In these partnerships they ask for materials from the denomination, schools and agencies to help in local contexts leadership development through discipleship training and specific leadership issues for a variety of roles in the church.

Innovation ideas proposed worth noting here is the development of a library of "Menno Talks" (like Ted Talks) around certain topics of leadership as well as many other topics of faith and the encouragement of MEA holding a Job's Fair at convention and other times of Mennonite gatherings.

Summary compiled by Terry Shue
August 15, 2013

Summary of Delegate Table Comments on Stewardship

Themes which were repeated:

- Baby Boomers and retired people are concerned about their retirement funds, which impacts their giving.
- Many congregations are dealing with church buildings which need costly repairs
- Some congregations are working on building projects (but there were far fewer comments about new building projects as there were about churches needing repairs.)

- Young people have considerable college debt and have a hard time finding jobs. Some have considerable debt and still don't have a college degree. Comments such as this one sum up many of the comments: "MVS has scaled down a lot – young people scared about volunteering because of debts and lack of money – how do we cultivate a sense of stewardship in younger people?"
- There is agreement that giving for mission is motivating. However, how we give to mission has changed. This comment represents the change: "One small church of about 100 members supports seven churches in Bolivia and an orphanage."
- A number of congregations have a budget surplus. Some are not sure what to do with the funds.
- There were a number of comments about giving of our time – the stewardship of time.
- Several reported 'anti' Conference giving attitudes in their local congregations. Some specific comments:
 - "We don't want to give to the Conference – we want to give to a project."
 - "Conference relationships are difficult for congregation without a lot of communication. How do they decide whether to give priority to Mennonite Church USA versus other organizations?"

The comments below represent comments made by many table groups:

- "Younger generation less 'brand loyal' to Mennonites – they give to causes."
- "Another table group said "Attention needs to be given to whether agencies exist for the church or the church exists for the sake of the denomination."

Below are several comments which are worth noting

- "We need a theology of abundance to replace a perception/fear of scarcity."
- "For the Dreamers fund here youth almost matched adults; they saw how they could contribute. Boomers and Gen Ys responded to teaching. "
- "Not willing to give to an institution that discriminates against me and other LGBTQ members."
- "Younger generations are giving differently – like text \$10.00 to a group like Red Cross. They want to know where their money is going." (Visual representation of where the money goes.)
- "We live in a consumer society where we feel we need a lot to live." (Some comments said we need resources on how to deal with our consumer society.)"
- "With a generous church, money doesn't stand in the way, but time does."
- "_____ Mennonite doesn't have an issue giving to the conference and national agency. Where are the issues?"

"Word to EB:

- Tell us "when we meet budget, the net \$20,000 will go to this project or that"
- We recognize that times are tough
- We know that people are generous
- We will respond to dreams, we are inspired by dreams"

Summary compiled by Marty Lehman, August 2013.