

April 2005, *Equipping*



What is the purpose of the church?

As a theological question this is profoundly important. As a pragmatic question it shapes everything that the church does, whether we consciously answer it or just assume that there is some useful purpose. People outside the church answer it as surely as those who are deeply involved. But if ten people answer the question you are likely to get twelve answers.

In last month's *Equipping* letter I posed a number of questions about leadership. One of the questions was "Do members know and agree on what business the church is in?"

At last year's Assembly in Winkler delegates discussed a purpose statement for the church. Since then a committee of the General Board has worked hard at gathering up the wisdom from that discussion and shaping it into a proposal that will be discussed at the Assembly this summer in Charlotte. The General Board approved the following on March 3 for recommendation to the Assembly:

Mennonite Church Canada Proposed Statement of Identity and Purpose:

*God calls, equips, and sends the church
to engage the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
we are a community of disciples of Jesus,
a part of the Body of Christ,
covenanted together
as congregations,
area conferences,
and a national church.
Gratefully responding to God's initiatives,
and empowered by the Holy Spirit,
we commit our resources and efforts to
calling, equipping, and sending the church
to engage the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

This statement expresses concisely an understanding of what God is doing in the world. It says something about who we are as a church (that's the identity part). Finally it says, in words that echo what God is doing, what we understand to be the purpose of the church.

Does this describe "what business the church is in?" I invite you to test this in your congregation and with your congregational leaders. Pray about your personal and congregational commitment of "resources and efforts to calling, equipping and sending the church to engage the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Discuss it with your Assembly delegates. If you can't send any delegates, send me a note with your response. Let's discover where this understanding leads us.

Sincerely



Dan Nighswander