

July/August 2003, *Equipping*



Delegates to the recent Mennonite Church BC annual meeting were challenged to consider fundamental questions about identity and ministry. Through a creative visual presentation of the conference's history and some very pointed questions, moderator Doug Epp asked the churches, "Can we dream again? ... Can we imagine new possibilities? ... Can we ask, 'What if...?'"

These are important questions for all area conferences, all congregations, and of course the national church to ask. It's exactly the kind of question that we have identified for our assembly this summer: "What if...?" In light of the adjustments that we have made to our programs it is especially important to think new thoughts.

I well remember the Sunday morning, about eight years ago, when I was confronted by a family of visitors to the worship service at Waterloo North where I was then the pastor. My sermon was based on a gospel lesson that I approached by asking a series of "wondering questions." I asked the congregation to imagine alternative choices that the characters in the biblical passage might have considered, and to imagine what was going on behind the story as it is recorded by the gospel writer. My questioners, fearing unorthodox interpretation, wanted to convince me that imagination is "the greatest" threat to true Christian faith. (They told me their calling was to visit a different church each week to root out heresy.)

In new circumstances, which in our generation seem to appear almost weekly, the gospel speaks in ways it did not speak in the past. God is doing "a new thing," as Isaiah reminds us, and if we are to keep up with what God is doing we must also do new things. As God's thoughts are ahead of ours, God's "imagination" is always ahead of us.

Even the most creative of church leaders sometimes tire of dreaming God's dreams and imagining the thoughts of God's mind. And there are always folks who would prefer to stick with old ways of being faithful, even if they are no longer relevant to what God is doing in new circumstances. I pray that you may have courage to walk with God into the future. And I solicit your prayers for me, for the rest of the staff and the elected leaders, and for the delegates (and host volunteers) who will meet shortly in St. Catharines to imagine and to discern what God is doing and wants to be doing in and through us.

—Dan Nighswander, *General Secretary*