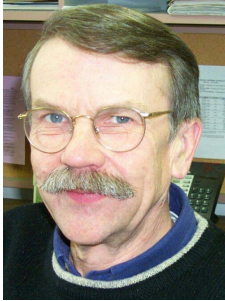


November 2003, *Equipping*



Mennonites and D.N.A.

“It’s in our D.N.A. as Anabaptists!” he said with impressive conviction, referring to one of the many ideals we hold up for ourselves as Mennonites. What stuck in my mind about this comment was the seemingly implicit assumption that among Mennonites there are some things that are inherent, carried from one generation to another in our “religious genetic code.”

Is there a “Mennonite D.N.A?”

As a clever metaphor it did get my attention, but the linking of genetics-language and religion caused me to pause and reflect on our sometimes hidden assumptions about who we are and why.

Consider some of our central core values. First, we are a believer’s church. No one inherits his or her faith, like we inherit the colour of eyes or like we grow up automatically speaking low-German or Spanish. We are believers because we choose to follow Jesus.

We treasure the experience of community. We strive to have unity in the midst of diversity. We exercise patience with one another when we disagree. Our practice of governance strives to achieve consensus. And we tend to get quite testy if it feels like governance is coming “from above.”

However, none of these experiences of community are possible without the willingness to submit to one another, in forbearance and love. Only a very intentional yielding to Christ (German readers may know it as *Gelassenheit*) and to his body, the church, makes this a lasting experience among us.

As a missional church, the call to witness requires of us the willingness to relinquish self-protecting reservations and to share our faith and life with our friends and neighbours, near and far. Missional faithfulness requires regular intentional, ongoing renewal.

There is no Mennonite D.N.A. Our faith is entirely based on what God continues to do in us, among us and in the world. Attentiveness, reverence and humility are appropriate faith responses that will shape Mennonite Church Canada, with its breadth of diversity and challenges, as a growing community of healing and hope in our broken world.

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