

May 2004, *Equipping*



About the time you read this you will also receive the registration material for Assembly 2004. Soon you will receive the Report Books, and the Canadian Mennonite and www.mennonitechurch.ca/events/winkler will carry further details as they become available. We're looking forward to this event and hope you are too.

This year we are trying several new ways to engage in conversation with each other. Included in the registration material is a letter about submitting resolutions in advance of the assembly. We hope this will help us to plan efficient use of delegate time.

A second innovation is a response to the frequent complaint that there is not enough time for delegate discussion of important matters. We have planned to meet in small groups around tables for an hour and a half each morning—Thursday, Friday and Saturday. In this setting we will talk together about the “big issues” facing the church.

MC USA has used this format for its meetings, and Kurt Horst, conference minister for Allegheny Conference recently wrote this explanation of why they do so:

Open microphones in large group settings create frustration because of the limited number of persons who are able to give input into the discussion. This increases the probability that only the most extroverted, single issue focused or anxious persons will be heard from. At the same time much good conversation often takes place in hallways and around dining tables but these conversations have no formal way of becoming part of the larger decision making process. Additionally, some of the influences exerted by these “informal” discussions lack the accountability of going through the larger public filter where the accuracy of reports and assumptions can be tested.

The use of table groups for large group decision making creates a setting that allows the process to:

1. hear the “less brave” wisdom
2. avoid being dominated by the “anxious” voices
3. gain the wisdom and give accountability to the discussions of the hallways and dining halls
4. recognize and use the wisdom, insight and knowledge of the greatest number of persons

The Report Book will provide process instructions and background material to help you prepare for each of the five discussions that we have planned. For now I just want to give you a preview of the topics and expected outcomes.

1. Mission Statement and Priorities (75 minutes) “We will work toward the goal of having delegates approve a revised mission statement and general denominational priorities.” A proposed new mission statement and priorities drafted by the General Board will offer a starting place for

discussion, as well as the current mission statement as it stands. All of this material will appear in the Report Book.

2. Leading the church in discerning theology, ethics, polity and practice (40 minutes) “The goal of this discussion is that delegates will give direction to the General Board that will assist in shaping a recommendation to be acted upon at the next assembly and implemented thereafter.” There is no recommendation on the table, but delegates are invited to participate in the early stages of shaping “a successor to the Council on Faith and Life.”

3. Homosexuality (40 minutes) “The goal of this discussion is to listen to what is happening in our churches, affirm the churches understanding, and continuing to dialogue with and minister where there is disagreement.” There will be no resolutions and no microphone time on this topic, just guided conversation in table groups to facilitate listening and learning from each other in community.

4. Joining Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) (45 minutes) “The goal of this discussion is to act on the recommendation to join that was postponed last year.” The Report Book will include information needed to take this action.

5. Frequency of assemblies (45 minutes) “The goal of this conversation is that delegates will give direction to the General Board which will assist in shaping a recommendation to be acted upon at the next assembly and implemented thereafter.” At Assembly 2002 in Saskatoon the delegates passed a resolution to talk about the frequency of assemblies. The report book will include important facts and considerations to help us consider this question.

It is our hope that congregations will help their delegates to think through these issues by discussing them in advance, using the resources on the Report Book. We invite all members of the church to pray for wise discernment and careful listening to God’s voice in each of these discussions.

In addition to the table group conversations we will be hearing reports, worshipping, taking various actions and enjoying the fellowship of God’s people and the hospitality of our hosts from Winkler. We expect to be informed about, inspired by and involved in the work that God is doing in and through Mennonite Church Canada.

We invite you to come. We’re sure there will be “Enough for all.”

Sincerely,



Dan Nighswander