



Formation

600 Shaftesbury Blvd
Winnipeg MB R3P 0M4
Toll Free 1-866-888-6785
T: 204-888-6781
F: 204-831-5675
E: office@mennonitechurch.ca
W: www.mennonitechurch.ca

February 2007, *Equipping*

Study and Reflection Guide: MC Canada Statement of Identity and Purpose

Dear friends and partners in leading and shaping the church:

I'm writing to share good news!

In particular, I want to share with you a tool to assist in ministry and teaching in your congregation.

In July 2005, delegates to the Mennonite Church Canada annual Assembly in Charlotte, North Carolina, approved a *Statement of Identity and Purpose* for Mennonite Church Canada as a complement to our *Vision: Healing and Hope* statement.

Since July 2005, and especially during the recent God's People Now! tour of Mennonite Church Canada congregations, many people have requested study material to help engage this statement and reflect on its role in shaping the ministry of the local church.

In this Equipping package you will find a three-session study guide to help you reflect on the *Statement of Identity and Purpose*, and to provide guidance as you consider who you are as part of Christ's body as a congregation, and as a member of a nation-wide church.

There is more good news.

In forty of Mennonite Church Canada's 225 congregations, English is **not** the first language of worship. If you belong to one or more of these 13 language groups, you will find helpful the enclosed translations of the *Statement of Identity and Purpose* as well as Mennonite Church Canada's *Healing and Hope* Vision Statement. A complete list of the languages available can be downloaded to your computer from www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/48. Even if your primary worship language is English, you may wish to obtain these statements in another language to assist you in ministry to smaller groups of people in your congregation. Many of these statements are also available as audio files.

May God bless you as we grow together as members of one body in Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,
Dave Bergen
Executive Secretary, Christian Formation

Biblical Foundations: Statement of Identity and Purpose Background

Mennonite Church Canada's new *Statement of Identity and Purpose* takes two steps beyond the Vision: Healing and Hope statement – a statement many congregations have used extensively and have grown fond of in the intervening ten years.

Our *Statement of Identity and Purpose*:

- 1) describes a particular organization (Mennonite Church Canada);
- 2) provides additional guidance for the purpose and function of the organization. For example, we “Grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace” by nourishing the “call,” working at “equipping,” and responding to the “sent” nature of our calling.

The *Statement of Identity and Purpose* indicates that the church understands its own vocation in light of God's initiatives and purpose. This explains the “echo” design of the statement in the first two and last two lines. The first two lines represent a call, while the last two lines represent our response to that call:

- 1) *God calls, equips, and sends the church to engage the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*
- 2) *We commit our resources and efforts to calling, equipping, and sending the church to engage the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

These first and last lines of the statement are grounded in Scripture:

- 1) **God initiates and the church responds:** God's initiative to reconcile the world is often referred to as “grace.” Two good examples (among many) in Scripture that the people of God are mandated to align with and incarnate God's initiative are Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. God blesses the world and calls and forms a people to be a blessing. God is at work “reconciling the world” and the church is to become an “ambassador” of God's reconciliation.
- 2) The church **has been called** (by God) to its **calling**. The inseparable nature of the “call” of the “church” from its “calling” is more clearly seen in the Greek language (see Ephesians 3:21 - 4:6). The three words (call, calling, church) are grounded in the same root word (*klesis*). This root is used 5 times in this short passage in Ephesians. Many translations miss this rich inter-play of words by not maintaining the same root in the translation: The “church” (*ekklesia*) has been “called” (*kaleo*) to its “calling” (*klesis*). In other words, the “calling” of the church is inseparable from the “essence or nature” of the church, and the source of the “call” is God.
- 3) God also “**equips**” the church with the spiritual gifts necessary for its calling – its vocation (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16; Romans 12:1-8). The church, in turn, has the ministry to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12). Thus, part of the church's “calling” is to equip itself for its “calling.”
- 4) Jesus **sends** the church as God sent Jesus. Jesus said to the gathered disciples: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). The church as a body is characterized by its “sent” nature, and in turn prepares itself for this mandate. The Greek word used for “sent” is *apostello* which connects the church to the “apostolic” vocation of Jesus. This, again, is more than a description of what we do as a church; it is a reference to who we are as a church. Our function and our identity are congruent with each other.

- 5) The calling, equipping, and sending initiated by God, and echoed in the church, are for the purpose of **“engaging the world.”** Here again we draw on rich biblical insights. In Scripture, the word “world” is at times used as a positive term to describe the good thing that God has created. God “loves the world” and does not desire its destruction (John 3:16). But at times this word is used negatively to describe those forces that resist and oppose the will of God from becoming reality (John 1:10; 7:7). The word “engage” is meant to reflect these two perspectives. Sometimes we “engage” the world by learning from its wisdom and to incorporate it into our own being, because if it is truly “wisdom” it also is from God. At times we “engage” the world by confronting its idolatry and sin. Both the wisdom of God and the sin of the world are found within and beyond the church. “Engaging” God’s wisdom and the world’s sin is the ongoing discerning task of God’s people “sent” into the world (Luke 12:54-57; Matthew 18:15-20). This is its apostolic mission – to align with God’s intentions to redeem the world and to witness to what it was meant to be.
- 6) Our efforts to “engage” the world are not random, but are based on the **gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ.** Jesus announces that the “gospel” is that the *“time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:14-15). From a Christian perspective, the message of the arrival and coming of the kingdom cannot be separated from the messenger (Jesus). Jesus says that this good news needs to be trusted and believed, namely that despite appearances to the contrary, the kingdom of God is indeed at hand. The presence of this kingdom calls for “repentance” (alignment). Jesus’ teaching about and living out the presence of the kingdom of God becomes our guide and our agenda. The gospel “of” Jesus and Jesus “as the gospel” are both integral to our witness as a church.

Ephesians summarizes these intentions of God in a marvelous way:

... to unite all things in him [Christ], all things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). This task of re-uniting what the “world” has artificially separated is another way of saying that God’s kingdom is becoming reality. It is already here. The purpose, identity, and function of the church is to live according to and proclaim this reality: *...that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known...*” (Eph. 3:10).

In his commentary of Ephesians, Tom Yoder Neufeld insightfully summarizes this “already” but “not yet” identity and task of the church. He states that:

“Ministry has to do with becoming what we already are.”¹

God initiates, the church is called to respond. This is our identity and our purpose.

*Commentary prepared by
Robert J. Suderman*

¹ Yoder Neufeld, Tom, *Ephesians: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale: Herald Press), 2002. p.184

Study and Reflection Guide: MC Canada Statement of Identity and Purpose

This statement, amended and adopted by Mennonite Church Canada delegates at the 2005 Assembly in Charlotte, North Carolina, complements the **Vision: Healing and Hope** statement. It describes Mennonite Church Canada and provides guidance for the purpose and function of our nation-wide church. This three-session study guide is intended to help congregations reflect on and own this statement so that it informs their identity and purpose as part of the body of Christ.

Session 1: God Calls the Church

1. In this statement of identity and purpose, the first two lines are echoed by the last two lines. What is the effect of this echoing structure on the impact of the statement?

2. How is the church's calling similar to what God does? _____

Read and reflect on Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. What echoes of these verses do you find in the purpose and identity statement? _____

3. In the Greek language, the words call, called and calling are grounded in the root word "klesis". If you were reading the original Greek text, how many times would you find this root word in Ephesians 3:21-4:6? (5) _____

4. "Klesis" also shows up in the Greek word for church, "ekklesia". What do you think this implies about the identity and purpose of the church? _____

5. Sing a song about God calling us as a church or as individuals. *Sing the Journey* 2, 3, 6, 95, and/or Hymnal Worship Book 397, 163, 491, 495

6. Share some stories about how you have heard and responded to God's call in your life.

7. Read and reflect on Ephesians 4:12. Draw a picture of it, if you like, or discuss the images that come to mind as you ponder those words for a few minutes.

Session 2: God Equips the Church

Divide your study group into three sub-groups. In each sub-group, study one of the following passages, written to equip the early church: Ephesians 4: 1-16, 1Corinthians 12, Romans 12:1-8. Reconvene as a large group to share what you have learned, as a way of equipping each other. Then, consider the following questions:

1. What spiritual gifts that God gives the church, to equip it for the work of ministry, are listed in these passages?

2. How were people in these early churches encouraged to equip each other for ministry?

3. Read Exodus 3 and 4 and reflect on the calling and equipping of Moses. What aspects of God's calling, Moses' responses, and God's equipping are expressed in the early churches to which Paul wrote?

4. How is God equipping Mennonite Church Canada at the personal, congregational, area church², and national church levels?

5. How are we involved in equipping others to participate in God's ministry in our world?

6. Share some stories of how you and your congregation have been encouraged and equipped to participate in God's ministry in our world.

7. Create a litany of encouragement for someone in your congregation who is rarely thanked for the ministry they provide. Plan to use it in an upcoming service.

² In the past, we have thought in terms of "Area Conferences" rather than "Area Churches". Mennonite Church Canada has five Area Churches: Mennonite Church British Columbia, Mennonite Church Alberta, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, Mennonite Church Manitoba, and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. Using the term "Area Church" more intentionally helps us think in terms of ministry at many levels: Congregation (Local Church); Regional (Area Church); National (Canadian Church).

Session 3: Jesus Sends the Church as God sent Jesus

A Disciple is one who learns from and follows the teachings of another. Jesus told his disciples long ago, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Being sent on a mission by Jesus became their purpose in life, so the disciples became “apostles”. The Greek word “apostles” means “sent ones.” Since the founding of the church, followers of Jesus have this one purpose – being sent on a mission. We are part of an apostolic church. Being sent on a mission by Jesus is not just what we do. It is who we are, and why we are a church.

1. Sing Bryan Moyer Suderman’s “Sending Song”³, or another of the sending songs in your hymnal (HWB 415, 359, 389, SJ 73 – 78). Bryan’s song compares the blessing of God to the sun’s warming and illuminating effects. What other symbols from nature help us communicate this vision of ‘being sent’?

2. Being sent is a blessing that encourages and equips us. Make a list or a poster that compares other words of blessing with words of discouragement that keep us from serving as Jesus sends us to do.

3. Christians are sent by Jesus with a specific mission; to engage the world with the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ. This part of the statement is inspired by passages like John 3:16-17, John 1:10, 7:7, Luke 12:54-57, Matthew 18:15-20, Mark 1:14-15, Ephesians 1:10, 3:10. Read and ponder these texts silently. Take some time to pray. Then reflect thankfully on how we already engage the world with this reconciling Gospel, and share how else you believe God is calling and sending us to participate in this reconciling mission of God.

4. The middle part of this statement describes Mennonite Church Canada as part of the body of Christ. Draw four, or more, concentric circles. Place your congregation in the smallest circle, your area church in the next, the national church in the third, and the body of Christ as the final and largest circle. What does it mean for the church at all these levels to be “in Christ”? How do you see and experience Christ in each of these concentric circles?

³ God’s Love is for everybody, Bryan Moyer Suderman ©2002 Lyrics: Sending Song
“As you go out from here, may the Lord go with you, the face of God shine on you ev’ry day.
We are sent by God wherever we are living: salt and light as people of the Way.” *Words and music by Bryan Moyer Suderman. Copyright © smallTall Music. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Mennonite Church Canada is a denominational member of SmallTall Music. This membership does not extend to congregational or individual use. Please see www.smalltallmusic.com for more information.*