

MCEC's 22nd Annual Church Gathering Minutes Extending the Peace of Jesus Christ: Growing Congregations

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, Kitchener, Ontario

April 24 and 25, 2009

Friday, April 24, 2009

- Gathering music was provided by the Rockway Mennonite Collegiate choir directed by Ann Schultz.
- Leroy Shantz, Moderator for MCEC, welcomed everyone to the 22nd Annual Gathering and briefly described the schedule for the Gathering. Joining him on the platform was Myrna Miller Dyck, Assistant Moderator for MCEC.
- Margaret Burnett, chair of the hosting committee, provided hosting details of the conference.
- Hosting Cluster included the following churches: Blenheim Ecumenical House Church, Erb Street Mennonite Church, First Hmong Mennonite Church, First Mennonite Church, Grace Lao Mennonite Church, KW House Churches, Pioneer Park Christian Fellowship, River of Life Fellowship, Rockway Mennonite Church, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, The Gathering Church, Waterloo North Mennonite Church, and Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church.
- Water bottles were announced to be for sale by the youth to support them in their travel to Mennonite World Conference this summer.
- Leroy introduced the listening committee for the evening: Nancy Mann, Derek Suderman, and Ann Sargent, and introduced Sam Steiner as the parliamentarian for the proceedings.
- Dennis Wikerd, Vice Principal of Rockway, welcomed the Gathering to the Rockway campus and wished us God's blessing in our deliberations and worship.
- Leroy introduced MCEC's Partners in Ministry and special guests through a PowerPoint presentation.
- Myrna Miller Dyck led in an opening prayer.

Worship

- Led by Margaret Nally (KW House Church) and Kevin Peters Unrau (Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church)
- *Blest Are They - Sing The Journey #94*
- *Lord, Listen to Your Children - Hymnal A Worship Book #353*

Meditation: Growing Congregations Through the Congregational Life Cycle: FAITH

- Jeff Steckley, MCEC Congregational Ministries Minister, introduced the focus of the congregational life cycle explaining that some congregations have been working with this material by attending workshops and holding conversations that pose creative and challenging questions. Through this focus we explore what it means to be growing congregations using the life cycle materials and we discover that we as congregations are at different places on the life cycle journey. Through these discussions we are provided with opportunities to share and discover how God is calling us as congregations.
- Jeff introduced Betty Pries of Associates Resourcing the Church as the speaker and facilitator for the sessions during both days of the Gathering.

- Betty Pries described the pattern of church life as a congregational cycle model consisting of seven stages: Conception, Birth, Creative Formation, Performing Stability, Protective Maintenance, Crisis and Confusion, and Closure. She also described as part of this model a loop back to the Renewal stage. This model can be used as a way of opening up to God's leading and paying attention to where God is calling us.
- The phase of Conception includes the following characteristics: a clear sense of purpose; God is real, felt and present; vision forms around questions of value, identity and purpose; people volunteer readily; new people attracted to innovation and vision volunteer readily; and relationships are close.
- Creative Formation questions: Who are we? Who is our neighbour? Why are we here? What shall we do?
- During the Performing Stability phase the guiding question is: How do we respond creatively and missionally? In this phase policies and procedures are developed, energy and focus for the new begins to level off, energy and focus goes into improving what we know works. Congregations can stay in this phase for some time as long as answers to Creative formation questions remain the same. It is our responsibility to pay attention to the moving of the Spirit and the four Creative Formation questions, and if changes occur, we need to ask those questions again.
- In response, Jan Steckley, Hillcrest Mennonite Church, and Jameson Sung, Toronto Chinese Mennonite Church, described the experiences of their churches in response to the creative formation stage.

■ **Table Group Conversations**

Members at each table were invited to hold table discussions using the following questions as a guide.

1. What kernel of wisdom do you take with you from what was just shared?
2. How have you (or have you not) experienced the stages just presented in your congregation?
3. How have you sought to discern God's leading during these stages in your congregation?
4. What questions are raised for you by the presentation?

Responses

- Dan Bender, Floradale. Not to be afraid to stay in a stage if there is comfort or no urgency to move, pastoral transitions push us into different stages, need and call to prayer during these transitions, question: Where are the congregations within MCEC as a whole?
 - Terry Lesser, Listowel. Discerning God's will takes discipline and time
 - Jane Kuepfer, Wellesley. What is going on in each church is quite normal - living with contrast of old and new and facing the realities of conflict, requires concentrated focused listening
 - Amanda Mustard, Poole. Waiting and acting, and not panicking, stages influenced by generation changes in the congregation, like intentionality of knowing what stage the congregation is at
 - Brandon Leis, Stirling Avenue. Newer church vs. older church differences, accepting realities, stability and recreation achieved even within a pessimistic outlook, pay attention to those questions even if things are going well, inviting an outside person in may reflect information mirrored back that you would not have otherwise
- *Lord, Listen to Your Children - Hymnal A Worship Book #353*
 - Litany - based on Isaiah 43 and Psalm 100 printed in the Annual Church Gathering Workbook
 - Prayer by Margaret Nally
 - Offering
 - *Great is Thy Faithfulness - Hymnal A Worship Book #327*

Executive Council Ministry Items

- Leroy described the two printed sources of information for this Gathering - the Report Book and the Workbook, providing an opportunity to take information back to home congregations. He also noted that a number of MCEC spiritual directors are meeting to pray and support us through the course of the weekend, and that a prayer room is available to participate in prayer.

1. Minutes of MCEC 21st Annual Gathering

Helen Eby, Executive Council Secretary, reviewed highlights from the 2008 Annual Church Gathering, and made the following motion:

Motion: That we accept the minutes of the 21st annual meeting of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, held April 25 & 26, 2008.

Second: Ellis Brown, Hillcrest Mennonite Church

Motion carried.

2. Affirmation of Executive Council Highlights for 2008-2009

Leroy highlighted the motions from the Executive Council from May 2008 – April 2009.

Motion: David Wenger, River of Life Fellowship, moved that we approve all actions taken by the MCEC Executive Council for the year May 2008 to April 2009.

Second: John Enns, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church

Motion carried.

3. Leroy drew attention to the MCEC Slate 2009-2010 printed in the Workbook, noting that formal action would take place on Saturday. There is still opportunity to make additions to the slate, and nominations can be made, with a seconder, to Carol Penner, Chair of Gift Discernment Committee. Leroy noted that Marvin Friesen has agreed to serve on Executive Council.

4. Reviewing MCEC in Ministry: The Financial Story 2008-2009

Tim Wagler, Chair of Administrative and Financial Services Council, and Ester Neufeldt, MCEC Operations Minister, reviewed the Financial Story for 2008-2009 through a PowerPoint presentation. They reported an operating surplus of the year of \$2,793 and thanked all for their generosity especially during the world's economic downturn. Ester drew attention to some of the programs made possible through generous donations. She highlighted changes in the restricted funds including a new temporary one to support youth to Paraguay, and the establishment of a Theological Leadership Development Fund which now has a broader use.

Motion: Tim Wagler moved that we accept the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2009 as printed.

Second: Dave Bechtel, Preston Mennonite Church

Motion carried.

Motion: Tim Wagler moved that we appoint PricewaterhouseCoopers as auditors for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2010.

Second: Craig Frere, Living Water Community Christian Fellowship

Motion carried.

5. Ministry Partner Update: Mennonite Church Canada in Ministry

Karen Martens Zimmerley, MC Canada Denominational Minister and Director for Leadership Development, joined by Norm Dyck, MC Canada Director of Congregational Partnerships, provided a glimpse of MC Canada's work by showing slides and speaking. They recognized people who serve on MC Canada's committees and provided suggestions to express a peace stand with the federal government, directing our attention to a conscience Canada website for a peace tax form when filing income tax returns.

Karen noted that financial giving was good last year until the last quarter causing MC Canada to register a deficit. She thanked congregations for their giving noting that they consider themselves blessed to be partners with MCEC as well as the other area churches.

MC Canada maintains information of the Global Anabaptist community by hearing about it through the itinerant visits of MC Canada Witness workers from countries such as China and South Africa, noting that Dan and Yvonne Nighswander, MC Canada Witness, were present this evening. MC Canada provides resources in different languages to newer groups coming to MC Canada.

Two new resources will be introduced this summer; one for pastors to use in ministry with lesbian/gay/transsexual people, and the other for pastoral and lay leaders, calling and growing leaders in congregations.

Karen and Norm invited MCEC people to MC Canada Assembly in Saskatoon from June 4 to 7, 2009, on "Being Engaging Congregations." They also described MC Canada learning tours to Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay this summer and a First Nations Learning Tour in Northern Saskatchewan following the Assembly in June.

Closing Worship

■ Milestones Litany

For everything there is a season, remembering people who have died this past year, those baptized, and births. People from each table brought three stones to commemorate these three milestone events.

■ Congregational Milestone Recognitions

David Martin introduced a number of anniversaries and important milestones:

- Maple View Mennonite Church — 150 years
- Leamington United Mennonite Church — 80 years
- Waters Mennonite Church — 50 years
- Ottawa Mennonite Church — 50 years
- Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church — release of a written history of their congregation
- Closing of Warden Woods Mennonite Church — effective June 30 of this year
We celebrate the ministry they have accomplished over the past 72 years (with Danforth and as independent church).

- Margaret Nally and Kevin Peters Unrau led in closing prayer.
- Sending Hymn - *Extending the Peace of Christ* (printed in Workbook)

Saturday, April 25, 2009

Welcome and Opening

- The morning session began with gathering music.
- Leroy Shantz, Moderator, welcomed everybody and introduced the listening committee of Nancy Mann, Derek Suderman, and Ann Sargent, and the parliamentarian, Sam Steiner. Leroy directed participants to the Workbook which contains information notes for the day.
- Margaret Burnett, on behalf of the Host Cluster, explained safety and housekeeping details. She also encouraged the purchase of water bottles being sold to support the trip to Mennonite World Conference this summer by MCEC youth.
- Leroy Shantz reminded delegates that the Ministry Partner Report Book is part of the information package for updates on ministry partners and to take opportunity to visit their display tables.
- Leroy introduced MCEC Executive Council, other Council and committee members, and MCEC staff.
- Myrna Miller Dyck, Assistant Moderator, opened in prayer.

Worship

- Led by Margaret Nally, KW House Church, and Kevin Peters Unrau, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.
- *From the Depths – Hymnal A Worship Book #136*
- Prayer by Margaret Nally and Kevin Peters Unrau
- *Lord, Listen to Your Children – Hymnal A Worship Book # 353*

Meditation: Growing Congregations Through the Congregational Life Cycle: LAMENT

- Betty Pries reviewed Friday evening's session of typical life cycle of a congregation and continued to outline levels of five, six, and seven of the Life Cycle process.
 - She described level five, Protective Maintenance, as forgetting to ask the Creative Formation questions. A congregation can slip gradually into this stage or it can result from a cataclysmic shift. During this stage a congregation longs for the ways things used to be, rather than listening for God's call. There is a loss of congregational self esteem. Impact of this stage includes a need to write down the mission, values, vision; structure drives the mission; energy slips; denial that things have changed; reluctance to go back into Performing Stability stage.
 - Questions asked during this stage include: how do we recapture what we had?; how do we maintain our numbers?; how do we beef up our programs?; how do we get people to volunteer? If not done, it leads to a painful, anxious time. "We are no longer who we thought we were."
 - Crisis and Confusion is the sixth stage. It is not possible to climb back up to the Performing Stability stage and the harder the congregation tries, the easier it is to slip into this stage. The congregation needs to go back to the Creative Formation stage.
 - Characteristics of this stage include: We know it is not working - we blame one another, pastor, whatever generation is leaving, or surrounding culture; energy is unfocused "We'll try anything to make this place live again." People admit they are in crisis but put all their hopes in the pastor and/or new people; have shifted from mission to maintenance to survival; renewal journey is hard work, it takes longer, it takes time and resources, and is often conflicted.
 - Church faces a critical decision which is the seventh stage. Closure can be welcomed as a holy death. Closure can also be painful, wrought with conflict, misery, and blame.
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Story Telling

Betty Pries interviewed Phyllis Kramer, Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, and Johanna Wall, Warden Woods Mennonite Church, to exemplify the seventh stage.

- Johanna Wall, Warden Woods Mennonite Church, sensitively, openly, and with integrity described the experience of Warden Woods and the journey they went through during the recent Lenten season - a journey of walking toward closure and the opportunities and challenges they faced during that journey. She described sensing God's presence and the resulting strengthening of their faith as this congregation moved from caution to clarity in their decision to close.
- Phyllis Kramer, Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, described the challenges of this congregation as a challenge of numbers (attendance and finances). This was overlapped by opportunity and questions of viability as a congregation, faithfulness to God, and the central meaning for their congregation. For now, they have made decision that their congregation is still alive but they know there is work ahead.
- Table Group Conversations
Members at each table were invited to hold table discussions using the following questions as a guide.
 1. What kernel of wisdom do you take with you from what was just shared?
 2. How have you (or have you not) experienced the stages just presented in your congregation?
 3. How have you sought to discern God's leading during these stages in your congregation?
 4. What questions are raised for you by the presentation?

Responses

- Linda Brnjas, Bethel. Reported from her group that a congregation cannot climb back up the hill, coming to agreement is difficult as to where the church is, do we take our congregations for granted and assume renewal will come, need to be intentional, looking for new vision is exciting and painful
- Sandy Shantz, St. Jacobs. Reported that her group appreciated the breakdown of detail, recognize transparency and honesty is essential, cannot climb back up, have to do the hard work and framework is helpful, realize we are not alone, structure driving the vision vs. the vision driving the structure, like the term of vampire evangelism - use of new members, how to continue to be a community church
- Charleen Jongejan Harder, Valleyview. Taking the time to listen, not going too fast, and not too slow - calm in the midst of sorrow, appreciated the words of Warden Woods being honest but kind, struck by not being able to climb back up the hill, enormity of the task
- Bruce Wiebe, North Leamington. Noted the significance of a congregation that is both visionary and reflective, noted the hard work of moving through the process, wonder how to get people to invest that type of energy into this process, there are many people already disengaged from the congregation - how to reengage them, is it not always clear as to what stage we are in - can you move back and forth before solidly landing in one stage, acknowledge importance of listening and hearing
- Betty Pries commented that different people will experience themselves in different stages - congregations do not move from one stage to another all in one step
- Leon Kehl, Floradale. Appreciated Warden Woods story, feeling God's presence, tempted to look at the good old days - superficial, critical to keep the purpose of the church at the centre, why are some churches thriving - what to do to achieve that, what happens when you have tried renewal, but backslide - what can be done, what kind of leaders does a church need during these stages
- Tim Reimer, Danforth. Noted that this cycle requires a sense of determinism, a congregation cannot climb back up. He noted there is only one place where there is a fork in the road on one of the diagrams - sense of fatalism - but there are several forks in a subsequent diagram

- Betty explained that a healthy congregation will constantly be paying attention to the Spirit to re-engage the questions so that they are actively listening to God's Spirit.

- *Lord, Listen to Your Children – Hymnal A Worship Book #353*
- Litany and Prayer
- *Longing for Light - Sing The Journey #54*

■ Executive Council Business

Leroy Shantz thanked Betty Pries for her leadership.

Leroy then introduced two issues presented for discussion now and approval later today.

1. Introduction of Recommended Changes to MCEC Funds: MCEC Mission Capital Fund

Leroy introduced proposed changes to the MCEC Mission Capital Fund which have been reviewed by the Mission Council, the Administrative & Financial Services Council, and the Executive Council. David Martin clarified that this fund was established in 1991 to assist new congregations with their building needs. This fund is recommended to be expanded to better support new and emerging congregations to receive assistance with rentals or leasing.

Leroy requested questions of clarification which follow:

- Ellie Huebner, Shantz. Requested clarification of what is new and questioned if special consideration for ethnic churches who may have other needs. David clarified the details of the existing policy definitions and identified that if approval is given to this recommendation, Executive Council will need to review the policy but that the intent for the fund will be the same.
- Ellie also requested clarification in the case of Agape Mennonite Fellowship which is no longer receiving funds - when is it new and when is it not. David clarified that funding for Agape was for ongoing ministry - not related specifically to facility accommodations - this Mission Capital is directly focused on facility, not on operating funds.
- Ellen Shenk, Ottawa. Wondered if the word "new" is a problem.
- Campbell Nesbitt, Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp. Wondered if a camp project would be included in this fund or if church congregation is more narrowly defined. David affirmed that this fund is directed to congregations.
- David Williams, Zion Mennonite Fellowship. Commented that perhaps as a deficit budget is being proposed, that the use of this Fund may be increased and requested how this Fund would be maintained. David Martin responded that this Fund has about 1.3 million dollars in it from the early 90s - it is a Restricted Fund and cannot be drawn from for covering deficits. Leroy noted that some congregations pay back into the Fund, the policy describes both loans and grants.

1. Introduction to Transfer of Properties: Welcome Inn Property Ownership Transfer

The Executive Council brought for decision a proposal to transfer property owned by MCEC to the Welcome Inn Church. This proposal was also reviewed by the Administrative & Financial Services Council prior to coming to Executive Council for action. David Martin provided information leading up to this recommendation including that there is a liability for MCEC to own too many properties, and that in 1999 MCEC had made a decision to divest itself of properties. Only one divestment has occurred to date - Rockway Mennonite Collegiate. Various options have been examined related to other properties, and legal advice is that property needs to be transferred to the body most closely related to MCEC or its ministry. Conversations are occurring regarding Warden Woods Community Centre, Maison de l'Amitié, and Welcome Inn Community Centre. Welcome Inn Mennonite Church has agreed to accept ownership of the property. Discussions regarding the other two organizations are not yet complete.

1. The following questions of clarification were raised:

- Ruth Martin, Hillcrest. Requested clarification of why ownership is transferred to the church rather than the community centre that uses the facility. David stated this is upon legal advice because community centres function under a different charter than MCEC.
- David Wenger, River of Life. Asked what the benefit is to the congregation for the ownership to go back to MCEC if not successful. David stated that the precedent had been set with the Rockway transfer and that the school, or in this case the church, would be prevented from giving it to another entity. Marvin Friesen of Welcome Inn Church agreed because of the legal implications.
- Peter Huebert, St. Catherines UM asked what would happen if they wished to build bigger. David responded that it is their property and they could do that.

■ **Announcements Before Break**

Margaret Burnett gave break instructions.

David Martin announced tickets for sale for the Lebold Fund Raising Banquet on June 11, and two youth announced fund raising initiatives to support youth to World Conference (water bottles and grocery cards).

■ **Ministry Updates from Council**

- **Executive Council** – David Martin, Executive Minister, reflected that God is doing amazing work in MCEC noting that when we came together 21 years ago we would not have anticipated worship occurring in 13 different languages. He stated that this is not of our own doing, but it is something for us to celebrate that Anabaptist theology is striking a chord with others. David also noted that this diversity can also be a challenge. As churches we need to reach out and make a place in our community. Executive Council faces the challenge of providing leadership in prioritizing our work - we are doing more ministry than what we can sustain. He announced that Executive Council, Council Chairs, and Leadership Team will hold a retreat in May to assess priorities and to work within them, and invited prayers for this event, as well as prayers for our congregations. David also expressed a concern for the health of our congregations in the world today, needing to be increasingly intentional about who we are and to allow shaping to be the church of tomorrow. He questioned where MCEC is on the congregational life cycle and suggested that God is calling us as a community of congregations to work on renewal and revisioning.
- **Administrative & Financial Services Council** – Ester Neufeldt, Operations Minister, presented the Spending Plan by means of a PowerPoint presentation. Leadership Team members took part in describing the Spending Plan for 2009-2010 according to their ministry areas. Ester outlined that the process for arriving at this Plan included giving each congregation an opportunity to pledge support for this next year. The uncertainty of the economy has influenced this Plan, but we are not making dramatic cuts. The Council will review and monitor revenues and expenditures regularly throughout the year. Intentional fundraising is also being considered. The MCEC revenues also affect the national church, Mennonite Church Canada. We will partner with 10 partner agencies in this coming year. The Council is challenging each congregation to consider a 4% increase for this year. A small accumulated surplus of \$16,517 is being projected by drawing down on the surplus from previous years.
- **Congregational Ministries Council** – Jeff Steckley, Congregational Ministries Minister, outlined four priorities for this council including providing resources for congregations, Youth and Young Adult ministry events, Youth and Young Adult learning tours, and new ministry initiatives. Jeff provided an update (a partial view) on achievements of the Congregational Ministries Council this year. Glimpses of these activities included Hope for the Small Church seminar, Yella 2008, VBS Troupe, Youth retreats, Junior Youth Breakaway, and youth travel to Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay. Each activity allowed for building relationships through conversations with one another, reflections on faith experiences, creativity, openness to getting to know others, intentional nurture of faith formation, experiencing the gifts of ethnicity; each reflected the breadth and richness of our congregations. Jeff then led the meeting through a short exercise to connect people with one another. People were encouraged to catch the eye

of someone they did not know and find something they had in common; then find another pair and find something that they all had in common. This exercise ended in offering of a prayer or comment of blessing to the other three people in the group.

- **Leadership Council** – Muriel Bechtel, Conference Minister, outlined some of the priorities of the Leadership Council including calling and preparing pastors, collaboration with Mission Council for an exchange program to nurture cross cultural relationships between pastors in MCEC, a three year Transitioning Into Ministry (TIM) project for beginning pastors, effective models for equipping youth pastors (peer learning and mutual support), support and training for experienced pastors, collaborating with church colleges to define areas of competency for ministry and leadership, learning from pastoral trends survey, and listening to congregations. She noted that God continues to call young people to ministry. This Council continues to assist congregations to find pastors, and *vice-versa*. Other ministerial work includes encouraging people to consider ministry, providing resources for preparation, and credentialing them for their roles. Significant attention is being given to equipping leaders new to the Anabaptist tradition. Twenty-eight new pastors and youth workers who began ministry in MCEC in the past year were introduced, along with three pastors who retired in the past year. Marilyn Rudy-Froese, Chair of Leadership Council, offered a prayer of blessing. Leadership Council anticipates nine ordinations and two more people licensed to ministry by July and offered thanks for this dedicated group of pastors.
- **Marianne Mellinger**, Coordinator of Leadership Formation, commented that it is energizing to see so many people entering church leadership positions. Her role is to provide learning opportunities for all leaders (new, existing, lay leaders) to grow into faithful and effective church leaders. Two things a congregation can do to support leaders in lifelong learning are: a) encourage a pastor to take a continuing education course, event, or spiritual retreat, and b) encourage them (if they are midcareer or an experienced pastor) to mentor a beginning pastor. Ministering to those with chronic mental illness and their families workshop is an upcoming example of continuing education opportunities being offered. Conrad Grebel University College offers a ministry training program through its Masters in Theological Studies.
- **Regional Ministers** - Regional Ministers tend to the healthy growth of a congregation by assisting them in conflict, helping congregations to attend to what God is doing in their midst, walking alongside to plan for a congregation's next church plant, inviting congregations to partner with each other, supporting congregations and pastors, and assisting them with sharing of resources.
- **Mission Council** – Brian Bauman, Mission Minister, described the work of the Mission Council as assisting with growing our congregations. Currently there are 15 new churches in various stages of their development. The council also maintains connection with other church organizations such as Mennonite Foundation and MAX Canada. Mission Council assists in developing partnerships between existing congregations and new ones.

Brian invited leaders from four new congregations to join him on the stage, along with David Martin and Leroy Shantz. The four churches with Emerging Church Status were:

- The Church of the Living Word in Ottawa;
- Markham Christian Worship Centre;
- Rehoboth Evangelical Church;
- Chin Christian Church.

Brian made some brief introductory comments about the support that these new churches and leaders need from the rest of the MCEC community of congregations.

Representatives from each of the four congregations shared five minutes about its ministry and hopes for the future. Descriptions of their beginning history, meeting place, and a summary of their worship are included in the Workbook. They each expressed thanks for the opportunity to join MCEC and a belief that belonging to MCEC will strengthen their commitment to their calling.

- Leroy and Myrna offered each a plant as a token of our support to them in being part of MCEC.
- David Martin welcomed each of the churches and the audience participated in a reception of new members
- Litany – *Hymnal A Worship Book #794*, committing ourselves as sister churches.
- Each pastor or lead elder from the new congregations offered a prayer of blessing in their own languages for the churches of MCEC.
- The congregation sang a welcome hymn *For We Are Strangers No More - Hymnal A Worship Book #322*.
- A prayer of blessing for the four new congregations was offered by David Martin.
- Leroy announced that each of the new churches would be sitting in designated seating at lunch and delegates were invited to take this opportunity to greet the members of our new congregations.

■ Offering

The offering was lifted both as a response of gratitude and as a token of our commitment to our common ministry as a community of congregations. The offering will be used to cover the remaining costs of this Annual Church Gathering. The dollars over and above this will go directly to supporting the church planting ministry of Pastor Lucy Roca who works with the growing Latin American refugee population in Quebec. Margaret Nally led in an offertory prayer and the offering was lifted by placing offering buckets onto the tables.

Prior to the break for lunch, Leroy highlighted the displays of MCEC partners to visit during the lunch break. Margaret Burnett provided some hosting instructions for the meal.

Praise God from Whom - Hymnal A Worship Book #118 was sung both for offering and grace for the meal.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON (APRIL 25, 2009)

Worship

- Gathering music
- *Sizohamba Naye – Sing The Journey #78*
- Prayer led by Kevin Peters Unrau and Margaret Nally
- *Lord, Listen to your Children – Hymnal A Worship Book #353*

Meditation: Growing Congregations Through the Congregational Life Cycle: HOPE

- Facilitated by Betty Pries. Renewal Journey from Performing Stability stage. Three forks in the road – Ongoing Renewal, Revitalization, Redevelopment.

■ Ongoing Renewal

Congregations have been renewed throughout history using various models. Today they must still engage in renewal and most use different approaches. It can be intentional, or is done more haphazardly, but needs to be done on a regular basis. Many denominations have not made a strong practice of knowing what it means to listen for God's leading. We need to find the skills and the Spirit to draw us back. There is a relative weakening of the role of the church in the lives of people. Can renewal be done only on Sunday mornings? Congregations sometimes avoid the renewal stage because nothing seems broken or because the hard answers to the hard questions are too tough to swallow.

■ Revitalization from the Protective Maintenance stage

Congregations in this stage still have enough internal strength and resources to revitalize. Revitalization depends on moving away from “how do we get back to the good old days” to “how do we hear God’s call for us in this time and in this place?”.

■ Redevelopment Stage begins out of Crisis and Confusion

At this stage congregations can choose redevelopment or closure, dependant upon open hearts and minds to the leading of the Spirit. Congregations must face current reality in order to allow something new to occur. Requires adequate financial resources (and time and energy) and requires resilient leadership. Redeveloping churches live out the mystery of the death and resurrection by “losing their life to find it.”

■ Story Telling - Interviews by Betty Pries with Stephen Cox, Niagara United Mennonite, and Jamie Gerber, Crosshill Mennonite Church

- Jamie Gerber described a visioning process over past 12 years facilitated by Jeff Steckley. Facility was one of the issues. Visioning was helpful in planning toward the future and resulted in building a new church building. During the process we reviewed our values and visions. It was an affirming process, presenting opportunities and challenges. Setting the pace was a challenge; too fast for some and too slow for others. Proverb – if you want to build fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go with others. Reclaimed “yielded to one another.” Communication of the process and of the vision to the congregation is important. While the new facility has given lots of opportunities, the challenge became how the building might be used as a tool. There was opportunity to give and receive God’s generosity through the process. We listened to each other, even those who did not like visioning processes.
- Stephen Cox: From the protective maintenance stage: Structures were well defined machines driving the vision, but questions came up because there were some structure issues. Needed to know what God was saying to them now, they were missing something. They hired a consultant and did a congregational review over a year. They gathered data through meetings, focus groups and a survey, and slowly sifted out some things the Lord was saying to them. Challenges included letting go of the church the way it used to be, the language had to drop off, had to say different kinds of things. The process required a willingness to do the work, to put in extra time for meetings, committees, to trust in a slow process of looking at ourselves slowly and honestly. They felt God’s guidance in the conversations - could sense the Holy Spirit at work. They were amazed at how many things they held in common. In the final meeting, there were 80% who agreed on one single plan of action.

■ Table Group Conversations

Members at each table were invited to hold table discussions using the following questions as a guide.

1. What kernel of wisdom do you take with you from what was just shared?
2. How have you (or have you not) experienced the stages just presented in your congregation?
3. How have you sought to discern God’s leading during these stages in our congregation?
4. What questions are raised for you by the presentation?

Responses

- Cathrin van Sintern-Dick, North Leamington. Taking the time to listen, yieldedness - bringing yourself to the process, not needing to have direct results. For many congregations, building projects are solid projects, but how to do a spiritual renewal - not able to measure it as well - it will need resources but it is different, cannot just ask leadership to take charge of it, it has to be carried by all of the people. How do we measure spiritual renewal?
- Tim Epp, Welcome Inn. We are not alone; letting go of your fears; taking a leap of faith; being able to work within differences

- Rick Martin, First Mennonite, Kitchener. It takes time, patience, do not want to rush the listening. To have renewal requires change. Conflict as a “gift” is a new concept. Difficult to push through and make a change happen is risky. Do not think about the good old days but look forward. Various churches had different experiences and are in different places and one had successful renewal. The further down the life cycle curve you are, the longer it takes and it depends how big a shift you are planning to make (eg. 8 – 12 months for a visioning process)
 - Darrell (Chip) Bender, Waterloo North. Some congregations do it regularly. Conflict can be good. Energized by the possibilities when speaking about vision, but sliding back when decisions need to be made. Easy to identify the individuals involved in mission and blessing it, but being involved in visioning corporately is more difficult.
 - Betty Pries. In letting go of the past you can still honour what was.
 - Janice Bean, Shantz. Listening is key to the whole church. Map out the process so people know what it will look like. The best place to do this is in a healthy state. Danger in going too slow - need to talk about it. Should maybe do it every six or seven years. New buildings - a lot of people are ingrained in old buildings. The building is not the vision, but it could be a tool.
- *Lord, Listen to Your Children – Hymnal A Worship Book #353*
 - Litany—in seven different languages.
 - Prayer by Margaret Nally
 - *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less – Hymnal A Worship Book #343*
 - David thanked Betty for her leadership, depth of knowledge, and pointed questions while setting it all within the context of faith and God’s call. He challenged congregations to use the life cycles process within our congregations.
 - Nancy Mann reported briefly on behalf of the Listening Committee. They are noting lots of great energy and exciting conversations. Aware that there are many conversations between individuals - respectfully ask that people give focused attention to the time of worship and through time of prayer.
 - **Executive Council Business**
 1. **Approval of Changes to MCEC Funds**

Motion: Gerald Good of Wilmot Mennonite Church moved that the Executive Council of MCEC be given the mandate to expand the criteria of the MCEC Mission Capital Fund to include within its policies, the option for providing financial support to new and emerging MCEC congregations for the rental and lease of facilities for use in congregational ministry.

Second: John Enns, Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church

Discussion:

 - David Martin clarified “new” as meaning anyone who does not own a building, or first facility support.
 - Betty Puricelli, Toronto New Life. Asked if a church receives rental assistance, and then asks for money to purchase, would they be eligible? David responded that this would need to be determined as the policy is developed. Details of wording still need to be worked out through Mission Council, Administrative and Financial Services Council, and Executive Council

- Herb Sawatsky, Avon Mennonite. Asked if this is start up funds, or will it eventually be phased out? David responded it is mostly only for one time use. Herb suggested that some words be added for congregations who are not self sustaining; should some be set aside for those that will never be sustaining? Leroy noted that this comment will be taken under advisement when developing the policy. Mike Litwiller, Mission Council chair, noted that it is thought that it would be short term help, that it was never meant to fund rental / lease payments ongoing.

Motion carried.

2. Approval of Direction in Principle for Transfer of MCEC Owned Properties

Adolfo Puricelli, Toronto Mennonite New Life Church, moved that the delegate body of MCEC mandates the MCEC Executive Council to convey the Welcome Inn property (40 Wood Street E., Hamilton, ON) to the Welcome Inn Community Centre and Church, commonly known as Welcome Inn Church, under the following terms and conditions:

- a. that the property be transferred at the cost of \$1.00,
 - b. that the Church continues to use the property as a place of worship and for carrying out the church's activities of community outreach and witness,
 - c. that the property should revert back to MCEC if the church no longer is a member of MCEC, and
 - d. that MCEC execute such legal documentation as our legal advisors deem necessary.
- Second: Ruth Martin, Hillcrest Mennonite Church

Discussion:

- Gerald Good, Wilmot Mennonite. Questioned divestment of Warden Woods Community Centre and if the original donors' intentions are respected. It would seem that the program should proceed as the community board decides, rather than burdening the congregation with this facility. He noted that the City of Toronto has put substantial money into Warden Woods and this should be rationale for doing something other than the originating document. Aware there are legalities of a charity giving to another charity. David Martin commented that MCEC has had legal council on divesting the property to an organization with different objects than MCEC. Leroy noted that MCEC's first choice of opportunity is to look at involving the congregation that is involved. Gerald commented that this seems to be in variance with the policy that the local ministries need to be given the option of ownership first.
- Dave Bechtel, Preston. Commented that MCEC has had legal advice that we cannot give property to an organization with different charitable objects. However there is also legal opinion that we need to be true to the original donors. Welcome Inn and Warden Woods are doing what they set out to do. We need to honour this as well.
- Leroy stated that transferring property directly to the organization that is carrying on the work is a delegate decision, we are not addressing the other two properties that are in process. This one is specific to only one divestment - Welcome Inn.
- Dave Bechtel, Preston. Clarified that this is not setting a policy on the others to which Leroy commented that we have set up principles of approach, but this does not mean that the outcome will be the same in each situation. David Martin noted that this was the Executive Council's first choice outcome, the congregation has agreed, and so we have decided to recommend going with this choice.
- Benno Barg, Breslau. Noted that dealing with a transfer of a property in Hamilton should be a separate motion from setting a principle. Leroy commented that we will vote only on the motion before us, but not the title and Benno was in agreement.
- Brent Horst, St. Jacobs. Questioned that Rockway Collegiate did not go to a congregation but it went to the Board of Rockway. Leroy noted this was due to the close relationship between Rockway and the congregations.

- John Enns, Waterloo-Kitchener. Questioned if the clause that the property should revert back to MCEC if the church ceases to exist will mean it needs to be kept on forever. David Martin replied that the title is transferred legally, and it will not remain on MCEC books.
- Ruth Martin, Hillcrest. Commented she has been chair of the Welcome Inn Board and she does not anticipate much change from the traditional operation. The Board of Directors has always been in charge of the program and the building. The change would be that permission would be received from the church rather than MCEC if it was needed.

Motion Carried.

Executive Council Ministry Items

1. Approval of MCEC Spending Plan for 2009/2010.

Motion: Tim Wagler moved that we accept the 2009-2010 spending plan as printed in the report booklet (page 46).

Second: Darrel Toews, Breslau Mennonite Church

Discussion:

- Jane Finch receives funding both through church development and urban ministry, and therefore is noted in the budget twice. Ester noted that this is not duplication.
- Twila Lebold, Bloomingdale Mennonite Church voiced an opinion that churches need to be giving more. Opposes this budget because it is less than last year's budget. Commented that MCEC is asking too little from the congregations.
- Ester clarified that the congregations were invited to increase giving by % over last year.

Motion carried. One vote opposed.

2. Approval of Slate

Carol Penner, Chair of Gift Discernment, reviewed changes to the slate:

- Executive Council: Marvin Friesen, Welcome Inn Mennonite Church, 11-0 (2 year appointment)
- Congregational Ministries Council: Susan Kennell Harrison, Hagerman Mennonite Church, 12-1
- MC Canada Nominating Committee: Gladys Bender, Steinmann Mennonite Church should be 11-2
- Ontario Multifaith Council: Susan Kennell Harrison, Hagerman Mennonite Church

Motion: Carol Penner moved that we accept the 2009-2010 Slate as presented.

Second: Lois Konrad, Leamington United Mennonite Church

Motion carried.

■ Listening to God's Call

Group discussions occurred at the tables in response to the following questions:

1. Where have I seen the Spirit at work today?
2. What do I want to share with my congregation from our worship and work today that I found particularly meaningful or exciting?

Responses

- Gladys Bender, Steinmann Mennonite Church. Teach us to be kind and honest at the same time.
- Grace Biehn, Riverdale Mennonite Church. Excited to see the fruit of her father's vision of Hagerman growing.
- Patricia Regier, Niagara United Mennonite Church. More people should come to this Gathering.
- David Sauder, Montreal Mennonite Church. Singing together.
- Victor Dorsch, Steinmann Mennonite Church. Praise God for the hard work that Brian Bauman has put into church planting.
- Ardith Frey, Waterloo North Mennonite Church. This assembly has been a deeply reflective time and an excellent way to resource all of us.

■ Open Opportunity for Discussion:

- Steven Trepanie, Montreal Mennonite Fellowship - question about the two motions just passed, for a congregation that would potentially receive a new building - could Capital Funds be used to transfer over the building to the congregation? David responded that the congregation could approach MCEC with a proposal and a request.
- Fred Martin, Waterloo North Mennonite Church. Will the restructuring of conference and Regional Minister model be re-evaluated? David responded that he has done a Council check-in and are making subsequent readjustments. A mini review was done in the last month of pastors with a number of responses. The Regional Minister model was affirmed to be in support of pastors, and is of value in assisting congregations to make connections to MCEC and with each other in clusters.
- Rick Martin, First Mennonite Church. Excellent budget to keep generous giving going and commends congregations. Encouraged MCEC to still dream even in this financially uncertain time. Could dreams be listed in the program so that congregations know what they are. Leroy responded that there are things the councils would like to undertake.
- Stefan Cherry, Village International Mennonite. Good to be here. Church planters thank Mission Council and also all of the congregations for support (on behalf of church planters).

■ Listening Committee

- Nancy Mann. It was good to be here. There was good energy and enthusiasm, joy, and participation. Appreciated the choir. Was moved by the worship time and reflection on the four congregational life questions. Was inspired by Betty Pries' presentation, appreciated her kind and gentle approach in asking difficult questions, and the specific examples from the churches at each stage. The discussion at the tables was lively. Sometimes people in the same church place their church at different places along the life cycle. She challenged us not to pine for the good old days.
- Ann Sargent. On Saturday morning she was approached by a delegate about why so many visible minorities were segregated and why spread around the discussion tables. When the new congregations were received, this was explained. When she asked a new congregation, they felt they had been warmly welcomed. After lunch, a delegate expressed pleasure at overcoming the language barrier.
- Derek Suderman. Consistent theme of allowing vision to affect structure rather than the other way around. If we do not know where we come from or where we are going, then any bus will do. Hears questions about whether or not the new structure is working. A few questions arise out of the life cycle model. This requires adequate resources (financial) and we set up a capital fund for assisting churches at the beginning, but do we have funds for appropriate closure. Being able to identify with several aspects of the model, and we do not feel we are alone is helpful. Striking how often the Spirit was mentioned - more than other years and memorable. Several delegates have mentioned an appreciation that despite the organizational language used, it was Christian language and not a business model. Noted how many times we use the term "ethnic" - sometimes in the opposite direction - sometimes meaning Russian Mennonite, sometimes Swiss Mennonite, and other times exactly the opposite. We are all ethnic congregations.

■ Closing of Annual Church Gathering

- Special thanks to Margaret Burnett and the KW Cluster for organizing the hosting and worship of the Gathering.
- Myrna Miller Dyck thanked the Listening Committee.
- Myrna announced the MCEC Fall Equipping Day on October 31, 2009 in Toronto.
- Stephen Cox welcomed delegates to Niagara for the next Spring Gathering, on April 23 and 24, 2010.
- Margaret Burnett offered words of thanks to the volunteers and to the members of the hosting committees from the churches.
- David Martin offered recognition of Bev Raimbault, MCEC Administrative Assistant, who will be resigning and he thanked her for her work. She will be going to university this fall. Myrna gave her a departing gift and wished her blessings as she pursues new opportunities.
- Muriel Bechtel will be on sabbatical September through December and Renee Sauder will replace her on a .6 FTE basis.
- Myrna Miller Dyck offered some closing remarks.
- Thanks to the musicians, and to the worship leaders Kevin Peters Unrau and Margaret Nally.

■ Transition of Moderators

Leroy Shantz has been moderator for the past three years, and Myrna thanked him for his commitment to his position. Leroy introduced Moderator-elect, Aldred Neufeldt, and passed the baton over from Leroy to Aldred. Three years ago Leroy was given a stone at Niagara, and has now passed it on to Aldred. Aldred accepted it as a sacred trust. He recognizes the challenges of secularism influencing our churches, but also noted that this is an exciting time where there is much interest in the Anabaptist view of the church, offering great hope to our congregations.

■ Closing Worship

- *Lord, You Give the Great Commission – Sing the Journey #63 (v.1-2)*
- Commissioning Litany
- *Lord, You Give the Great Commission – Sing the Journey #63 (v.4-5)*
- Benediction
- *Rain Down – Sing the Journey #49*