



CANADIAN CONFERENCE
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

ARTICLE 7 [MB Confession of Faith]

Mission of the Church

PASTORAL APPLICATION

The following perspectives may be helpful in our understanding of the mission of the church. First, conversion is not an end in itself. We are admonished by the apostle John, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). Disciple making is described as “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded” (Matt. 28:20). The evangelistic task must never be separated from the nurturing task. Healthy churches empower people to use their gifts both in outreach and in nurture. Christians are to be both salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

Second, contrary to popular perceptions, the call of Jesus is not merely an individualistic call to salvation. Rather, it includes a call to join “the company of the committed,” to become a member of the body, to share in the “fellowship of the saints.” This corporate dimension dare not be omitted in our shattered individualistic world. It is the testimony of God’s presence and rule in the world.

Third, this corporate dimension is also vital to evangelism. It is the church that offers the context for evangelism. How the members of the body relate to one another, how they live out their faith, provides a powerful witness. It creates a plausibility structure out of which unbelievers can make sense of the gospel. It offers the world an alternative society, one in which the Gospel is actively worked out.

A Temptation to Specialize

In an age of individualism and specialization, deference to the “expert” tempts us to relegate the execution of the Great Commission to those designated by the church for that purpose. In our tradition this includes those called evangelists, missionaries, and pastors.

While we must recognize the special giftedness of designated servants, we must insist that the commission includes all those who claim to follow Jesus. Indeed our history as a denomination and as members of the wider Anabaptist tradition is one marked by missionary zeal shared by a broad spectrum of people.

It is vital that we regain the zeal of our spiritual ancestors who understood the requirements of personal holiness to include speaking the words of the gospel and living out its implications in everyday life. It may be that the current reliance on the trained expert has its origin in our preoccupation with technique. A witness, however, is simply one who tells what he or she knows. Effective witness is found not in technique but in faithfulness, consistent living, and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

An Exclusive and Inclusive Message

Given the increased attraction of universalism, we must insist on the exclusive way of salvation. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 NRSV). We must resist the impulse to accommodate this focus to the pluralism of our world.

We do well to remember that the call to new life in Christ is also inclusive. It is to “all who receive him.” We must take care to remember the admonition of the apostle that the dividing wall has been broken down (Eph. 2:14). It would be good for congregations to take a more serious look at where they are located. The homogenous principle of the church growth movement tends to justify where and how we do church. How might we be more faithful in bringing the good news to the “least of these”?

Diversity needs to involve more than “separate but equal” congregations in the denomination.



Individual congregations need to demonstrate that the social, racial, economic, and gender walls have indeed been broken down. Even when our culture teaches that only separate but equal multiculturalism works, we must demonstrate that God's reconciling love brings every variety of people together to love and care for one another. This unity in diversity becomes the hallmark of a vibrant, witnessing community of faith.

The mission of the church needs to find expression in the daily life of the local church. Mission should be revealed in the atmosphere of the church gathered and scattered. As a people whose purpose is built around good news, we believers should live joyful, hope-filled lives. People arriving at a worship service have reason to expect the event to radiate faith, hope, and love. The mission of "good news" should be reflected in every way possible.

A Two-Part Call

Mennonite Brethren Christians can enjoy a unique position in the wider Christian community when they understand the gospel in terms of both evangelism and social concern. We must without reservation call people to repentance and reformation of life in Jesus. We must be clear and culturally accessible in this proclamation and live out the social implications of the good news by caring for those in need and proclaiming God's peace and justice in the wider community. The news of God's reconciling love is holistic, encompassing spiritual, social, relational, and physical aspects of human experience. The atonement that Jesus accomplished was to redeem the spiritual and physical creation. As ambassadors of reconciliation, we proclaim in word and deed the all-encompassing nature of Christ's redemptive power. We must give the cup of water and we must do it in Jesus' name!

Historically, Mennonite Brethren have been leaders in cooperative ventures to meet physical needs in Christ's name. Although structures are changing, the strong tradition of cooperating with other Anabaptist denominations in the work of Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Mutual Aid, Mennonite Economic Development Agency, and the like needs to be continued. Loving neighbor and obeying the lordship of Christ involves both communicating God's love verbally and demonstrating it through our actions (Matt. 25:31-46).

Growing a Healthy Church

We can accomplish the church's mission only to the extent that the church itself is healthy. Mennonite Brethren use various tools to encourage congregational health. Essential elements for healthy congregational life include empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. A leadership team that knows where the congregation should be going provides visionary leadership. Leaders call out people for active ministry, motivate them, and equip them for ministry. This mobilization of gifts encourages members to use the gifts they have to do the work they enjoy most and can do most effectively.

The decisive factor in congregational health is passionate spirituality. When Christians live their faith enthusiastically and with growing commitment, the church grows in health. Inspiring worship is characterized by active participation by the people, whether the forms are more liturgical or free, more contemporary or traditional. Growing congregations use small groups to provide a secure environment, personal relationships, and the opportunity to share spiritual experiences. These small groups enable brothers and sisters in the faith to grow as disciples. Evangelism that uses as its starting point the needs of the people who are to be reached is relational evangelism. This does not negate the theocentricity of evangelism, calling people to submit to God's sovereignty, but understands that the gospel addresses all aspects of life. In growing churches the relationships of people to one another are characterized by a high degree of love and caring for those inside and outside the church.

A Vision as Wide as the World

Historically we have defined ourselves as a missionary movement. This over-arching theme has inspired great missionary endeavors around the world. It may also explain why the "Mission Church" is considerably larger than the "Sending Church." As a denomination, we have consistently shown ourselves ready to pledge our lives and our fortunes to spreading the gospel around the globe. Indeed some of us may have



done this to the exclusion of our responsibility to take the good news to our own neighbors and those who are different from us in our own community.

Here again we must emphasize the multifaceted nature of our commission. “As you are going, make disciples...” is probably the correct reading of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). If so, the responsibility falls on all of us wherever we are going. Because the call to follow Jesus is to all, however, we must not lose the urgency of sending credible witnesses not only to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but also to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is the responsibility of the local church to foster compassion for those in need, a vision for the lost world, a prayer focus for mission workers and the world, and a plan for sending workers into mission (Matt. 9:35-10:1).

