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A RESPONSE TO HENRY SCHMIDT'S PAPER "MODELS/STRATEGIES

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The purpose of this consultation is to develop a workable strategy to reach our stated church planting/growth denominational goals. Henry Schmidt's paper proposes several models/strategies of church planting/growth that can help us reach those goals. Henry Schmidt's wide experience and extensive reading is very evident. At times I felt inundated by all the condensed lists of information!

The biblical principles Schmidt gives lay a proper foundation and help us place our strategies in the perspective of the new era of God's reign. Our record of church growth/decline during the past 50 years graphically paints the need to place evangelism at the heart of our denomination.

When it comes to forging a denominational strategy, it is true that denominations have their strengths and weakness, but it is clear that we must become more flexible, relevant and inclusive.

We must also be willing to demonstrate our commitment through our finances. If we are serious about growth, Schmidt says we need administrators and church planters. I assume we also need places to meet, whether rented or purchased. This certainly will take some creative financing.

Although this is a North American consultation, our vision statement is global and we must see the needs and resources from a global perspective. Where in the world are new church starts most needed? How should our personnel and financial resources be allocated globally?

As one reads this paper the gap between where we are and where we want to go looms ever larger. Is it really possible for us to make the necessary changes to reach our goals? Can we overcome our mono-ethnic rural mentality? Some people question whether encouraging numerical growth, developing larger churches, focusing on growth corridors, centralizing denominational leadership and taking a more transdenominational stance are compatible with their understanding of our Anabaptist heritage.

In conclusion, Schmidt lists eight shifts that will help us reach our goals. Some of these are radical shifts for us, but we need to pray that we will be open to the Holy Spirit to move us to make the changes and be willing to pay the price. The challenge will be to agree on what must be done, find personnel/finances and motivate our fellow members to make these shifts. Then we together can pray, witness and give to offer hope in Christ to our troubled world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the most significant reasons for our decline in membership that we can help change in the future? (see pgs. 2, 6-7)

2. Translate what our denominational goals for membership and number of churches means for you, your church and district.

3. How would you explain the importance of MB's planting new churches in major cities to a baby boomer with MB background who presently is not actively involved in a church?

4. Ultimately, if we want to see our present churches grow and also plant new churches, we personally will need to reach out to the unchurched around us and communicate to them how they can find new life in our risen Lord. How can we overcome our hesitancy to personally communicate this Good News with others and motivate others to join us in this joyous task?

5. Of the eight strategic shifts Schmidt lists on pages 25-26, what are the two or three that we need to work on first? How do we go about motivating people to make these shifts?

6. What are the first steps that we will take to invite people to accept Christ as Savior and Lord and encourage them to unite with our church? (As individuals, as participants of this consultation, as local congregations, as districts/provinces, as national conferences, as a North American conference, as international church leaders?)