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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES OF  
CHURCH GROWTH WITH THE  
MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH  
SHOULD EMBRACE

Respondent: Vern Heidebrecht

The writer of this paper has presented a clear and fair treatment of the Church Growth Movement. His analysis is helpful in putting this movement into prospective as it relates to our churches.

My response will address itself to a number of issues which I believe need to be considered.

First, the "frustration factor". The CGM was birthed out of the experience of Donald McGavron. His frustration because of the lack of effectiveness in missionary work stimulated him to embark on this research. This led to a pragmatism, this is, treating church growth from the practical point of view. He worked at the fleshing out of theology into church growth principles.

The frustration regarding the lack of church growth in the Mennonite Brethren Churches provided a vacuum for the CGM to take hold in many of our congregation churches. Our frustration was felt in the tension that rose out of expressing a strong church mission theology and not being adequately equipped to penetrate our

communities effectively. For example, conference wide we are growing less than 2% annually. We have had few mentors and models in church growth.

The principles taught by the CGM have been beneficial in terms of coming to grips with many of the key sociological and strategic issues in church growth. As this paper warns, however, these principles and task-oriented helps should never override our spiritual dependency upon the Holy Spirit and God's sovereign purposes. It is important to note that the CGM has had great appeal to Mennonite Brethren because of our commitment to church growth.

Second, there is the balance and tension regarding "presence, proclamation, and persuasion" (pages 6-7). The writer may be oversimplifying CGM here. The CGM's strong emphasis on "pers~~u~~asion" does not and cannot exclude "presence" and "proclamation". The latter are still present but balanced by measuring receptivity. Paul declared this in 2 Corinthians 5:11, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." I hear CGM people teach that this involves a sensitive, listen-oriented message. The emphasis of caring for the complete person comes through. Also, this is an area where our own tradition of faith and practice can make the correctives where needed. I see the CGM moving more to a holistic approach as it takes root in the church.

Third, we need to realize that the CGM is one of many significant influences on the church scene today. A. W. Tozer made

a call in the early 1960's to restore worship in the church, for it is the "...missing Jewel in the evangelical church." There is a renewed focus on worship in the church today. The impact of "Praise and Worship" which lifts up the majesty of God and calls us to worship Him with our lives is ushering in a renewed awareness of the transcendent God in our midst. When Jack Hayford penned, "Majesty, Worship His Majesty", the theme for much of contemporary worship came into focus. The "small group" and discipleship movements are also impacting our church to a renewed sense of accountability and mutual ministry.

Also, Campus Crusade has become much more church oriented and thus serving in building up the local fellowship. God is using other churches and leaders to restore prayer and spiritual formations to their rightful high priority in church life.

The point I am making is that God in His sovereignty has given us the opportunity to gain insights and depth from various movements, including the CGM, to grow the church today. The CGM is only one of the many streams of energy the Lord is pouring into church today.

I like the emphasis in the paper that church growth is both the result of a spiritually healthy congregation and careful planning. The church planter, the Apostle Paul, put it this way: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). This scripture begins with God, speaks of strategy, and recognizes the unique giftings in Paul and Apollos.

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As we keep focusing on the Lord and testing out practical principles of ministry, we will better understand Paul who declared: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:22b & 23)