

Being a Church on Mission

Our Collective Responses at Retreat 2015

Session 1: Who Are We as a Church?

1. As we think about defining ourselves at this present time, what do we consider to be our gifts and strengths as a congregation?

We are good listeners. We care about dialogue and diverse representation. We do family, in-reach, and hospitality well. We are warm and welcoming, multi-generational, educated, thoughtful, self-reflective, casual, laid back, accepting of others, and committed to the Kingdom. We are a handy group of workers. We are good cooks. Anabaptist beliefs and practices (distinctives) are important to our congregation.

2. As we think about meeting the needs of our community and the surrounding area, what passions are driving us; what work and ministries do we have a heart for?

We have a heart for children and youth (e.g. VBS, Preschool, youth ministry). Our concerns are for the transient community, international and college students, and cultural education. We care about assisting the community Food Pantry and To Our House (homeless ministry). We support missions, demonstrating moral convictions (e.g. peace and reconciliation), and faithful stewardship. Moving forward we want to help people recover from addictions, find jobs, and learn to embrace simple living. We want to further promote service-oriented vocations. We want our driving force to be Christ.

3. As we think about defining ourselves at this present time, what barriers within the church keep us from functioning the way we want as a people on mission?

We feel it's a constant battle with having time for the church, setting priorities, and discerning where we should invest our energy. We are too busy outside of church and discipleship related activities. We struggle with inconsistency and not having routines. A small group of people are carrying the workload and we're "too nice" to approach others who are not involved. As a result of being over-worked, we fear starting new ministries. We are spread out geographically. We are scattered in more ways than one. We have a lack of resources (people & money). We lack transportation for college students. We feel overwhelmed. We need young leadership. We need a fresh realization of the purpose of the church and the mission of God. There is a great deal of confusion and many misconceptions about what it means to be a "Mennonite" among us, and in our community. We need to meet the budget and see giving as a form of worship. We need to rethink our governance and keep CMF informed of how decisions are made.

4. As we think about meeting the needs of our community and the surrounding area, what obstacles and challenges are we currently facing as a Mennonite congregation?

We are not ashamed of our Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition, but there is a major misconception with “Mennonite” and having it in our name may be preventing outsiders from visiting our congregation. We are largely transient and lack a core group of disciples who are local and more permanent. We live in an “on-demand” culture and yet we don’t want to give into consumerism within the church. We struggle to stand-out as an Anabaptist congregation where our “Peace” message is a barrier to some, but attractive to others. We are not reaching the “others” who would resonate. We’re not sure of our target community and we’re pretty homogenous. Economic conditions are causing some strain on our church. We need more presence in the community, but we’re unsure of how to be that presence, as well as how to “evangelize” and invite others. We are experiencing both societal and church complacency and apathy.

Session 2: Who Do We Want to Be as a Church?

1. As we think about growing and reimagining ourselves for the sake of God’s mission in the New River Valley, what are our hopes and dreams for the future?

We want to see the Kingdom realized in the NRV. We want to see the church expand and reach the community. We want to see baptisms and new disciples. We want to meet needs of the community with relevant ministries. We want to collaborate with other like-minded churches. We would like to plant other churches in the NRV. We desire to strengthen families around us. We want to be known for our “peace” message, and for being a joyful church. Also, we want to be known by the community for a particular ministry. We hope to awaken to God’s work around us and join him. We want to promote a “gentle faith” to our neighbors, not continuing confrontational religion. We want to build a local core, create new leaders, and be visible to our community. We hope to overcome the great barrier and confusion over being a “Mennonite” church.

2. As we think about meeting the needs of our community and the New River Valley, what do we see as positive and possible within the next 3 to 5 years?

In the near future, we believe it is possible to achieve our budget needs, not only to sustain our current church staff and ministries, but grow our staff and resources. We believe we can increase spaces for discipleship, and offer a second worship service. We can make space, meet needs, and offer more opportunities to do ministry and for others to be influenced by our church. We see ourselves being a welcoming congregation with a positive image in the community. We see our church having ministries to families with regular outreach to college students, internationals, and refugees. We see ourselves

planting churches and networking with other Anabaptists. We can envision ourselves achieving a presence and promotion of simple living and sustainability through a NRV relief sale. We believe we can and should offer another community 12-step program and other “celebrate recovery” type ministries.

3. As we think about growing and reimagining ourselves, what fears do we have?
4. As we think about meeting the needs of our community and the New River Valley, what challenges might keep us from making our future growth a reality?

#3 & 4 were combined in our discussion time

There is a challenge to get commitment from people in our crazy busy culture. We’re asking questions like: “Who is going to do the work? Are we ready to navigate change and conflict? Reflecting on our passions and dreams, what steps and ministries come first? Can we really extend the table and grow our numbers beyond our comfort?”

We know we need to be honest and be willing to ask for help, but we don’t always do it. Growth means new governance structures for smooth, effective functioning; adopting a new organizational (pastor/elder) model. Can we do it? Are we willing to do it?

We fear many things: loss of core values, loss of intimacy and “family feel” with which we’ve become accustomed. We fear losing people, our focus, our Anabaptist identity, conflict, and failure. We fear running out of funds. We fear doing more because current leadership is tired. We fear welcoming those who are different and becoming a church we don’t recognize. We fear losing control of what *has been* for a long time. There may be a few members who have no interest in “reimagining” our church for a new season. We fear losing people who don’t share our mission and vision for the future of CMF.