

EDITORIAL

Congregations, too, want 'new wineskins'

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It's too bad the New Wineskins consultations of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), that covered a four-year period and got Mennonites together from all over the world, didn't "become a hot topic" in the pew, as Will Braun observes in our main feature on page 4.

Because what is emerging is life-changing for all of us and should be engaging us far more than it is. MCC, as it turns out, has touched—and continues to touch—us at so many levels. Birthed as an attempt to rescue our sisters and brothers suffering from unspeakable military cruelty at the hands of army bandits in southern Russia and from widespread famine, it today reaches out to the hungry and poor, the disadvantaged and pillaged, the oppressed and downtrodden in 62 countries outside of North America, not to mention addressing such things as mining injustice and aboriginal rights within our own borders.

It may be the single most attractive Mennonite establishment, capturing the imagination of our young people, giving them opportunities to experience the planet in ways they otherwise couldn't. It appeals to their growing sense of justice and to their idealistic goals of making a difference in a violent and environmentally degraded world.

And the non-Mennonite world of

national and community leaders has taken note of what small administrative costs there are in delivering aid and services through MCC compared to other well-known relief agencies. In other words, aid gets more fully intact to the end receiver than with some other organizations in the same helping business. We can all take much satisfaction from this.



Because of this, and because of the changing culture of our own congregations here at home, the Wineskins conversations—conducted most seriously inside administrative circles in a kind of corporate culture with what was termed the "appreciative inquiry" process—should have triggered more serious thought and conversation at the congregational level.

The process, while implemented with good intentions by MCC discussion leaders in many locations, seemed scripted with no follow-up steps. What happened to all those recorded comments on flip charts and white boards, for instance? We never heard back from the planners regarding common themes, trends in thinking, changing paradigms or strategies voiced by people in the pews.

"Appreciative inquiry," reduced to its essentials, takes the stance that we should look at the future through lenses that see life positively, not negatively, and consider "willing possibilities," not constraints

and prohibitions.

While this sounds good on its face, a kind of sophistication can evolve that says that what is basically an internal restructuring shouldn't be of great concern to constituents, an attitude that smacks a little of elitism and is not exactly congruous with our Anabaptist ethos of communal decision-making and sharing.

To their credit, MCC leaders, as voiced by Arli Klassen, were willing to change course in developing a global model that did not sit well with non-North American partners because of what was perceived as its "imperialistic" nature.

All of which is to say that MCC wisely and realistically realizes we are living in a vastly different world than when it was born and developed over these 90 years.

These consultations and their outcomes are exhilarating and heady, not only for our major Mennonite enterprise, but for those in the pew who might want to, and should, take some ownership of the process and its outcomes.

The evolution of MCC's mission and mandate for the 21st century is exactly what should be happening at the local level: more partnerships with like-minded organizations, a changing paradigm in which we look beyond ourselves and see our Anabaptist faith distinctives as part of a larger ecclesiastical fabric in our communities, a new confession that calls us "to listen to, and learn from, people of other cultures."

A local congregation might think "appreciatively" about teaming up with other congregations when its youth group is too small to nurture on its own, or to team up with other local congregations in meeting the needs of immigrants or low-income neighbourhoods where a local coordinated effort could do so much better.

ABOUT THE COVER:

The MC B.C. women's retreat at Camp Squeah began with the 94 participants getting a pink manicure in keeping with the theme of 'breast cancer awareness.' See story on page 23.

PHOTO: WALTRUDE GORTZEN, MC B.C. WOMEN'S MINISTRY

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