

# Can we be too positive?

*Negative feedback in pastoral reviews also deemed important*

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVE ROGALSKY

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Pastoral reviews in the past seemed to look only for problems. But, according to current thinking, if you do that, “you’ll find what you’re looking for.”

So, over the past five or six years, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada has looked for what’s working in pastor-church relations using Appreciative Inquiry (AI). However, from the beginning, concerns were raised that the reviews were “cake walks,” and did not look for problems before they grew insurmountable.

According to AI Rempel, MC Eastern Canada regional minister, the AI process was tweaked three years ago to include room for questions about areas where growth was needed. As well, pastors were excluded from focus groups during the review process, giving room for congregants who felt intimidated sharing negative comments to their pastor’s face.

Negative feedback in pastoral reviews was just one focus of the April 13 seminar for pastors and pastoral-congregational relationship committees (PCRCs). The others included supervision of the pastor, and the differences between three different kinds of reviews: professional development of the pastor; continuing the pastoral/congregational relationship; and testing “congregational efficacy around the vision we have for ourselves.”

Questions pastors can ask that address the need for critique include, “What am I doing that you would like me to do more of?” “What am I doing that you would like me to do less of?” and, “What would you like me to start doing?”

Rempel suggested that such questions focused on the pastor’s work and professional development should not be tied to a review and vote for continuing the pastoral/congregational relationship, and be separate from congregational reviews.

Using “family systems” thinking that focuses on people becoming emotionally

mature, being their best selves and dealing with anxiety in the system, Rempel discussed the area of pastoral supervision.

PCRCs address the relationship between

congregations and pastors. If the committee has supervisory responsibility over the pastors, the danger is that they will not trust the committee to have their best interests in mind. Trust is needed, Rempel said, so that PCRCs can address the relationship, neither trying to “save” the pastor from the congregation, nor minutely overseeing the pastor for the congregation.

While reviews are important, Rempel concluded that it is “candid, ongoing conversations” that are key to a healthy pastor/congregational relationship. ❧



*Karl Dick, Pastor Nancy Mann, John Harder and John Enns, all from Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church, discuss issues raised at the “Pastoral Reviews and Negative Feedback” seminar offered by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada on April 13.*

## /// Briefly noted

### Credit union receives award for charitable achievement

KITCHENER, ONT.—Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (MSCU) was recognized with the 2013 Corporate Award for Outstanding Charitable Achievement from the Ontario Credit Union Charitable Foundation on April 11. The award is presented annually to an Ontario credit union or company within the co-operative financial system in recognition of its community contribution considered to be above average or beyond normal expectations. MSCU was recognized for the growth of its Stewardship in Action program over the last four years. Benjamin Janzen, Stewardship in Action advisor, accepted the award, noting that the amount of money flowing into the community has grown by 22 percent annually over the last four years. More than 200 churches and charitable organizations now receive support each year. The program has also fostered three significant partnerships during this time: a \$500,000 commitment to Mennonite Central Committee Ontario to build a new home for several Anabaptist organizations; a \$1 million gift to establish the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union Centre for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College; and a new partnership with MEDA to support international development through its Farmer to Farmer program.

—Mennonite Savings and Credit Union

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