

May 20, 2010

Dear delegates of Central Plains Mennonite Conference,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ that unites us. I hope this finds you experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in your congregation and community as we celebrate the gifts of Pentecost.

I recently was blessed to witness the Holy Spirit at work in Central Plains conference. Twenty conference leaders gathered in an upper room at Turning Point, Omaha, Nebraska, to hear the recommendation from the Unity Task Group and its year of work.

You may remember that the intention to form this group was shared at last summer's annual meeting, with the goal of increasing the unity of the conference even when we disagree and to foster a way of living together that empowers our fellowship, worship and mission, rather than being about an absorbing focus on differences. Last fall, Conference Council intentionally chose members who represented the broad range of beliefs about homosexuality, as well as geographic and gender diversity. The group met twice at Manson, and then worked electronically this spring. We enlisted the services of John Gehm from RESTORE in Sioux Falls as group facilitator. You will have a chance to meet John this summer at annual meeting.

Members of the task group shared the holy moments in their time together, and Conference Council witnessed the work of the Spirit among them. Scriptures that touched them during their work include Isaiah 41:19 *I am about to do a new thing..* And Colossians 3:17 *Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus....* And the theme verse that leads the recommendation from John 17, *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Conference Council also experienced the moving of the Holy Spirit in this work, and with gratitude to God, will bring the attached recommendation as an action to annual meeting in Mt. Lake, June 24-27. The recommendation to delegates supports and calls for the entire recommendation as a unit as each step arises from and supports the other. This means the action will include:

1. Four central affirmations define our membership in the conference.
2. Conference Council's intentions to organize a process that fosters understanding between diverse churches in our number.
3. For a period of three years, reserve the use of the variance policy for serious violations of number 1 above, followed by a review of conference policies to determine future direction.
4. Acknowledge that the variance policy, as it has been applied to St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship, has not achieved its redemptive goal and reinstate St Paul to full membership with the hope of restoring open conversation and moving our conference toward a unity of the Spirit.

Conference Council now prayerfully sends this recommended action to delegates for your discernment with your congregation. At annual meeting, discernment time around tables is planned. Please join your conference leaders in prayer for the blessing of the Holy Spirit in a fresh way as we submit ourselves to the risk of being in relationship with each other.

Sincerely,

Diane Zaerr Brenneman

Moderator

Central Plains Mennonite Conference