

Feb. 18, 2011

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace be multiplied to you...

This communication is intended to give an account of the meeting of bishops on Dec. 7, 2010. It is also an effort to encourage dialog as we continue to seek ways of strengthening the body life of the Beachy constituency. Your input in this process is important and we believe vital to the well-being of the constituency. The meeting was not intended to be a decision-making meeting but to be a part of a process that we trust can help build our commitment to the Lord of the Church and to each other.

Enclosed you will find two summaries; one of the survey we had taken in the Spring of 2010 and one of the December 7th meeting. From the feedback on the surveys you will notice that there is an overarching concern about where we are headed as a constituency. A strong majority agree that the non-use of the radio has been a defining issue for the Beachy constituency. Most of the responders support the suggestion that we consider establishing criteria for those who would serve on constituency committees and vote on constituency issues. There is significant support for defining who we are and what we stand for as a constituency. It also seems apparent that some of our strengths are also perceived as weaknesses. A small majority indicated that what defines us as a constituency should be defined by both what we are for and what we are against. How to appropriately implement and administer these ideas is where the challenges arise. There were a lot of comments and questions on the returned surveys that could not have been fairly represented in a brief summary. We hope to be able to do more of that at the upcoming annual Ministers Meetings in Lancaster.

The meeting on Dec. 7th proved to be encouraging. We were gratified that a large percentage of the bishops were able to attend. The interest and participation of the attendees was exceptional. The meeting afforded an opportunity for the kind of honesty that can strengthen relationships. To be able to dialog about differences in a safe atmosphere seems crucial if we are going to understand each other. What did we accomplish and where do we go from here? Since this was not intended to be a decision-making meeting but a springboard for future developments, we didn't make any specific decisions on a course of action involving the survey questions. We did take a good bit of time to discuss the challenges we face on personal, and church levels, and how we deal with them. In short, the experience was positive enough for many that we have had numerous suggestions that we make it an annual event.

While there may still be unanswered questions, we are confident that the Lord is willing to help us find a way to work through to conclusions that honor Him and promote His kingdom.

Sincerely,
The Bishop committee

Bishop Committee Questionnaire 2010

Total Responses: 132

1. Would you be supportive of the Committee's thought that the non-use of the radio has been a defining issue for the Beachy Constituency?
Yes 80%
No 5%
Uncertain 11%
Unanswered 4%

2. Would you be supportive of the Committee's suggestion that we consider establishing criteria for those who would serve on constituency committees and vote on constituency issues?
Yes 77%
No 3%
Uncertain 10%
Unanswered 10%

3. Do you see value in a clearer definition of what is Beachy?
Yes 76%
No 7%
Uncertain 10%
Unanswered 7%

4. If so, what should define us as a constituency?
What we are against/trying to avoid 0%
What we are for/where we are going 6%
Both 55%
Unanswered 39%

5. What do you see as the strengths our constituency has?
Mission program, mutual trust & understanding, Christ is central, ability to work through disagreements, anabaptist values, sound teaching, congregational autonomy, brotherhood, living out our faith, good balance of teaching and practice, plain, solid relationships, biblical aid plans, practice of the ordinances, openness, abundance of resources, tolerant, harmonious working together, ability to stand, flexibility, service oriented, conservative biblical interpretation, modesty, new birth essential, openness

6. What are our weaknesses?
Inconsistencies among leaders, recipe approach to missions, exclusive, building fences, see standards of practices as relative, 3rd and 4th generation complacency, individualistic mind set, unhealthy fascination for sports, love of the world, materialism, splits, loss of vision, casualness, forcing external change, lack of definition of who we are, lack of personal accountability and conviction, lack of discipline, lukewarmness, allegorical interpretation of scripture, weak on the new birth, excessive tolerance, increasing protestantism, diminishing anabaptism, poor understanding of prayer veilings as well as shunning, no constituency structure in place, no governing body, busy but little direction, lack of pilgrim/stranger concept, weak on holy living, some fathers are irresponsible, openness, but no boundaries, aversion to the conference model, unwholesome social networking, leaders sometimes neglect issues of the day and focus on the letter and lose the heart of the people

**Bishop Meeting Report
Maranatha Fellowship Church
December 7, 2010**

The meeting was called by the present bishop committee: David Yoder, Raymond King, Phil Miller, Roman Mullet, and Ivan Beachy. (Number of bishops present: about 55.)

Moderator: David Yoder

Devotions: Ivan Beachy

From the book of Acts we find that as they proceeded after the conversion of Saul to more outreach activity in the church, they found rest by settling on “decrees for to keep” (Acts 16:4). God would have us bring rest to the churches for edification.

Meeting Objectives:

To challenge each other; where we came from, where we are, where we are going, and how we plan to get there.

We are at a crossroad, maybe even a watershed. Where are we as a constituency? In what direction are we headed?

We seek to provide a safe place to share our hearts, concerns, and challenges. This is not a decision-making meeting.

We divided into small groups of 11-12 men, where each one would have opportunity to share. Each group was chaired by one of the committee members.

Suggested discussion points:

What is our vision for future generations? Are we content to see us become another failed conservative Anabaptist group? Are we fatalistically following the conferences, just 50 years behind them? Is there nothing we can do?

What is different about us that will help or hinder us in stemming the tide of cultural pressures?

What are contributing factors of gradual decline or loss of practice in other Anabaptist groups? Probably we should not spend all our time looking at where we don't want to go, but could we study it enough to avoid similar outcomes?

Is our effort here today to save a constituency or is it to promote the vitality of local churches within the constituency?

Are our foundations solid? Are we becoming weak in doctrinal areas, such as salvation and grace?

How well do our leaders strike the balance of 1 Peter 5:2 and 3?

How biblical is our view of possessions?

How is technology affecting us? Are we its master or servant?

We then met for about three hours before and after lunch in groups of 11-12 men.

Additional points and questions coming from these discussions:

What is our vision?

Are we embarrassed at being non-conformed in lifestyle and appearance? What makes us think our congregation is not “typical Beachy”? Where do we want our churches to go? Is that the vision of the present generation? Are we sharing our vision with them?

We need diligence in keeping our vision before our people. This generation needs to pass on biblical convictions to the next generation.

How do we keep our people with us?

To keep our statement of practice and our people together, we must lead by example. Ministers should stand together, even when minor disagreement is present.

When church members move from one congregation to another, intentional communication with the former church is desirable; it shows respect to former pastors.

How should we address the technology issue?

(From cell phones to internet and other inventions)

It is hard, but necessary, to stay abreast of new developments, unless we decide we want absolutely nothing to do with modern technology.

The internet is perceived as a necessity for some people. It seems to be inescapable that we will either use it or else someone will use it for us. It must be kept as a mere tool and its addictive potential must be firmly resisted.

Is it consistent to allow the internet if we don't allow radio and television? Some blockers, filters, and software accountability programs are: Covenant Eyes, Be Secure, Agape Internet, Clean Internet, Safe Eyes, and others. There is no better filter than a pure heart, but brotherhood accountability is also essential. Inner controls can be built. Our teaching can help do that.

The radio is not neutral. It is addictive and is capable of undermining good morals. Radio also carries many religious broadcasts. While we don't find fault with those who use this means of getting the Gospel out, we do believe that much questionable and false teaching comes by public radio, so that we believe it presents a negative balance sheet to us. There is software available to block out radio from the internet.

Accountability to each other as a constituency

While we have no policing body in place, we need to think of how our decisions affect other congregations in the constituency. Group integrity and mutual respect need to dominate our relationships as congregations toward each other.

Concern for the liberal element among us was expressed. Some of us would appreciate more clearly drawn lines. While we don't see the need for conference organization, we fear that an unhealthy individualism has come upon our congregations because of our long-held autonomy.

Communication within the congregation

Let us not become defensive or threatened when questions are asked. Make sure that questions are understood and then think through the answers. We need to listen to youth and to all age groups in the church. The Bible is clear that the younger is often well-advised "to submit to the elder."

Are we called to be leaders or moderators? Are our churches becoming too large? Should we be moving out more into unchurched areas? We are commissioned to go and teach all nations.

Concluding comments:

The bishop committee struggles with defining clearly what the Beachy constituency really is. What model of church organization does it fit? Is there an effective way that we as brothers can help each other?

What has this day together changed in each of our minds and hearts? We have heard each other and were open with each other. It was a blessing to be together. This was a day of many questions. We hope the future may hold some more answers.

The committee wants to hear from you. Write a letter, send an e-mail, or make a phone call. Share with us how you feel about these things.