



Canadian Conference
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Video Update – May 2018

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Hello to all of you across Canada! By now, the signs of spring are everywhere. And we're always encouraged when the days warm up, and the blossoms begin to appear, and leaves are coming out on the trees because we know a new season of growing, and gardening, and sometimes, the work of just cutting the grass are all before us. But we take great delight in the new life of a new season. That's kind of how I'm feeling as I think about my continued work and role in leading the national conference of the MB churches in Canada.

As I said to you in my last edition in April, we have been talking a lot about a different way of relating to each other and a different structure that would help us to really accomplish a national impact as the local churches really can engage in our provincial conferences in a way that makes it effective for each of you in the ministry that God's called you to. We understand that all of you are leaning into this call, that you really have a strong desire to see the gospel of Jesus Christ – the name of Jesus – made famous in our country, and for many people to be transformed in their lives, their relationships, and the way that they work, and the way that they carry on life. It's why we exist.

So, we've been asking the question, *How is it the conference, both national and provincial, can really add that kind of value – to be that kind of support, that kind of resource for each of you in your local churches?* In fact, we've asked the question, *Why have the conferences at all?*

While I think many of you understand how important it is that you have those provincial conference leaders and that relationship among yourself in the provinces, the question may have come across your minds, *Why do we need a national conference? Is that really necessary?*

Well, in rethinking how it is that we'll have this new relationship and the ways that we can structure ourselves in order to really be effective in the work that we desire in each of our local churches, we've answered the question by trying to define, *What is it that's uniquely the role of our national conference? And how would we position this conference in such a way that it's not duplicating and it's not becoming redundant with the work that the provincial conferences and local churches are doing?*

There are a couple things that I want to just point out to you to answer the question, *Why?* The national conference carries and holds this very important idea of our identity. This is far more than our identity as what we call Mennonite Brethren, or even some of us who remember that we do have an ethnic heritage that we share. It's far more about the way that we read the Bible together. We call it our Confession of Faith. And it's a wonderful, living document that enables us to understand how it is that we will read Scripture, and how we'll teach and preach the Word within our churches, and how we carry out our ministry – live our Christian witness – in our neighbourhoods, our cities, and across this country. Our national identity in the Confession of Faith is a very important resource that we agree on, that we share across the country.

It's based on that confession that we also invite both our churches and our pastoral leaders to be accountable, to agree, to lean in. So, we ask pastors to be credentialed, to think about that Confession of Faith, to think deeply about it in terms of their own theology and their understanding of the Bible and how God works. It's a part of our identity.

There's another identity that you may not think about very often. Many years ago, the Parliament of Canada provided for the Mennonite Brethren churches of Canada a very important document called a charter. It is a wonderful treasure. It's really the foundation that enables us to carry out our work with the full sanction and full authority that are given to Christian ministries here in Canada. It's something that all of us as members of a local church would be really hard-pressed if we didn't have. And so it's the reason that we still need each local church to be a member of a national conference: because we share this national charter.

So we have an identity together and, furthermore, we have built relationships. We have networks of friendships. There are many people that we have come to know and to appreciate and to love over the years. We have this identity as Mennonite Brethren across Canada.

But we also have important national partnerships. There are ministries that have grown up that are not just localized, or not just part of our provincial conferences, but they become an important part of our national work and ministry.

And so we have partnerships with MB Mission, who think about the proclamation of the gospel and the mobilizing of people into mission and ministry, both in the local, national, and global way. We want to strengthen those relationships. Our new national structure, in fact, continues to find ways that we will be one, that we will collaborate, that we will have both unity in our mission as well as coordination in the work that we do together, that we can be effective. And so, through them, we extend the reach of our ministry – both across the country and around the world – in proclaiming the gospel and planting Christ-centred churches that give witness to Jesus Christ.

So it's an important part of our common national mission together. But we share that with our Seminary. Training up leaders, equipping people in their understanding of both theology that's important in their work and in their ministry, but also in the way that they prepare and equip local leaders within churches, so that they can be effective in the work that God's called them to do in the church. Our seminary is a national partner in the work that we accomplish.

So, there are many ways that we share in this common national ministry together. We also recognize that across the country there are regions that are stronger and those that are weaker. So as we partner together in this national mission, we can reach into places where there aren't all that many MB churches.

In the province of Quebec, for example, we're so encouraged to see that both the churches that are there and the new churches that have been established are growing together in a greater sense of their collaboration in witness for Jesus Christ.

Atlantic Canada is another place that we want to really begin to focus on. And it's together that we can actually use our resources to strengthen the churches that already exist in that region of our country.

So, we have a nationally shared mission together.

But then we have partners that are very important to us, that are beyond just our particular stream of MB churches, that are important in the ministry that we accomplish. We are a part of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren churches and conferences around the world (ICOMB). There are over 30 of those conferences in many of our continents, and it's together with them that we can link together, that we can work together, that we can have a witness around the world. It's an important relationship that national provides for our local churches.

We share a partnership with other wonderful agencies like MCC Canada and, in our provincial contexts, with those expressions of MCC. We also have relationships with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), where we link together with other like-minded churches, and organizations, and believers for the things that matter in our country. These become very important relationships, and they are an important way that our local church can have a witness in this country through these partnerships.

So, when we ask the question, *Why have national at all?* we understand that there are some unique roles that only national can provide. While that means in this new reordered structure that we will actually reduce some of the footprint and costs related to that of our national ministry, we trust that we will continue to increase the impact through our local churches, through the provincial conferences – the impact of our Mennonite Brethren witness in this country. I know that you're praying with us about that.

I want to invite you to continue to consider the decision we're going to be putting before you at our Gathering in Saskatoon this July, as we consider together how it is that God would enable us to be both collaborative and how we can also be catalytic in the work that he's called us to do.

Thank you for the way that you engage, support us in prayer, and give to this ministry. God bless you.