

## *The Pastors Connection*

December 2012

### **Who Decides?**

*“But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘No, we want a king to rule over us’; even though the Lord your God was your King.” I Samuel 12:12*

It was when the Israelite people felt most threatened that they invested a person with authority to govern them, rather than trusting God to protect them through their collective strength. Anabaptist fore-parents’ recognized the revivalist power of “the priesthood of believers.” Only later did Mennonites empower “Bishops” to “rule over” them.

In light of current church-wide challenges I hear anew “Why don’t ACC or MCUSA leaders discipline congregations not in line with our Confession?” The simple answer is that we have not given them that power.

Many of us admire former CMC leaders of the Ira Kurtz, Roy Glick and Pastor Harvey generation; as we should. Should not our admiration trust their discernment to move away from a bishop model to one granting power to each congregation’s leadership team? They had witnessed destruction when bishops outside a congregation misused “kingly” authority. Bishops, Popes and Kings have authority to define dogma and discipline accordingly. But the NT shows leaders gathering in trust that God will reveal Himself through a messier Acts 15 meeting model.

In Matthew 5 Jesus redefines sin away from action to a condition of the heart. Following Christ’s lead in a previous context meant advocating a divorced man be entrusted with church leadership; while also advocating removal of membership for another man pursuing divorce. The first man had been abandoned by his wife before he was a believer and was now a faithful Christian husband, father, and returned mission worker. Although he was grieved over past sins, his life now revealed a heart overflowing with godliness. The second man was a life-long “believer” whose heart was arrogant as he pursued making his lover a trophy wife “worthy of his station in life”.

I would not want a church system that invested policy, or people outside the congregation with authority to keep an Elder Team from disciplining the arrogant man. Nor do I want a model where the first man could not be considered for leadership; for such a model would have tied God’s hands from calling home breaker Saul into Apostle Paul.

All my life I have sought to apply biblical values to moral and ethical questions. CMC members share that biblical practice. In spite of challenges alongside strengths in ACC and MCUSA, I praise God that five years ago we discerned to remain connected to our family of faith. Connection partners us with the many persons who share biblical values as reflected in *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. Isolation would silence our voice. How would withdrawal accomplish prophetic witness?

As long as Mennonite polity grants the local congregation authority to apply pastoral ethics I anticipate connection. And I embrace faith that God will provide wisdom to walk the journey. God does not hold CMC accountable for how other church leadership teams apply ethics. He does empower us to govern Conestoga's life together. We answer to Him accordingly.

I share that privilege with your Pastoral Team in joy, Pastor Bob Petersheim