

The Pastors Connection

Feb. 2011

Sensing God's Spirit On Campus

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..." Acts 1:8

Last week I again participated in the annual School of Leadership Training hosted by Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS). Thank you for supporting me in this rewarding interaction with peers. Each year I come away stimulated to pursue God's purposes with excellence relevant to our generation.

The workshops and seminars are generally led by EMS staff but the past three years the main speaker brought a prophetic perspective from outside the Mennonite faith. This year the theme was on the Holy Spirit. The guest speaker, Cheryl Bridges Johns, is ordained in the Pentecostal Church as a preacher and scholar. Her presentations were brilliant, challenging and inspiring.

Dr. Johns noted with grief that although the Pentecostal movement originally shared with Mennonites a commitment to pacifism, that gospel application has been minimized in her faith tradition. She also noted gently that in the first generations of Anabaptist Mennonite faith we were dynamic witnesses who could not be silenced. Dr. Johns referred to current Pentecostals as the "power church" and current Mennonites as the "peace church" and stirred us to wonder how each movement might recapture our lost part of gospel.

Two of the four workshops I participated in were led by EMS staff that came to the Mennonite church from non faith background. Each opened with a powerful testimony of God's Spirit convicting them of sin, healing them of deep brokenness, and leading them on a path that now includes teaching at EMS.

No family is perfect. Neither is any congregation. Nor is any church institution, including those with whom we partner in the Mennonite church. But I am deeply grateful that current and future church leaders are sitting at the feet of scholars who "rightly divide the word of truth" and whose lives show abundant fruit of evidence that God's Word and God's Spirit radically transformed their lives.

As you read this article our 2011 annual meeting should be history. But since I am writing three days prior to the meeting I don't know what you will discern concerning our recommended budget draft. All who review it will see a shift under the Mission category. There are literally thousands of excellent mission and ministry organizations with which we could partner. We are recommending that two priorities shape the mission portion of our budget in 2011 and forward: support of the mission and ministry efforts of the faith family to which we are directly connected (MCUSA), and other ministries in which CMC members are deeply invested by giving time and support.

As with each act of servant leadership, the Pastoral Teams commitment is to think and pray as we shape policy. Then we hold our “wisdom” lightly as we submit it to the Body; recognizing God’s dynamic Holy Spirit is within each member. When we gather together, the wisdom of the Spirit is multiplied in the collective group. As such, NT leaders dare never claim with dogmatic certainty “Thus saith the Lord” until the matter has been tested by the community of faith.

So once again I proclaim: Your counsel is welcome! We move forward with certainty of God’s blessing when we can say with the believers of Acts 15: “It seemed good *to the Holy Spirit and to us.*”

Joyfully living His story with you, Pastor Bob