

Contact: Sunoko Lin

Church Leaders Meet to Consider Launching a New Evangelical Anabaptist Ministry Network

Proposed Network Would Emphasize Evangelism, Accountability, and Disciple-Making

January 21, 2015 – More than 170 Mennonite and Anabaptist leaders, representing 75 congregations, gathered in Hartsville, OH from January 16-17 for two days of prayer, worship, conversation, and discernment around the theme of “Reimagining New Life Together.” There were also representatives from some conferences and Mennonite agencies. Sponsored by Anabaptist Renewal Circles (ARC), the consultation invited pastors, elders, and ministry leaders to share ideas around the possibility of a new Anabaptist ministry network that might be a home for congregations interested in covenanting together around the primacy of Jesus, obedience to Scripture, and bold evangelism.

The proposed new network would offer connection and accountability for churches that affirm the Mennonite Confession of Faith with a primary orientation around Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples.

Three sessions of worship and Bible-teaching anchored the gathering, with an emphasis on personal repentance of sin and submission to God’s Word as essential to the discernment process. Three ordained pastors from large congregations within the Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) shared sermons that called for renewed fervor for evangelism and baptizing new disciples in Jesus’ name: Wesley Furlong, lead pastor of Cape Christian Fellowship in Cape Coral, Florida; Bishop Leslie Francisco, senior pastor of Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Virginia; and Howard Wagler, lead pastor of Journey Mennonite Church in South Hutchinson, Kansas.

Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of MCUSA, also spoke from the main stage, offering his blessing on ARC’s desire to facilitate spiritual renewal and the proclamation of the Gospel.

During more than four hours of table discussion and open mic sharing, attendees reviewed a draft of the vision, core values, and theological commitments that would shape the development of the proposed new network. Attendees also stood up to share their personal convictions and prayers for what qualities they hope might define the new network. The most oft-repeated themes revolved around theological unity, Jesus Christ as the centerpiece of the faith, evangelism, biblical authority, intimate experiences with the Holy Spirit, relational intentionality, and personal accountability for obedient living.

Following the gathering, the ARC Steering Committee met and decided to form a taskforce that would consider next steps in launching a new network, with a desired launch date of Fall 2015.

Anabaptist Renewal Circles (ARC) was founded in June 2011 to mobilize the Mennonite and Anabaptist community to bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. To learn more about Anabaptist Renewal Circles, visit anabaptistrenewal.org.