

## Moderator's report

*"I pray that they all be one ... so that the world will believe you sent me"—John 17:21.*

During the past year, your Leadership Council has been dwelling in the Word by focusing on Jesus' prayer as recorded in John 17. This passage will also be the focus of our time together this summer at Celebration 2013.

To me, this prayer shows the heart of Jesus, He wants us to be united. Not just for our own sakes. But for everyone's sake—so that the world will believe in him.

As a conference, we have reason to celebrate many areas in which we have been united this past year:

- We agreed to sell our building in Somerset. It was a tough decision for some of us, but one we agreed was in the best interests of our future as a conference. And what a surprise that we had not one buyer but two! Thanks to the Zurich Group of State College, Pa., led by Jim Rosenberger, for working with us and buying the building.
- We had a wonderfully positive review of the work of our conference minister—"one of the most positive I have ever experienced," according to one of my colleagues on the Leadership Council who regularly participates in employee reviews. Thanks to Donna Mast for her dedication and hard work, all of which have made us more united as a conference. We are most fortunate to have her services.
- Almost without planning or structure on the part of conference, we are reaching out to those around us. The Bhutanese-Nepali Church of Pittsburgh continues to attract new believers. Shalom: a Peace Church of Brother Francis and Sister Clare is off and running in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh, Pa. World's Attic continues to minister in Somerset, Pa., and International Guest House, Washington, D.C., to people from around the world.
- We have a desire to be reconciled. The decision in 2005 to put Hyattsville Mennonite Church on a non-voting participant basis has been an uneasy one for us. We want to be reconciled, whatever that may mean. We now have in place a Reconciliation Discernment Committee to lead us in this expression of being one.
- We are laughing together again. I lost count of how many of you said that to me after Celebration 2012 last summer. I am grateful this is happening. Laughter is one sign of a healthy organization. The more we can laugh together, the more united we will become.

But even as we celebrate our unity, we must also remember there are divisions among us. We have work to do:

- Our different interpretations of Scripture continue to divide us, particularly on the issue of sexuality and same-sex relationships. Have we allowed the prevailing opinions of our culture to drive us, rather than a united and prayerful look at how we use Scripture and attendance to the voice of the Holy Spirit among us?

How we interpret Scripture has led at least one of our congregations to go on record that unless conference comes to the same position, they will be leaving our fellowship. While we understand the desire to be faithful, this stance also makes it difficult for your Leadership Council to proceed as we seek to determine our future as a conference.

- Finances continue to be a challenge for those of us charged with leading this conference. At the same time congregations are asking for expeditious and quality service, giving to the conference budget from congregations is on a slow decline. Thus one of the tough questions facing us as we review our structure is whether we can continue the level of staffing we currently have, particularly that of a full-time conference minister. Although the evidence is that we want more than full-time service!
- Closely related is the issue of the change in giving patterns. While giving to the conference budget slowly declines, designated giving is in a dramatic increase, with a record high of more than \$98,000 this year. So we continue to ask: how do we balance the appeal of specific projects with the need to finance the administration of our work?

These difficulties need not discourage us. We can view them as opportunities to help us become even more united as a people of God.

One way we will do this in the coming year is by evaluating our structure. When we adopted our new way of operating in 2011, we agreed to do this after a two-year trial period. Those two years are up this August.

But before we can evaluate our structure, we must talk about our future as a conference. What is our vision? What is our mission? As congregations and as individuals, do we love each other enough to pledge to work together in spite of our differences? These questions will be the focus of at least two of our times together as delegates, beginning at Celebration 2013 this summer and continuing in our fall session in November.

Jesus' plea for unity as recorded in John 17 came in a time much like ours, with much discord, diversity, and fractured relationships. Perhaps that is when it's most important to be reminded that we need to work together, to be united—"so that the world will believe."

—**J. Lorne Peachey**, *moderator*