

## Discussion #1

### Question 1: What is breaking down trust among leaders and congregations?

#### ❓ Poor communication

- Two issues identified: Conference minister issues; MCUSA
- Causes distrust
- Some feel like the “hinterlands” where info is known in H’burg, but not their areas
- Possibly that “not knowing” is related more to lay persons; pastors have been meeting regularly to discuss the MCUSA & LGBTQ concerns
- Faith & Life Commission is following the Pastoral Misconduct Policy & protecting those involved until further processing can occur with relevant parties; more info will be forthcoming

#### ❓ Unwillingness of MCUSA to accept diverse interpretations of the Bible. EX: using language of “repentance and forgiveness” when there are honest differences in interpretation of Biblical text

- There is uncertainty about on what footing we are relating in the current climate.
- One person feels lack of certainty around what it means to be clean or in proximity to Jesus?
- Do we as a church seek to find common enemies in our unity, rather than in something else?
- Perhaps what breaks trust is gathering into groups that have common enemies.
- Perhaps we have put our relationships together based on truth first, grace second. Perhaps grace should come first, and then we deal with truth.
- There is a fear that I can’t speak what I really feel in larger church leadership contexts.
  
- "othering," running on emotion, wanting to appear more spiritual, dispersed nature of VMC, leadership is not safe, discussion spaces are not safe, long held grudges, assumptions of moral superiority on traditional "side", denigration of motives of others
- Several in our group feel more connected and have more trust with their district leaders and congregations than with the conference
- not listening to each other, not curious enough to learn from others even if we disagree with them...
- If both sides of an issue are convinced that the other side's view is sinful, how can a leader be chosen to lead?
- not enough relationship-building across district lines
- we equate "trust" with "agree with me."
- Covid has created isolation among churches and without face-to-face interaction, it is easy for factioning to happen. The organizational structure of the District Ministers, where they spend much time traveling to Harrisonburg for the FLC meetings, is problematic as well. Until the

process with the Conference Minister is completed, it will be difficult to work at rebuilding trust. It was noted that there is profound hurt, anger, and frustration within congregations and factions at this time.

- Not feeling safe to share without being attacked. Behavior that is outside of the bounds of expected behavior. Wrong assumptions about the role of VMC leadership. Lack of orientation to the conference and how things are supposed to work. Assuming that we have shared values and theological perspectives. Leadership has become more and more educated causing a great divide between leadership and folks in the pews (especially the rural congregations).
- Regarding the Process for dealing with Crisis in Leadership: In a trust crisis there seems to be very little information shared or very little transparency of the specific offenses and who were offended. Failure to do so in a timely manner has negative implications to conference and those affected.
  
- Note necessarily seen breaking down of trust but more simply disagreement
  - These may not be the same thing
  - You can disagree without losing trust
- See signs of distrust
  - Groups meeting regularly separately for discussion to discuss differences
  - Is that distrust or simply sharing of common interests
    - Friendship groups – are these misinterpreted
- Significant lack of trust
  - During restructuring proposal ripped apart on conference floor, it was significant lack of trust with leadership fearing for more conservative congregations
  - When in conversation with younger leaders feeling unlistened to, disempowered, marginalized
  - Churches leaving due to lack of trust
- Is it disagreement or distrust?
- Perhaps it goes back to a fundamental thinking of who we are as a body of Christ
  - Together due to calling or basis of our own choosing – perhaps if we think of ourselves as blood relatives rather than friends
  - Global level or local level
- Unclearity of what it means to lead
- Need to have specific answers. Need to take a position on issues.
- Reflexive response that we don't need one another and institutions.
- Perception that VMC values some congregations as more integral to VMC than others.

- Asking people/groups to do work and then not accepting the results without picking it apart. (e.g. mission and vision statements)
- Remodeling/restructuring process
- Scholar paper on Biblical/Theological perspectives on same-sex relationships - presented as equally valid options (traditional perspective was poorly presented) feedback was invited, but not incorporated.
- Credentialing process: it felt like same-sex beliefs was a litmus test for being credentialled (8+ yrs ago)

- 
- Outside the church influences more than the church itself, leads to “camps” of opinion instead of trust.
  - However we find ways to be together and strengthen bonds in fellowship?
  - How might we bring our own people to be involved in our congregations in order to build trust “at home” first and then beyond? \_\_\_\_\_ bonds in our congregations, conference resource.
  - Locally maybe not a “crisis of confidence” as compared to conference (i.e. leaders and/or congregations to each other)
  - Proximity of relationships affect level of trust.
  - We have to not be convinced we are so right in our belief/opinion.

Question 2 Next page

## Question 2: How might we rebuild trust?

- Spending time together, leaving is always preceded by a stepping back from engagement, does our structure facilitate this?
- How can differences be used to draw us closer together?
- We need to come together in more times than just to discuss our differences!!
  - Spend 80% of your time in your non-problem area.
- Create an associate of Anabaptist minded churches to meet together regularly
  - Allow individual congregations/organizations to do church discipline themselves
  - Need a way of connecting that allows connecting without feeling like we have to work out all our differences

be flexible, be mature, be open to feedback, solicit feedback, accept responsibility for our parts, be humble, admit mistakes, assume good motives on the part of the other, assume the other is working to follow Jesus

Creating settings and opportunities for creating relationships where we can talk together and develop trust in one another.

Looking at what we have in common, seeing “that of God” in those we disagree with

Trust is rebuilt when there is safe space for sharing...if we give grace to each other

Meeting together again once Covid concerns are minimized will be helpful. Regarding District Ministers, it would be beneficial if they could be empowered to stay within their district for the majority of their time working with their congregations. For example, they could have more time to facilitate monthly pastors' meetings or groups of churches getting together for events. It was noted that rebuilding can benefit from a more grassroots effort. There is need for lament for the loss of congregations.

Compassionate listening! Provide an orientation to the conference for pastors and church leaders. Focus on washing each other's feet.

1. How do we form relationships around grace first, and then truth, where both are really important.
2. How do we create safe(r) spaces?
3. By meeting around tables and continuing to talk.

location

Service proximity

further out doesn't feel \_\_\_\_\_ as much

all-in, plugged in

not unique to us

Self-sacrificial giving i.e. living to serve

Leadership - for life, respect

disciple has things land hordes on themselves

legalistic has things land hordes

- Spiritual attack of the enemy toward the conference. We have not been attentive to this reality.
- It's about interpreting the scriptures.
- Even if we disagree, we can learn to live together, if we tell each other the truth.
- We need to learn how to resist in spiritual warfare - prayer, fasting together.
- Our leaders have had to attempt to serve in a context of great conflict between differing camps. The leaders are not necessarily the cause of the conflict. yet they are caught in it, and it has a spiritual dimension.
- The reality of same-sex relationships is in all parts of society and in our churches.
- Of course we should welcome all people, including those who are LGBTQ. But the question is whether we believe the behavior is something God blesses or not. Do we believe that all views are equal? Do we focus on "positions" regarding the interpretation of the scriptures or do we focus on the larger question of submission to the scriptures as authoritative? We do not believe all interpretations are equal. In fact, some may even be diabolical in origin.
- It's one thing to believe we are all brothers and sisters. It's another to demand that we all live in the same house.

-----

- Understand what constitutes shared worship. Recognize that some relationships are so contentious and strained that no investment in rebuilding trust exists.
- Choose not to define VMC in terms of a single position on a presenting issue.
- Share with one another what each of us needs and deeply values, especially when those are not begin met.

- 
- 5 statements by Sara were highly affirmed
  - could Assemblies of VMC be more focused on prayer, conversation, bible study and less on doing business? (we have experienced some of this, but would value even more.)
  - Are there ways we can better utilize online gatherings for engaging conversations & prayer (as has been done with VMM prayer times).

---

If we trust in Jesus we are on a winning team. What about trusting each other to help those who are in deep need? Reaching out to families battered by alcoholism and other addictions to improve the basic needs in our community.

Support and strengthen and trust church community ministries in our local contexts.

What does it mean to “hear from conference”? The churches not just conference minister.

ministry and mission (VMM) help channel our energy outward

meeting in person @PMC for delegate sessions

praying together, time spent together

hearing other local churches testimony of how God is working (presently missing)

mission focus, rather than years of theological controversy (in another denomination)