

February 3, 2010

Yutzy Alignment Report

After a sweeping yearlong study, Mennonite Church USA leadership has received a consultant's report on how the denomination operates and with suggestions to improve its witness. Consultant LaVern Yutzy's 22-page "Report on Alignment Opportunities for Mennonite Church USA" puts forth recommendations for 15 different areas of church organization, addressing issues such as the role of area conferences, Executive Board composition and the four churchwide program agencies' functions and structures.

To introduce his work, Yutzy states, "I consider it a very rare privilege to have had the opportunity to talk with 142 persons... Meeting these persons and participating in a variety of conference and denominational level meetings have underscored the high levels of commitment and competence that are present. There is clear evidence of a strong passion for the church and an appreciation for worship and prayer as an integral part of following Jesus."

Yutzy observed Mennonite Church USA as a denomination in change and affirmed our ability to live into the future. The alignment effort, he said, must be seen within the vision and commitment of Mennonite Church USA to embody and extend healing and hope. "Alignment efforts are not an end in themselves...if it has any value, this report will support our efforts to faithfully follow Jesus."

Noting area conferences' "significant frustration" at feeling marginalized, Yutzy calls for giving them greater prominence in the church. The role of denominational-level activity, he said, should be supporting the 21 Mennonite Church USA area conferences rather than congregations. Serving congregations should then be the conferences' responsibility.

"In order to identify resources that will facilitate the work of conferences, conferences themselves must be integrally involved in this ongoing conversation," Yutzy said.

One way to do that, he proposes, is reconfiguring the Executive Board to include five representatives from area conferences as well as one representative from each recognized racial/ethnic group in Mennonite Church USA.

Other recommendations include:

- * Executive Leadership and the four churchwide program agencies sharing support services as much as possible.
- * Adding MHS Alliance as a fifth agency.
- * Implementing a process to identify strategies to address each of the four churchwide priorities.

The Executive Board, which had hired Yutzy a year ago, received his report last month and has since distributed it to other denominational leaders and staff for their consideration. The report and responses will be a major agenda item at the Executive Board's Feb. 18-20 meeting in

Hampton, VA. At that time the board will develop a plan to receive feedback over the next number of months from those potentially most affected by the recommendations.

Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, Ervin Stutzman, noted that no decisions have been made about any of the recommendations in the report at this time. Each recommendation will be considered on its own merit over the next months in an appropriate forum for discussion and decision-making. Within this process there will be wide opportunity for participation by people who have a stake in the outcome. Stutzman is calling the church to prayer as we move into this period of discernment. The full text of Yutzy's report and recommendations can be found at http://www.mennoniteusa.org/Portals/0/YutzyReport_2010Jan12.pdf