



1 Study Conference
2 Mennonite Brethren General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel
3 Fresno, California
4 October 15-17, 1986
5
6
7

8 THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH: A COVENANTING PEOPLE
9

10
11 by Edmund Janzen
12

13 Among the urgent issues arising from the diverse theological movements
14 of the twentieth century is the question of the nature of the church. It is
15 not a simple matter for the church of our day to grasp the New Testament
16 concept of the church clearly, and to realize it in practice. Many models
17 of what it means to be the church are available today. However, less and
18 less frequently is the contemporary church defined as a covenanting
19 community of believers. Nor is such an understanding of the church commonly
20 present in how the people of God "do" church. Cultural, commercial, and
21 even political influences have tended to shape our concept of the
22 membership, organization, and mission of the church. It is possible to
23 discover extreme deviations in biblical understanding and in historical
24 expression of what it means to be the people of God. On the one hand one can
25 see a developed absolutism in which the individual member and even the
26 individual congregation are of little account (a hierarchical model based
27 on the succession of apostolic authority); on the other hand one can see a
28 pronounced individualism wherein the individual member and the individual
29 congregation insist upon complete self-determination, and absolute autonomy
30 (a free-church model based on freedom of association and congregational
31 authority). As is the case with all biblical concepts, it is difficult to
32 retain the biblical ideal within balance; so also regarding the view of the
33 New Testament church.
34

35 Central to the Mennonite Brethren view of the church (and consistent
36 with historical Anabaptism) is the conviction that the church is composed of
37 those who freely accept the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, turn away from a
38 life of sin, and voluntarily are baptized into the body of Christ as
39 expressed in a visible local congregation. Conversion for the Mennonite
40 Brethren (as for the Anabaptists) is a two-dimensional experience: (a) the
41 emphasis on justification by faith based on true repentance, and (b) the
42 result of a new life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ.
43 Indeed, faith in Christ must be linked with following Christ. The believer
44 must be deeply aware that he has said "No" to self-centered living and with
45 all his heart, mind and body must set out to live a new life for the Lord
46 and His Church. How one behaves will be determined by what one believes.
47 Similarly, ethical choices (what is morally good or bad) will reflect and be
48 consistent with the new inner nature of the believer, i.e., outward
49 expression and inward character must agree.

1 I. The Nature of the Covenant Community.
2

3 In a paper prepared for a Canadian Mennonite Brethren Study Conference
4 in 1978, John Redekop provides a visual chart in an effort to capture the
5 essence of the Believer's Church. (See Appendix A) The four "normal traits"
6 that characterize the Believers' Church as noted by Redekop are: 1) living
7 under the authority of the Word; 2) separation of church and state; 3) the
8 church as a voluntary gathering of covenanted believers, and 4) separation
9 of church and world.¹
10

11 It should be noted that the concept of the New Testament church as a
12 covenanting community of believers is not a notion of the twentieth or
13 sixteenth centuries. Rather there are ample antecedents in both Biblical
14 and historical perspective that document the validity of such a definition
15 of the church. The description of those chosen as God's set-apart people
16 appears in the Old Testament in terms of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic
17 covenants in Genesis and Exodus. To be sure, such an ideology of election
18 due to God's favor often bred an inclusive view of peoplehood which in turn
19 developed into spiritual arrogance. The prophets thundered against the
20 abuses of spiritual privilege and the failure to accept the responsibility
21 inherent in the covenant concept--(an historical lesson that should not be
22 lost on us today). At Pentecost, the 120 and all whom God would add to
23 them, were now the people of God, "in continuity with the people of the
24 Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants."² Paul, like Peter at Pentecost, made it
25 clear to Gentile believers that they too were a part of the historic (and
26 now new) people of God. It was the Galatians whom he called "the Israel of
27 God" (Gal. 6:16). The Gentiles, he said had been "alienated from the
28 commonwealth of Israel, and were strangers to the covenants of promise. . .
29 . but now . . . you who once were far off have been brought near in the
30 blood of Christ . . . who has made us both one, . . . one body through the
31 cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end" (Ephesians 2:12-22). As H.S.
32 Bender rightly concludes, "the new people of God are of course under a new
33 covenant and order, with a new mode of organization and administration, a
34 new standard of ethics, a new relationship to the world, and new resources
35 in Christ and the Holy Spirit for their life under the Lordship of Christ."³
36

37 Further, the identification of the disciples of Jesus as the covenant
38 people of God is supported by the New Testament's application of the church
39 to a multitude of other terms and concepts once applied to Israel in the Old
40 Testament--the remnant, the elect, the sons of Abraham, a holy nation, the
41 exodus pilgrims. And that was their self-perception as well. Though
42 never using the word ecclesia (lit., "called out together ones") in his
43 epistles, Peter states most clearly the idea that the body of believers
44 ("God's own people") is the continuing people of God (I Peter 2:9-10)--but
45 only if they respond to God's grace. As Israel, so the church. The
46 covenant was not effective at Sinai until Israel responded in obedience
47 solely to God. Similarly the church came into existence in response to God,
48 by repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit came (and comes) only upon those
49 who believe.
50

51 A footnote from church history is appropriate here concerning the
52 Anabaptists of the Reformation period who sought to be the true church of

1 Christ after the New Testament pattern, and who consequently rejected the
2 mass church of the Reformers for the believers' church.

3
4 They could have spared themselves untold suffering at the hands of
5 the persecuting state churches had they been willing to suspend
6 the creation of visible churches committed in full obedience to
7 Christ. There were those who did this, pre-eminently the
8 Spiritualists of their day, Caspar Schwenckfeld and others. But
9 the very heart of the Anabaptist commitment to Christ was to
10 follow Him openly in life. The new life in Christ was to be in
11 evidence, wrought out in the human relations of the concrete
12 social order. There was to be no crypto-discipleship in the
13 private retreat of contemplation. Nor was there to be any
14 surrender to the life standards of the world by a retreat into
15 justification by faith. Christ was to be made visible in the
16 church, and the church was to be made visible in the world,
17 whatever the cost. This the Anabaptists conceived to be the
18 original apostolic pattern of the church as given in the New
19 Testament, and they viewed themselves as restoring this pattern,
20 and thus completing the Reformation.⁴

21
22 From historical perspective it is noteworthy that the founding leaders
23 of the Mennonite Brethren church in 1860 saw themselves as the spiritual
24 heirs of the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, and of the New Testament
25 church before that. In the Document of Secession (January 6, 1860) they
26 made four specific references to the teachings of Menno Simons, and then
27 concluded their declaration with the significant statement: "In all other
28 articles of our confession, we are also in accord with Menno Simons."⁵
29 Interestingly, the name "Mennonite Brethren" which the founding fathers gave
30 to the new church in 1860 was not the result of practical expediency, nor a
31 matter of ecclesiastical diplomacy. "It was," says J.A. Toews, "a conscious
32 and deliberate identification with the historic theological position of the
33 Anabaptist Mennonite movement."⁶

34 35 II. Joining the Covenant Community

36
37 For Mennonite Brethren since 1860, baptism of the adult believer was
38 "the covenant of a good conscience toward God" (I Peter 2:21); it was the
39 hallmark of discipleship; it was the pledge of a complete commitment to obey
40 Christ; it was a witness to the transforming grace of God in the life.
41 Reception into church membership followed the ordinance of baptism.
42 Congregational life and work have always been an important part of being a
43 member of a Mennonite Brethren church. "When believers join the church,
44 they become part of a Christian family in which each member carries
45 responsibility for all other members, including the decision-making. The
46 freedom to join in decision-making is, however, coupled with the obligation
47 to follow the entire body in its version and decisions whether one agrees or
48 disagrees with them."⁷ Implied in this statement is an approach to
49 decision-making that yields individual rights and opinions for the good of
50 the corporate whole. Also implied is a covenantal style of being and doing
51 church.

1 Frequently (depending upon leadership and direction of the local
2 Mennonite Brethren church) newly baptized believers were asked to review and
3 accept a "covenant," a written understanding of mutually shared
4 responsibilities incumbent upon all members. Though this collection of
5 statements often contained positive admonitions to attend, to tithe, to
6 witness, to pray, to bear burdens, it was often viewed as a legalistic
7 code of ethics: not to smoke, not to drink, not to dance, not to associate
8 with "the world."

9
10 Today many view church membership as an option. More importantly, many
11 in our Mennonite Brethren churches who have joined, view church membership
12 as an individual privilege. Indeed, American Evangelicalism suggests a view
13 of salvation that is subjective and individualistic: if one confesses one's
14 sins and loves Jesus, one is ready for baptism, and that is sufficient. For
15 some, membership in a local body is of secondary, or limited importance;
16 certainly it is not seen as essential to living the Christian life in terms
17 of individual ethical decision-making in personal life styles. Thus a
18 certain independence emerges; our church members become "free spirits" not
19 readily accountable to anyone but to their consciences and the Holy Spirit.
20 By attitude and by act many deny that they are their "brother's keeper," or
21 that their brother/sister should even evidence concern for them. Yet the
22 New Testament stresses the matter of mutual concern for one another,
23 including matters of conduct in everyday life (Galatians 6:1-2) (I Thess.
24 5:11). Joining the church did and should still represent a seriously
25 considered and voluntary choice. It marks a juncture of individual
26 discipleship with corporate discipleship. In the Anabaptist practice, the
27 believer covenanted by baptism with the congregation to become submissive to
28 its discipline and to participate in its total fellowship. Thus the form of
29 the congregation (i.e., its polity) was that of a voluntarily gathered group
30 that covenanted together in regard to their witness of the Lordship of
31 Christ and to the Holy Spirit binding them together.

Members. =

*call to covenant loyalty -
bounded sets. -*

32
33 Futher, notes Katie Funk Wiebe in Who Are the Mennonite Brethren? "this
34 basic view of the corporate Christian life is also the basis for the way
35 Mennonite Brethren congregations function today. Though spread far and wide
36 geographically, we opt to function as one body in many aspects of our
37 denominational witness. . . . All are invited to join spirits, gifts and
38 energy at various conference levels to extend the Kingdom of God. . . .
39 Member churches are expected to support conference activities, recognize and
40 abide by all conference resolutions, and carry them out to the best of their
41 abilities."⁸

42
43 While it is true that our Confession of Faith in describing the
44 organization of the church states "each congregation regulates its own
45 affairs," it goes on to state "the work of the brotherhood is conducted in a
46 spirit of interdependence, love, and submission one to another under the
47 Lordship of Christ."⁹

48
49 In 1950, a document on "Evangelical Freedom in the Mennonite Brethren
50 Churches of Canada" was presented by the Board of Spiritual and Social
51 Concerns and was adopted by the Canadian Conference. In the resolution a
52 significant reference to the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) is

*congregational consensus - what measure of it
is required? Acts 15*

1 made as a means of addressing the spirit of localism and individual church
2 autonomy.

3
4 By means of this council the principle was established that for
5 the resolution of difficult questions, one assemble, deliberate,
6 and come to a consensus. Then the resultant decision is to be
7 conveyed to the churches, to serve as a guide for church life and
8 action. Such decisions should conform to the Word and directive
90 guidance of God. The resolution of these questions was not left
10 to individual churches, not even to Paul or Peter, but was
11 expected from the corporate body of mature brethren.¹⁰

12
13 This shared commitment to the Lordship of Christ is crucial to a proper
14 understanding of a true believers' church. It is the basis for motivation
15 in a free and joyful obedience to God's will and for responsible
16 participation with the people of God. It is at the point of such a
17 commitment on the part of an individual member or a local church that the
18 realization of the biblical view of the church as a covenant community will
19 either rise or fall.

20 21 III. Discipline in the Covenant Community

22
23 The believers' church concept of discipline is based on God's Word
24 (Matthew 5:23-24) (Matthew 18:15-19). It emerges from the teaching of
25 Jesus, and its context is that in a covenant community there is no "private"
26 sin. The sin of one member involves the entire body. Thus the corporate
27 church carries responsibility for the sin of each individual, and the indi-
28 vidual carries responsibility for all his brothers and sisters. The church
29 as a covenant community exercises a lively sense of sin--not in an
30 hierarchical manner but in a mutual "caring-enough-to-confront" manner.
31 Only a church that believes in and practices discipline maintains the
32 sanctity of the body of Christ. It is in such a church, where mutual
33 responsibility is practiced, that one is held accountable (and holds others
34 accountable) in following through on one's commitment to Christ. Discipline
35 is shared by members and made binding at the point where a corporate
36 consensus is obtained under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the
37 yardstick of the Scriptures. Indeed, searching the Scriptures until a
38 consensus is reached replaces the spirit of individualism so common today.

39
40 It is the contention of Marlin Jeschke in Discipling the Brother that
41 where the covenant concept is only acknowledged or understood by individual
42 members and churches, the easiest avenue available to address offenses and
43 grievances will be the legal route. Who can deny that in our culture today
44 even Christians choose to litigate matters in courts of law that should have
45 best been adjudicated within the pale of the congregation?¹¹ Unless a local
46 congregation (or a district/provincial conference) spells out the
47 expectations of members and member churches in their common life as the
48 people of God, more and more cases of church discipline will go unresolved
49 only the most blatant and public offenses will be adjudicated, and more
50 members will follow the cultural pattern of suing one another and the
51 church(es) in order to settle grievances.

1 Once again the covenant community of the Mennonite Brethren must
2 activate what it has committed itself to do in its Confession of Faith:

3
4 Through public teaching, sympathetic encouragement, private
5 counseling and earnest rebuke, the church promotes constructive
6 discipline. Believers are encouraged to live a life of Christian
7 discipleship, and to progress toward spiritual maturity so that
8 the church will glorify God in the world.

9
10 God's Word is the standard for church discipline. Christians
11 living in sin must be admonished in brotherly love and sincerity.
12 Where private counseling fails, the church exercises redemptive
13 discipline. If warnings are disregarded and the attitude of
14 rebellion and estrangement persists, the offender is formally
15 excluded from the fellowship of the church. Believers, however,
16 must continue to practice love and compassion toward the erring
17 one in order to win him back. When he repents of his sin, the
18 church forgives, reinstates him into fellowship and encourages him
19 in the Christian life.¹²

20 21 IV. Dialogue and Discernment in the Covenant Community

22
23 Dialogue within the church assumes the equality of believers in Christ.
24 This means that each member has something to contribute to the understanding
25 of God's will for the church. The importance of lay participation is clear:
26 the accent is not on any one person's view, but on the principle of
27 consensus and the priesthood of believers. The covenant community is the
28 context for ethical decision-making. Paul shamed the Corinthians for going
29 before pagan courts with lawsuits against one another. Indeed, Paul
30 contended that even "the least esteemed" member of the Corinthian church was
31 competent to judge such matters because he/she too had the Holy Spirit (I
32 Corinthians 6:18). Similarly, the solution to the problem at Thessalonica
33 recommended by Paul was "testing" (spiritual discernment)--"Do not quench
34 the Spirit . . . but test everything" (I Thessalonians 5:19-21. RSV). The
35 mode of discernment is conversation. The quality of its conversation is
36 what sets apart the covenant community. How do we "test the spirits" today?
37 An old Anabaptist baptismal formula asked, "Will you give counsel and
38 receive counsel?" The formula presupposed a communal approach to problems
39 (e.g. ethical, social) in which every baptized member was expected to
40 participate. Honesty, openness, and a willingness to discern what is right
41 and wrong are necessary ingredients of the covenant community.

42
43 Local congregations (as well as the larger conference) need to exercise
44 their gifts of discernment with crucial current issues in mind. It is
45 simply a practical necessity as well as good theology, for it is
46 increasingly impossible to separate personal and social problems, especially
47 within the urban context. The church must not succumb to the culture around
48 it. Our culture today is both pluralistic and yet individualistic; it
49 espouses ethical relativism and dismisses absolutes. Consequently, our
50 churches are less and less prone to hold people morally responsible for
51 their actions. For those who suspect that taking a church covenant
52 seriously implies the imposition of a legalistic code, there are words of

1 reassurance. Indeed few would choose to live a joyless life under a code of
2 repressive legalism.

3
4 Legalism flourishes in an institutionalized environment where the
5 reasons for "doing things right" have become as important as the reasons for
6 "doing right things." Dr. Paul Hiebert provides some helpful insights to
7 the matter of legalism and ethical decision-making in a chapter entitled
8 "Conversion in Cross-cultural Perspective" (see Conversion: Doorway to
9 Discipleship by Henry J. Schmidt, ed.).¹³ He suggests that the majority of
10 the Western church thinks in terms of "bounded sets," i.e., our minds think
11 of a set of common characteristics held by a certain object, group, or class.
12 Therefore, we can quickly define an apple as distinct from an orange. While
13 both have essential qualities of a fruit, there is a clearly noted boundary
14 between the categories. A fruit is either an apple or it is not. It cannot
15 be 70% apple and 30% orange. So all objects in a bounded set are uniform in
16 characteristics. Similarly we tend to define Christians in terms of a
17 "bounded set." The boundary clearly is noted in terms of right beliefs and
18 right practice. Thus one can emphasize certain behavior patterns (both
19 positive and negative) as essential in defining who is or is not a
20 Christian.

21
22 Hiebert recommends a "centered set" approach to Christian ethics. Less
23 common to our Western minds is the notion that (as in a magnetic field) the
24 primary focus in deciding what is or is not Christian is what is at the
25 center, and whether movement is toward the center or away from it. Thus,
26 rather than focusing on the boundary, the primary emphasis is on the Prime
27 Motive in our life, Jesus Christ, and whether we are moving deliberately
28 closer to Him or away from Him. Thus behavior (good and bad acts) is judged
29 not so much in terms of stepping out of bounds as in terms of dynamic growth
30 towards Christ-likeness. "Bounded set" mentality quickly lends itself to
31 codifying practices and patterns (legalism); "centered set" thinking
32 provides the option of focusing on relationships and attitudes (freedom).
33 Even a covenant community of believers could develop a framework of legalism
34 as the basis of its covenant. Unfortunately, some within the Mennonite
35 Brethren brotherhood can testify to such motives and methods in their past.
36 Legalism refuses to allow for variance and much like the Pharisees, locates
37 spiritual maturity in right acts.

38
39 The implications of this form of the covenant community are urgent for
40 us. The agenda of the congregation needs to grow out of the needs within
41 the groups where the will of the Lord is sought. This is part of
42 discipleship. Consider the biblical model for ethical decision-making in
43 the church. Acts 15 provides the setting for the Church Council at
44 Jerusalem, an event to which Luke plainly attaches the highest importance.
45 It is interesting to note that the apostles did not simply hand down an
46 edict as a solution to the problem caused by the rapid progress of Gentile
47 evangelization in Antioch and vicinity. (Peter's personal solution was to
48 withdraw from Gentile believers due to the requirements of Jewish
49 tradition!) The danger of complete cleavage between the Jerusalem church
50 and the Antioch church loomed ominously. The "brotherhood" at Jerusalem was
51 given an opportunity for dialogue and decision-making. However, the church
52 did not merely discuss, but engaged in seeking the will of God earnestly to
53 solve a sticky ethical issue. What emerged was an apostolic letter; yet the

1 process was one of mutual discipleship. The result was not legalism.
2 Legalism is impersonal dogma; discipleship is personal following. In
3 legalism the code stands sovereign; in discipleship the believer follows the
4 Master. Legalism allows for no exceptions; discipleship seeks to relate
5 individual conduct to the claims of Christ in everyday situations as tested
6 by the larger church. Legalism judges all alike. Mutual discipleship
7 recognizes that believers follow Christ in the light of their corporate
8 understanding of the will of God and their maturity in Christ. The covenant
9 community approach provides the context for collective wrestling with
10 significant issues, thus furthering the understanding of God's will. A
11 covenant seen in that light can become a blessing rather than a burden.
12

13 V. Promoting Unity and Loyalty in the Covenant Community

14

15 The New Testament tells us that while local churches were distinct
16 bodies of believers, they were not absolutely independent despite ethnic,
17 geographic, and cultural barriers. Indeed, the decision and advice of the
18 Jerusalem conference in Acts 15 (cited earlier) were sent to all the
19 churches so that these resolutions might guide them in their thinking. It
20 appears that Paul did not readily separate one church from another in his
21 thinking, for frequently what he wrote to one church became applicable to
22 all the churches (the Colossian and Laodicean churches were to exchange
23 Paul's letters to them, cf. Col. 4:16). Former M.B. Conference leader Dr.
24 A.H. Unruh once said, "In the Scripture we learn that the churches moved
25 forward unitedly. The Scripture does not teach the absolute independence in
26 the local church."¹⁴

27
28 In the today's contexts of pluralism--many denominations, many causes,
29 and many leaders--those churches claiming a common understanding of their
30 history, mission, and purpose should advocate interdependence and unity.
31 Thus the churches of a conference such as the Mennonite Brethren are bound
32 together in fellowship and understanding of the nature of the N.T. church.
33 Primarily theological and historical distinctives and not ecclesiastical
34 structure or machinery give shape to the larger church.

35
36 To promote unity and loyalty (the spirit of wanting to belong), the
37 people of God must sense a common vision--a direction that the churches can
38 affirm, and a goal that the churches can grasp. Unless such a vision is
39 sufficiently transcendent and calls local churches to a higher level of
40 commitment and service, the conference runs the risk of "losing" churches
41 and their members to other causes and ministries, many of which may be
42 worthy and virtuous. Conference institutions (schools, boards, agencies)
43 have the right to ask as servant-arms of the larger church conference
44 what the vision and direction for the future are. Similarly, local churches
45 must recognize, affirm and demonstrate unity with and loyalty to the larger
46 church conference. This is an important issue for the spiritual health of
47 the corporate covenant community. A local church should have the integrity
48 to follow through on the commitments that its informed delegates have made
49 in its behalf at church conventions--whether related to matters of doctrine,
50 ethics or handling financial obligations to conference projects.

1 Since the touchstones of the covenanting community are integrity and
2 mutual responsibility, it is incumbent on each local church to work
3 aggressively at developing and sustaining unity and loyalty by interpreting
4 to itself the central vision and the various ministries of the conference of
5 which it is a part. Similarly it is incumbent upon church conference and
6 pastoral leadership to articulate a unifying vision which will cause local
7 churches to want to belong and to support.

8
9 V. Several Practical Suggestions

- 10
11 a. Our local Mennonite Brethren churches need to seriously discuss and
12 pray about those positions that the larger brotherhood has taken.
13 Very few of our younger members have been part of decision-making
14 procedures and often view conference resolutions as legalisms of a
15 former generation. They do not own them and may therefore disregard
16 them. What stance do local churches and members take to
17 "conference" issues? Not only is the concept of discipleship and
18 covenant community at stake here, but so is the important feeling of
19 ownership of and identification with our conference.
20
21 b. Our local Mennonite Brethren churches would do well to provide a
22 positive context for teaching the principles of ethical
23 decision-making and the "doing" of ethics. The development of a
24 greater sense of loyalty and involvement will be the result when
25 people feel they are part of the decision-making process and
26 experience the joy of shared responsibility and accountability.
27 Seminars on ethics, a series of studies on the nature of the
28 believers' church, and sermons or classes on decision-making
29 and discipleship are several suggestions for local church agencies.
30
31 c. When our local Mennonite Brethren churches view themselves as
32 covenant communities, they will be less threatened by cultural
33 change. Indeed, the consensus model provides a way of initiating
34 change and yet allows for group cohesiveness. So often the church
35 reacts to cultural pressures by "caving in" in bits and pieces as
36 first one, then two, and then a stream of members pursue an
37 individual course. Discussion after the fact is too late; rigorous
38 discussion before and during the fact can make it possible for a
39 group to either change as a group or reaffirm its previous stance.
40 In any event, "doing things" for the right (Scriptural) reasons is
41 patently superior to "doing things" because everyone else is doing
42 them.
43
44 d. Mennonite Brethren churches should be encouraged to activate a
45 simple church (covenant) as a useful vehicle for the teaching and
46 training of its members in terms of responsibility and
47 accountability. Those who are newly baptized or are joining from
48 other fellowships should be fully informed as to the nature of a
49 believers' church that takes the mutual care of its membership
50 seriously. The expectations of membership in our local
51 congregations should be communicated honestly to those voluntarily
52 seeking membership. (See Appendixes B and C for suggested church

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

covenant models). The stress should be on seeing the covenant as a positive means of relating biblical principles to ethical issues.

- e. The General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel should initiate a change of name of the Conference that is consistent with and reflects covenant theology. Both symbol and substance are important in determining what our name communicates to ourselves and to others.

Since 1963 we have been the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America. Such a name suggests a view of the church that accents local church autonomy and is descriptive of a loosely bound confederation of churches. Should not the name of our denomination reflect more accurately our ecclesiology and our desired polity? The adoption of the name The Mennonite Brethren Church of North America would be more consistent with what we believe about who we are (a Believers' Church) and who we want to become (a Covenanting Community). Polity implications inherent in such a change are as follows:

- 1) the development of church/conference structures that provide for autonomy with accountability;
- 2) the greater integration of conference structure so that conferences do not operate too independently;
- 3) a greater uniformity in local church governance with toleration for differences in worship and leadership styles;
- 4) greater General Conference visibility in the local church.

Covenant model .

Erosion of unifying focus and influences.
Strong teaching (of) covenant theology and ethics of daily living.

1 Footnotes and Bibliography

2
3 ¹John H. Redekop, "The Mennonite Brethren as a Believers' Church: Past,
4 Present, and Future." A paper presented at a Canadian M.B. Study Conference
5 in June, 1978.

6
7 ²Harold S. Bender, These Are My People (Scottsdale: Herald Press,
8 1962), 2.

9
10 ³Ibid., 4.

11
12 ⁴Ibid., 20-21.

13
14 ⁵J.A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro:
15 M.B. Publishing House, 1975), 3.

16
17 ⁶Ibid., 3.

18
19 ⁷Katie Funk Wiebe, Who Are the Mennonite Brethren? (Hillsboro:
20 Kindred Press, 1984), 29.

21
22 ⁸Ibid., 29.

23
24 ⁹Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren
25 Churches, (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1976), 15.

26
27 ¹⁰J.A. Toews, People of the Way, (Winnipeg: The Christian Press,
28 1981), 49.

29
30 ¹¹Marlin Jeschke, Discipling the Brother, (Scottsdale: Herald Press,
31 1972).

32
33 ¹²Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren
34 Churches (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1976), 15.

35
36 ¹³Henry J. Schmidt, (ed.), Conversion: Doorway to Discipleship,
37 (Hillsboro: Board of Christian Literature, 1980).

38
39 ¹⁴A.H. Unruh, The Christian Leader, 15 September 1955: 4-5.

40
41 Other Bibliographic Sources

42
43 BOOKS

44
45 Bender, R.T. The People of God. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971.

46
47 Garrett, James L. (ed). The Concept of the Believer's Church. Scottsdale,
48 Herald Press, 1969.

49
50 Kyle, Richard G. From Sect to Denomination. Hillsboro, Center for
51 Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1985.

1 Kraus, C. Norman. The Community of the Spirit. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,
2 1974.

3
4 Manitoba Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. My Church Covenant.
5 The Christian Press, Winnipeg.

6
7
8 STUDY PAPERS

9
10 Hein, Marvin. "The Church, Its Regulations and the Individual Member."
11 Unpublished paper read at the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren
12 Churches Study Conference, Reedley, CA, November 23-24, 1967.

13
14 Hiebert, Waldo. "The Scriptural Definition of the Nature of the Church."
15 Unpublished paper read at the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren
16 Churches Study Conference, Denver, CO, July 12-16, 1958.

17
18 Toews, Paul. "Myths and Realities of Mennonite Community Today."
19 Unpublished paper read at the Common Life Conference, Laurelville, PA,
20 February, 1986.