



## Summary of discussions on “Our Purposeful Plan” Kansas City Delegate Assembly, July 2015

Responses came from 71 (out of 93 possible) table groups. Table groups responded to the three areas listed below.

### **1. Agreement/disagreement with lines 788-789 under Resources or Regulations: “. . .[not] a highly centralized denomination organized to regulate the life of conferences/congregations.”**

There was broad affirmation for the emphasis on congregations as primary and on the importance (and priority) of the national conference providing resources. A number of tables spoke of needing both resources and regulation, saying that there should be a balance (though leaning more toward resources).

There were also strong statements in support of articulating common beliefs, accountability, and some kind of regulatory role at the national level. Some wanted to use the word “accountability” instead of “regulation.” Several tables stated that resources/regulations seemed more like a polarity to manage, rather than an “alternative route.”

There was some awareness that we speak differently about “regulation” depending on whether it moves in the direction we want to support or whether it applies to us or others. Some expressed opposing views as to whether the board’s leadership was too regulatory or not strong enough. Taken as a whole, comments reflect the contested views on this issue in our church currently.

Some specific comments:

- Emphasis on resources rather than regulation, conversation rather than control.
- We need accountability and a unified voice, but this is best done in a congregational or conference context.
- We are not looking for “top down” leadership unless it goes the way we want it to go.
- We enjoy autonomy at local level, but also feels too decentralized. What do “we” believe?
- Surprised by lack of prophetic, shepherding direction from leadership.
- People want more authority on some issues and looser regulation on some issues (pick and choose which issues).
- There is fragmentation if focus is primarily about resources; we need to have boundaries and center...more than “Jesus is Lord.”
- Affirm focus on resources, but in the last two years the Executive Board has seemed more in a regulatory mode than in a resourcing mode.
- Don’t want a bishop, top-down model, but feel that Mennonite Church USA has swung to the opposite direction with only delegates making a decision. Executive Board cannot seem to make decisions without delegates.

### **2. Which of the 10 items in lines 795-805 most closely touch your congregation.**

Several table groups said all were important; some became more important, depending on context and circumstance in the congregation. Most table groups did some kind of tally to answer this question, but used different methods:

some delegates chose just one answer, others chose two or three. The list below represents a summary of the number of times each item was mentioned, and the results are interesting, even if the methods were disparate. Listing is from most frequently mentioned to least mentioned.

- 81x's 1. A sense of identity and belonging that transcends the local context.
- 68x's 6. Support for calling, training, and sustaining congregational leaders.
- 67x's 8. Avenues to cooperate with other groups on projects in mission or relief.
- 53x's 3. Educational resources and other means of discipleship.
- 27x's 9. Outside help when congregations face intense conflicts or personnel issues.
- 16x's 2. Ways to cultivate healthy interdependence with other congregations.
- 15x's 5. Broader discernment regarding tough issues that arise in pursuit of our mission in the world.
- 15x's 7. Ways to keep communal vision and memory alive and refreshed
- 12x's 4. Encouragement during difficult times in congregational life.
- 9x's 10. A shared public voice when broad consultation is needed in order to speak well.

### 3. Indicate which of the thirty-two 2015-17 goals most closely touch their congregation.

If table group comments are any indication, delegates had good discussion about the 2013-1015 goals report and the 2015-17 goals; almost 58% of the table group comments (15 out of a total 26 pages) were about these two documents. There was some review of the 2013-15 goals. Appreciative comments were made about each of the seven goals, with specific mention of the programs listed under each goal.

There was broad discussion of and affirmation for the items listed in the 2015-17 goals. One table expressed a view that seemed to reflect the thoughts of many: "We (table 61) affirm the Purposeful Plan and appreciate the clarity of the document. The seven priorities are all worth our time and resources. As congregations, we are drawn to one or two more than others, but that doesn't devalue any of the priorities. We need each other to meet the goals of the Purposeful Plan. . . "

Here are some comments collected under each goal:

**Christian Formation.** This goal was frequently mentioned. Appreciation for *Begin Anew* and *The Gathering Place* website (mentioned 7x). Affirmation for efforts to provide new resources to revitalize spiritual life. Mention of a desire for a new adult Sunday school curriculum.

**Christian Community.** This goal was also frequently mentioned in table groups. Concerns of biennial convention (with cost, distance, participants tend to be white middle class). Appreciation for resources on biblical discernment and for focus on Christian unity in the face of social and political polarities.

**Holistic Christian Witness.** This goal received heavy emphasis from table groups. Strong articulation of need to invest in church planting, especially among immigrant groups and young adults. Appreciate emphasis and want even more. Several mentions of affirmation for the upcoming church planting summit. Several groups mentioned appreciation for witness/work with veterans (6x's). Affirm intentionality of church planting. A number of tables mentioned support for Israel-Palestine "Come and See" tours, both in past biennium and 2015-17.

**Stewardship.** Tables affirmed Everence's work on providing financial aid to struggling pastors (Lilly grant). Also affirmation for other financial planning and end of life resources from Everence. Appreciation for work with challenges faced by young adults and young families.

**Leadership Development.** Support for focus on resources for first-time pastors; hope these can be available in more than one language; also need for seasoned coaches. Several comments were made that we need to continue to work with sexual misconduct policies. Support for review of the Ministry Inquiry Program.

**Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation.** Strong affirmation for work on Doctrine of Discovery (from 12 table groups), as well as support for Hope for the Future Gatherings and work on intercultural

competency. Continued support for work on undoing racism. Appreciation for Women Doing Theology conferences, but question: why is this listed under Undoing Racism and not leadership development?

**Church-to-Church Relationships.** Affirmation for this goal, but not as many comments from table groups.

One table mentioned support for work at relationships with the Lutheran Church; another table said that effort was “not obviously useful”, but said it was vital to work with mega churches. Two tables mentioned support for relaunching Believers’ Church Conference. One table said it was important to work on church-to-church relationships “near and far”, while another table encouraged relationships with African-American congregations.

**There were also these additional comments about goals that should be added to the Purposeful Plan:**

- Several tables said we need to work more on income inequality and poverty as an issue. One table noted, “Jesus was very concerned about economics. Have our institutions become captive to accumulated wealth?” Several tables asked how we build solidarity between rich and poor.
- Several groups (five) noted the absence of a creation care goal (seen as a "removal" compared to 2013-2015). It was noted, “Our logo is a bird and olive branch; two living things relating to Creation!” We need to have goals on Creation care and climate change; on stewardship of the earth/environment.
- There were eight different comments reflecting support for a new music collection.
- Two comments about Everence working more with poorer congregations with financial management issues: “Everence resources work best with higher income level members. Some urban areas in particular contain members with marginal resources. We need resources for these people. Instead of doing things ‘for’ people, we want to do things ‘with’ them.”
- One comment reflected a desire for more of an urban ministry focus; looking for goals directly focused on Hispanic churches; looking for work against sexual trafficking and slavery; wanting a focus on prison reform/racism in the criminal justice system.
- One delegate said, “Would like to see one baby at every table at the next delegate convention! Seriously.”