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Place: Blumenort Community Church and online  
Date: Saturday, November 25, 2023  
Attending: Conference Delegates, Staff, Open to the Public  
Chair: Abe Bergen (Moderator)  
Recorder: Erica Fehr  
Call to Order: 9:00 a.m.

Chair: Abe Bergen, Moderator

1. Welcome – Abe Bergen
2. Worship – Mitchell Martens, Associate Pastor of Youth, Blumenort Community Church
3. Opening – Barry Plett, Associate Pastor of Camp and Community, Blumenort Community Church
  - a. Whenever Israel is in the news Christians tend to think apocalyptically.
  - b. Some Christian personalities have named the date of Christ’s return, and all have been wrong.
  - c. When Jesus visits the temple in Matt 24 with his disciples, they are enamoured of the building, but Jesus is not as impressed. True worship, he teaches, is in spirit and truth and the temple would be toppled.
  - d. Jesus lays out what the disciples will experience: wars and rumours of war, etc.
  - e. Matt 24 is intended for the lifetime of the hearers, but woven into it, is the future.
  - f. Jesus gives clear instructions to keep watch, be alert, be ready.
  - g. But we should not be cynical—Jesus is coming back.
4. Introduction to Hybrid Meeting
  - a. Welcome to those online
  - b. There will be two votes today and we will count raised hands of those in the room and online.
  - c. Conference Council Minutes of June 3, 2023  
**Decision: M/S David Kruse/Josh Muehling to adopt the minutes of the June 3, 2023 Conference Council Meeting. Carried**
5. General Board
  - a. Overview – Emery Plett
    - i. Emery began on July 17, 2023, and is getting to know people and continuing to learn his role and responsibilities.
    - ii. Staff have been able to go out to visit churches. Emery most recently took a trip west and had good conversations with leaders in Regions 1 and 2 churches. He plans to go East in the new year.
    - iii. Two current projects are reviewing EMC gatherings and external affiliations to make sure we are aligned and using energy well.
    - iv. It is exciting to see how many churches have chosen to sponsor an Afghan family.
    - v. Reminder to delegates to subscribe to EMC Today. Also note other communication avenues including the EMC website, The Messenger, social media and missionary prayer notes.

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- vi. Prayer of dedication for Gerald Reimer
  - b. Personnel Committee (PC) – Emery Plett
    - i. The PC is happy to announce that Gerald Reimer has been hired as the Director of Global Outreach. Gerald has worked in a variety of roles since being hired more than twenty years ago and is well-qualified.
    - ii. This hiring leaves a vacancy but before a decision is made to hire another director for church planting strategic planning will be done with the Church Planting Task Force and other relevant parties.
  - 6. Introduction to Round Table – Four white pills for the church
    - a. Hopeful trends within the Canadian Church
      - i. An organization called Cardus pulled together reports from multiple surveys about religion in Canada.
      - ii. Outside our bubbles, society is not particularly friendly toward religion.
      - iii. Post-pandemic, the church should be aware of the challenges.
      - iv. NB: PowerPoint slides available for detailed statistics.
      - v. Four White Pills (areas of opportunity)
        - 1. Kid’s Ministry
          - a. Young families are starting to come back—they believe it is important to have religious training for kids.
          - b. The majority of people in the church began attending as children. Church camp is a significant influence.
          - c. We should see this as an opportunity for discipleship.
        - 2. Men’s ministry
          - a. This group is the least likely to have felt any personal connection to God.
          - b. Culture has been hard on young men and there is a loss of identity.
          - c. The group expressing the most interest in scriptural truth and growing is young men—not shame-based ministry, but one where they are challenged to live honourably.
          - d. This is apparent in podcasts being listened to by young men.
        - 3. Biblical Integrity
          - a. Churches that compromise on truth decline.
          - b. The churches that affirm what the Bible says—not pounding on the pulpit, but affirming the teaching of scripture, and figuring out how to make it work are succeeding.
          - c. EMC churches that grow often aren’t sure why, but they are preaching Christ.
        - 4. Genuine Experiences
          - a. This was hard to define for the survey.
          - b. The best we can do is create an atmosphere. Camp ministry is effective because we remove people to nature, with other believers etc.

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- c. In men's ministry it's not just about doctrine, but about experience.
        - d. Rather than religion as an escape from suffering, people are trying to understand their suffering within their religious context.
      - vi. This survey is Canadian, not Anabaptist, but it shows that what we hold to as Anabaptist is resonating with Canadians who are seeking God. We have been equipped for a time like this.
      - vii. Key statements – see slides.
  - 7. Affiliate Agencies Report
    - a. Report from Steinbach Bible College – Dave Reimer
      - i. SBC is an Evangelical Anabaptist college that empowers leaders.
      - ii. SBC has a reputation for sending students back to churches to serve.
      - iii. One-third of the attendees at the recent Winnipeg youth workers event were SBC alumni.
      - iv. SBC has several EMC people on their board and are grateful.
      - v. Steinbach Christian School, with which SBC shares a campus is growing and they are looking at campus development.
      - vi. Christian private schools are growing.
      - vii. Ephesians teaches about the spiritual battle and the importance of the church in changing the world. SBC exists to help train leaders so the church will be strong.
      - viii. Encouragement to church leaders to identify leaders and encourage them to attend. Some churches provide financial support—this is worth considering.
      - ix. 24% of SBC students are international or Indigenous—that is a higher number than EMC students.
  - 8. Board of Trustees Report
    - a. This past year they ran a treasurer's day, hired an accountant, increased mileage rates, provided funds through church building grants and paved the EMC parking lot.
    - b. General fund is higher than it has been in the past five years.
      - i. Increases in receipts due to estate funds and interest rates.
      - ii. Expenses are lower because some staff aren't in place.
    - c. 2024 Budget
      - i. Changes in the budget:
        - 1. Increases
          - a. Salary increases of 2.5% for employees.
          - b. Increase to associate missionary salaries.
          - c. Support for Afghan couple being brought on as EMC missionaries.
          - d. Increase to travel/hospitality.
          - e. Missionary care – mental health and wellness
        - 2. Decreases

- a. Youth – there is no Abundant Springs this year.
- b. BCM publications – reduced number of issues
- c. Church planting – we do not have a director and some church plants coming off of subsidy.
- 3. Salaries have been reallocated, which can be seen in board salary lines.
- ii. See additional details in the Conference Council material package.
- iii. The budget being presented is 7.7% higher than the 2023 budget but because of higher bequest rates and higher interest rates, the BOT is budgeting for a 2.5% increase in donations.

**Decision: M/S Andrew Kampen/Harold Reimer to adopt the 2024 budget as presented. Carried.**

- d. Interaction with the Board of Trustees
  - i. Ralph Unger – The raise for missionaries is encouraging. How are the missionaries who needed to raise 40% funds doing?
    - 1. Answer: Gerald Reimer – The majority of the missionaries are doing well with the 40% they need to raise. For some, it is a struggle but right now everyone is in good shape. Some have more “cushion” than others. There is an under-supported missionary fund.
  - ii. Tim Dyck – Giving Tuesday?
    - 1. Giving Tuesday will happen this upcoming Tuesday. The focus is on compassionate funds for mission fields and missionaries. The goal is to raise \$35,000 CAD.
- 9. Board of Leadership and Outreach – Cameron McKenzie
  - a. The Ministerial meeting at Pansy was a good time of conversation and fellowship.
  - b. Report on the meeting this past Thursday.
    - i. The BLO reflected on the fact that they don’t spend much time thinking about the outreach portion of their portfolio.
  - c. Strategic goals and ongoing projects:
    - i. Pastor Ethics Commitment – the document was adopted by the Ministerial in June, but with the recommendation that additional work be done on it to involve the congregation in covenantal language.
      - 1. The final version of this document will be presented in June to the Ministerial and the Conference Council.
    - ii. The BLO has been working on policies for some time, and they are now doing more pastoral/leadership development work with the Ministerial.
      - 1. Theme “Who’s IN?” - recap on the Ministerial Day (Nov. 24).
      - 2. They discussed barriers to being part of a church and how to move people to deeper discipleship.
      - 3. A panel discussing membership and baptism.
      - 4. They discussed what it means to be the ministerial including what the expectations are of each other.
      - 5. This will shape the work of the BLO.

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- iii. Long-Term Planning for the Ministerial
    - 1. The BLO will create a three-year plan to balance the events they organize.
  - iv. Misconduct Policy
    - 1. BLO developed a robust policy, but it needs to be implemented.
    - 2. Their next step is to develop a process or flow chart that will outline how the policy will be employed when contact is made.
    - 3. This will be reported at the June meetings.
  - v. Credentialing Model
    - 1. The conference has a wide range of people in leadership. Some have little experience or formal theological education, some are second-career people with a lot of experience, and some are from different denominations. So, the BLO began to ask if a one-size-fits-all credentialing program is the best approach. They are considering how to make the credentialing process more responsive to the pastors and ministers who have joined our churches.
  - vi. Conversation with Executive Director regarding Church Planting Task Force
    - 1. The BLO discussed with the Executive Director what the future of church planting might look like and where the BLO fits into that. This was an encouraging and stimulating conversation.
    - 2. The BLO sees outreach as the “heartbeat” of the conference.
  - d. Questions and Comments
    - i. It is good to see the BLO is focusing on outreach. The hope when church planting was moved from the Board of Missions to the Board of Leadership and Outreach was that the BLO would be more than a maintenance board. Response: This is good to know. The rationale for decisions made in the past is not always clear to current board members.
10. Fun Thing – Mo Friesen
- a. Quiz to identify three of the twelve pastors/ministers/youth pastors who began in 2023. (Answers were Steven Warthe, Justin Marchand, and Greg Klassen)
  - b. Full list of pastors and ministers new to their position in 2023.
    - i. Abe Dyck – Bow Island
    - ii. Dani Caldiera - ConneXion
    - iii. Trevor Fleming – EFC
    - iv. Matt Funk – Heartland
    - v. Greg Klassen – Kleefeld
    - vi. Steven Driedger – La Crete
    - vii. Kevin Friesen – Pansy
    - viii. Ryan Rear – Pelly
    - ix. Dion Plett – Pleasant Valley
    - x. Jonathon Reimer – Ridgewood
    - xi. Justin Marchand – Steinbach EMC
    - xii. Steven Warthe – Vanderhoof
11. Round table discussion – Four white pills (see discussion results document)
12. Board of Missions
- a. Overview - Art Koop, Vice-Chair
    - i. Interviewing missionaries is a highlight of the BOM work.

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- ii. Paul Thiessen was approved at .4 FTE for another two-year term for his translation work (he is semi-retired).
  - iii. The BOM is short one board member and welcomes recommendations.
  - b. Reza and Bahar Azimi – Anthony Reimer
    - i. The Azimis have been approved as missionaries working with Afghan people via the Internet.
    - ii. They are part of the Blumenort congregation.
    - iii. It is exciting that they want to work full-time in ministry to Afghans.
    - iv. They are on a two-year contract with EMC, after which they may move to another organization.
    - v. Prayer for Reza and Bahar
  - c. Missions objective 2024 – to send prayer teams overseas again - Gerald Reimer
    - i. Antonio and Esther Pitta have been in Spain for one year with their daughter who is studying remotely at SBC.
      - 1. They hope that other EMC workers will join them in the next year. This will be the focus of the prayer team.
    - ii. Angel and Blanca Infantes in Guadalajara, Mexico
      - 1. The church they are with serves migrants. This is a growing part of their ministry. They hope to send a prayer team in the fall or winter.
      - 2. The prayer team will also connect with Sandra and Israel Chavez Plett
  - d. Report from Israel and Sandra Chavez Plett
    - i. Sandra, a missionary with Multiply married Israel, a pastor she met in Mexico, and they have a son. They are in Canada visiting supporters and churches.
    - ii. They work with disciples to make disciples.
    - iii. They focus on two key areas: church planting and discipling young leaders. The discipling young leaders' part is done at Matthew Training Centre.
      - 1. They have developed a few programs, mostly working with the youth of Latin America. It is incredible to see how God works. They have seen people get excited about ministry in Columbia and youth in Mexico getting mission experience in other cultures, such as Thailand.
    - iv. They also work in a church plant, responding to spiritual, emotional and physical needs.
      - 1. Two and a half years ago they started a thrift store in the area and a year later they started services in the thrift store. The Sunday morning service looks very different—they meet in a carport, so they need to pause for street noise. They love the call to plant churches. They weren't prepared for all the challenges they have faced. Sometimes they have thirty people attending and sometimes nobody comes. They believe God is doing something amazing in their neighbourhood—people seek them out.

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- v. Their greatest ministry focus is their son. He's been a huge blessing.
  - vi. Prayer for the Chavez-Plett family
  - e. Gerald, speaking about his move to the mission's portfolio—he believes he has been called to this.
  - f. Interaction with the Board of Missions
    - i. It was interesting to hear Dr. Yemiru's suggestion for the EMC to expand work into the U.S. He may be able to get a visa in the U.S. even when he can't get one in Canada, and he already works in the U.S. It's not clear who would make that decision. We continue to pray for a Canadian visa.
13. Church Planting Task Force
- a. The Task Force is looking for two additional members.
  - b. Introduction to Task Force Chair, Travis Sass
    - i. Personal testimony about how he became involved in missions which prepared him for the work he is doing now.
    - ii. He served in several Latin countries, most recently in Ecuador with his wife where they served for seven years planting churches.
    - iii. They were called back to Canada, a difficult transition, and became involved in the Ebenezer church in Brandon, not knowing it was an EMC church.
  - c. Charge from Gerald as he leaves the Church Planting Taskforce
    - i. Gerald has had a chance to work with CBF in Swan River—they are excited about reaching out and have challenging questions about how to do that. This was an inspiring conversation, and they will meet to discuss further in January for a weekend.
    - ii. This is the identity of our conference—how do we move from passion to moving out?
    - iii. Where we are today is a result of visioning together to reach out.
    - iv. We need to find the balance between shepherding our churches and reaching out.
  - d. Scott Dick
    - i. Ste. Agathe outreach was started by Rosenort EMC and after some time Scott and Debbie moved there for ministry.
    - ii. They have begun many programs, that ended when people moved away.
    - iii. The longest-running program is their kid's ministry.
    - iv. This year they have three local volunteers to help.
    - v. They are getting to know parents and to help build family relationships.
    - vi. An answer to prayer was how many people from the community helped them with the event.
    - vii. They invite delegates to sign up for their "Call to prayer". A woman in their community accepted Christ—their only part in it was prayer.
    - viii. They have many more dreams about how to reach out, but both Scott and Debbie have experienced health issues because of stress. They are reducing the number of activities for the next year.
    - ix. Invitation to church youth groups to join them for spring break activities.

x. Prayer for Scott and Debbie

14. Board of Church Ministries

a. Overview– Sarah Barkman

- i. The BCM is happy to welcome two new members.
- ii. They are finding ways to support kids' ministry in the next year.
- iii. The Archives Committee is finishing a handbook and working on the backlog of material.
- iv. The Education Committee continues to work on the hermeneutics project.
- v. The BCM will review its publications in 2024 and work on policies such as Artificial Intelligence and reporting on Ministerial Misconduct.
- vi. Several recent headlines in EMC publications are noted.
- vii. EMC's first core value is relationship – a shared faith story and doing more together than individually. It is important to tell our stories, keep up to date and discuss issues and one way to do that is through our publications.

b. Armchair Anabaptist – Jesse Penner

- i. The first season has been released.
- ii. Thank you to Kevin Wiebe for the initial vision and for sharing his skills.
- iii. Introduction to new co-host Andrew Dyck who began this year.
- iv. They have had great interviews.

c. Reviewing our associations – Inter-Mennonite Chaplaincy Association

- i. The IMCA is supported by three conferences – MC Manitoba, EMMC and EMC. We support them financially – about \$4,000 each year.
- ii. A poll last year at the Conference Council was followed with research.
- iii. The program is local, few EMC students access it, we have theological differences, particularly around gender and sexuality and we believe there are better ways to support post-secondary students.
- iv. We believe IMCA is valuable and that Mark von Kampen is a good chaplain who is respectful of different perspectives.
- v. The BCM decided to discontinue support, though financial contributions will continue to the end of the term. The BCM encourages churches to find ways to support student ministries.

15. National Youth Committee – Lyndol Fast

- a. They are looking for new committee members – particularly from Ontario.
- b. The NYC is preparing for Abundant Springs in 2025 beginning with the theme.
- c. They are currently focusing on youth workers communities. 63 EMC youth leaders attended the Winnipeg conference. They met for supper after the conference.
- d. There will also be a conference in Calgary, and they hope for a similarly good turnout from EMC youth leaders in Alberta.

16. Closing – Abe Bergen

- a. Next year is the 150-year anniversary of EMC in Canada.

17. Adjournment