



What Matters?

Trajectories of Hope

There is this constant refrain throughout scripture of renewal, restoration, and yes, reformation.

From the reforms of Josiah detailed in II Chronicles 34 and 35, to the promises contained in Pentecost, to the rapid spread of early Christianity our history is replete with change and holy insecurity. Such is the time in which we live.

The passage of history reveals the coming and going of institutional forms and processes. Sometimes the change is more dramatic e.g., Josiah's reform or the Reformation. Other times the slower process of renewal and restoration occurs.

Whatever one wishes to call our current context, significant renewal and reflection need to occur. We risk becoming entrapped in the polarizing and paralyzing politics of our time and losing our ability to articulate another way of living and being together. While confronted with daunting challenges, the opportunities are manifold for the church to define itself with clarity and distinct witness.

What matters? Sisters and brothers, the call is to focus our time, energy, and resources and not be consumed by events and circumstances outside of our direct control. Each congregation is given a garden and community to tend, and the Shenandoah District of the Church of the Brethren is our organized method of working directly together. How shall we steward and use that which we have been given?

In the Update of October 26, I indicated that I have been contemplating three trajectories of hope as the basis for conversation and action. There have been numerous conversations with congregations and the leadership in the District which gave rise to these trajectories. In addition, a Strategic Planning Team began significant work just prior to COVID-19 in the winter of 2020. This team was comprised of officers of the District as well as Leadership Team representatives. COVID-19 interrupted the work of that team before it could be developed and shared for further processing. The three trajectories of hope I share with you contain some of the thinking of the 2020 team.

RENEWING COVENANT AND FAITH

As our culture continues to change and polarize there will be an increasing hunger for a Gospel that emphasizes a restored relationship with God through Christ and manifests itself in restored human relationships. A congregation that models a reconciled and restored community of faith under the Lordship of Christ will be a powerful witness.

There will be and there is a need for clarity on our central foci, values and practices. These need to be stated clearly and simply and cannot be taken for granted. Our traditional Anabaptist/Pietist values need to be restated and recontextualized. A specific need is to root them once again in discipleship (following Jesus) and in scripture.

RENEWING THE CALL OF LEADERSHIP AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Leadership is becoming and will become more local. Congregations are finding their own leadership either from within or people they know. Leadership will reflect the communities they serve.

What kinds of shared ministry models, either within the congregation or between congregations, need development and encouragement? How do we call, educate, and credential when placement is less national and more local?

RENEWING OUR BUSINESS TOGETHER

How do we manage the business of the District to be efficient and wise stewards of the resources that we have been given? This includes a thorough review of, among others, our governance structure, staffing models for the District and the role and function of the District Conference. What is it that we prioritize in mission and ministry?

There is much more that can be said regarding these and other trajectories. The original work of the Strategic Planning Team contained some ideas on how we might take specific steps to engage and develop these items of our life together.

As we come together at District Conference and beyond, I invite us to a time of intentional reflection on how we model “another way of living.”

Serving Christ Together,

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Originally appeared in the Shenandoah Update, November 2, 2022.