

Bishop Committee Report      April 7, 2010, Fairhaven, Goshen, Indiana

Current committee. Roman B. Mullet, Holmes County; Raymond King, Burgettstown, PA; Philip Miller, Holmes County; David Yoder, Hutchinson. Tim Miller's term expires this year.

Ivan Beachy was elected to replace Tim Miller for the term of 2010-2015

Clarification on the nomination process for this Committee. We became aware that it seemed like the nominations and election were being decided by which bishop happened to have a topic at the Minister's meeting that year. In order to minimize that effect we, consulting with Paul A Miller, decided to try to make the nomination process more truly open by giving you opportunity to name your nominee on the response card to the hosting church ahead of time. To do it this way also reduces the time needed to proceed here at this meeting where business time is limited. It seems like some did not notice the instructions on the back of your letter or understand the space at the bottom of the response card given for that purpose. We hope to continue this practice and want to encourage you to prayerfully consider a nominee and give your suggestion when that opportunity is given. We will need you to always give the brother's name and his church and state because so many of us have the same or similar names.

Thank you for your response to the survey we sent out in February. We received responses from almost half sent out and more are still coming in. I will come back to comments from those responses later.

One issue that has been raised to us is the issue of the mode of baptism. We have historically accepted pouring as our mode of baptism and we see no reason to take issue with that. What seems more problematic is when the mode does become a more significant issue with us than what it seems that the Scripture and the early church made it. We are open to your input and discussion if this seems to be an issue that should be looked into further.

We are aware that there is promotion of the idea to do away with the second ordination, of bishop. We have some concerns we think should be considered as we evaluate these ideas. We fear it could be moving away from the seriousness with which the lead responsibility should be viewed by both the congregation and the leaders. It could also, depending on how it is used, lead to confusion within a congregation about who is responsible for what. Will this move contribute to an instability that comes from lack of consistent, long-term leadership similar to what our mission churches often experience when there is a frequent turnover in leadership? We believe that the second ordination has served our churches well over the years and that serious consideration should be given before discarding this practice. We feel that most of the abuses of the role of bishop are situations that would have occurred no matter what the title given would have been. In other words, changing a title won't change the man. If, as seems necessary in any organization, there is still a lead pastor, we fear that harm could be done to the church by too frequent rotation of that role, and there is little accomplished by simply exchanging one role label for another.

With regard to your responses on the survey sent out. We want to give some summary comments this year and the committee will continue to evaluate the responses and issues raised and continue with the discussion next year.

With regard to the non-use of the radio, we find a substantial majority of the constituency continuing to support the affirmation given to that position at the 1999 Minister's meetings in Grantsville, MD. There was some question raised about whether our constituency position is rather obsolete. From our perspective, we have simply added other things to those negative influences which draw people away from Christ. We believe that radio in the old form as well as the new ones on the internet, cell phones, etc is still an influence to be avoided. We further believe that the influence of video in most of its forms, TV in all its forms and other modern medium are simply compounding the ways the enemy is distracting, destroying, and taking us away from, rather than toward, growth in Christ and obedience to His Word. Is the result of those influences we allow taking us toward or away from faithfulness to God and His Word? We believe that

American Christian culture has by and large simply modified fallen, worldly culture and that any means by which we indiscriminately absorb either of those can lead to our spiritual ruin rather than spiritual health.

We continue to be concerned that we may be neglecting to look far enough into the future in relation to the use of these information technologies. The direction we are going is more important than where we actually are at a given moment. Is our vision broad enough to see the effects of our choices and that of our churches today on the lives of our people to the third and fourth generation? Brethren we are not serving our churches well if we say we expect one thing and in reality have no such expectation. Let us lead our churches into the way of integrity that what our standards of practice say we expect is in fact what we expect of each other. To simply accept the pressures and influences of the world as inevitably working their will is to abdicate our call and responsibility to lead the church in the way of victory over those pressures and influences.

Consistent themes in the responses to the question of our strengths was our openness to a broader spectrum of fellowship and our emphasis on congregational autonomy. A prominent theme in the responses to the question of our weaknesses was our lack of accountability to one another and how far apart we are getting. As we understand these responses, we see an acknowledgement that our strength is also our weakness. We have done fairly well up to now functioning with both the tension and the strength our differences bring us. Now the concern is that the differences are becoming so great and fundamental that we may not be able to continue much longer with the greater tension. One of our characteristics seems to be that none of us considers our church to be typical *Beachy*. On the one hand that is an acknowledgment that one defining characteristic of *Beachy* is that no church needs to be exactly like any other church. But to the degree, that we distance ourselves from the constituency, to that degree we are lessening our respect for the positions and concerns of others in the constituency. As a result, since none of us are typical *Beachy*, then *Beachy* becomes whatever we make it.

It seems to us that as our constituency grows, it becomes more difficult to have closeness of personal relationships that heightened our regard for each other as churches in earlier days. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" is the rhetorical question of Scripture. The obviously expected answer is "no". Unfortunately, when there is less agreement, we find it easy to separate our ways to resolve the problem. Is the only solution to downsize and re-unite by separation and division? or can we consider our desire for relationship to one another significant enough that we are willing to sacrifice in the spirit of Romans 14 for the sake of unity and deeper fellowship with one another? Do we accept that another possible solution is to work toward agreement. That is more costly, and we take the other route precisely because it is easier. Agreement comes at the price of submission to one another, in the Lord, and our human nature will avoid that at all cost. Our plea is to understand these principles, to consider them carefully, and take seriously Romans 15:2 "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification". Our unity must be centered around our commitment to apply the Word of God consistently and directly to our daily lives in such a way that we are mature in our own walk with God and the Kingdom of God is built up by our investment. Too many of our people are starving and dying spiritually because the seeds of the Gospel are being choked out of their lives by the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches and worldly values and they have become unfruitful because we have not been protecting them and warning them carefully enough.

Can we gain the vision for joining together, around the Word of God and the presence of Christ among us? With the strength we gain from uniting, we give witness to the transforming work of Christ in a way that stands as a witness to both the world and worldly Christianity that it is possible to live out so great salvation in a way faithful to the entirety of God's Holy Word

Brethren, let us rise up and be faithful to God and His Word, and let us love one another with a depth that calls us to live out the principles of Romans 14 in the context of our constituency. Let us be drawn together by a common concern to be faithful both theologically and practically to the desire of God for His people.