

The Value of Connections

Occasionally someone in the course of conversation mentions that their church is an independent church. It is usually said with contentment and confidence. I feel sympathy and skepticism. I wonder if they really know what they are missing by not having strong connections to a larger church network. My experience at the 2016 CMC annual conference reminds me of how much I and the church I lead benefit from a healthy relationship with a network of churches such as CMC.

The deep theological roots and tradition of CMC is needed more than ever as cultural Christianity collapses around us. Our theological convictions provide a desperately needed sure foundation. The CMC Statement of Theology



>> Dale Keffer "passing the baton" to Joe Byler

is a solid resting place. The presence of Rosedale Bible College and its mission of providing a sure theological foundation continually reminds us of the importance of teaching Truth to the next generation. Once again at annual conference I was encouraged to hold fast.

Sunday morning at conference I, along with many others, renewed my commitment to daily pray, "Here I am Lord, send me." So quickly I allow daily routines to distract me from my passion for evangelism. I tend to become satisfied as long as I, my family, and my church are stable. But may we never forget that the local church is missionary by nature. Our duty is more than nurturing the saints. We are compelled by God's love to share the gospel with our neighbors, reach the unreached, and plant churches in new communities. Rosedale Mennonite Missions continually calls me back to caring deeply for the lost sheep. They matter to God. His heart is that none perish but all come to repentance.

The relationships forged over years of

attending CMC events and interacting with others have become an incredible source of encouragement to me. Once again I left conference feeling encouraged and nourished. I found more clarity in sorting through confusing issues. Years ago I was wrestling with a parenting issue. My peers were generous in giving advice. While attending a CMC event I happened to sit next to an older brother and casually mentioned to him my parenting struggle. He listened, empathized, and gave a few simple suggestions which happened to be contrary to the advice of my peers. I followed his advice and now know God was directing that conversation. I need my brothers and sisters. *Let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:25)

Joe Byler is the newly appointed Moderator of Conference. He is the pastor of Oakdale Mennonite Church, Salisbury, Pennsylvania. He and his wife Naomi are the parents of twelve children.