

March 2010

SUMMARY OF TASK FORCE FINDINGS

Introduction

In 2008 Mennonite Women Canada (then known as Canadian Women in Mission) appointed a Task Force on *Bridging the Gap and Enlarging the Tent*. This document provides a summary of Task Force findings. What follows are excerpts from the Report and all its recommendations. A separate document provides the March 2010 response from MW Canada Executive.

Mennonite Women Canada Executive

Preamble

The Task Force, appointed by Canadian Women in Mission (name changed to Mennonite Women Canada in June 2009), presented a preliminary survey to Mennonite women gathered for the Canadian Women in Mission Annual Meeting and luncheon at the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Saskatoon in June 2009. The results from the 48 surveys were analyzed separately.

In September of 2009 the official survey was finalized and ready for distribution to Mennonite women across Canada. Each provincial Task Force member was responsible for distributing to and collecting from the women in her province. The survey was also available online through the web tool Survey Monkey, on the Mennonite Women Canada blog spot, on the Mennonite Church Canada web page and in the October 'Equipping' bulletin.

The following numbers and percentages are from the combined surveys.

Total number of surveys completed = 1131 (221 online and 910 paper)

Breakdown by province:

British Columbia	16%
Saskatchewan	22%
Alberta	12%
Manitoba	4%
Ontario	46%
Quebec and East	1%

Age of respondents:

18 to 35	7%
36 to 50	18%
51 to 65	27%
66 to 75	28%
76 plus	19%

Comment: *Almost half (47%) of the respondents were over the age of 65 and 25% of the respondents under the age of 50.*

Attendance:

When asked if their church has a women's group that supports the national or the provincial organization 68% responded yes
18% responded no
14% indicated they didn't know.

1131 women responded as follows:
32 % do not attend at all
18% attend sometimes
50% attend regularly

Comment: These statistics confirm the fact that younger women are generally not attending women's groups within the church. 60 to 69% of women ages 18 to 50 do not attend at all. 70 to 77% of women who are over 65 attend a women's group regularly.

Support:

When asked if their church has a women's group that supports the national or the provincial organization 68% responded yes
18% responded no
14% indicated they didn't know.

Comment: A greater percentage of younger women do not know whether their church has a women's group affiliated with the national and/or provincial organizations. This could be due to a lack of interest, low visibility of women's groups within the church due to the aging population or poor communication between churches and the national and/or provincial organizations. Some women from the same church answered this question with no and others answered with yes.

Connection to national organization:

When asked how important it was to be connected to the national organization
21% said very important
48% said somewhat important
31% said not important at all.

Comment: Half of the women in all age groups said that the national organization is only somewhat important. It is apparent that the value placed on the national organization increases according to age from 11% in the 18-35 age group to 31% in the 76+ age group. In the 36-50 age group almost half (48%) feel that the national organization is not important at all.

Connection to provincial organization:

When asked how important it was to be connected to the provincial organization
28% said very important
48% said somewhat important
24% said not important at all.

Comment: The value placed on the provincial organization by all age groups very closely resembles that of the national organization with somewhat important at 48%. The percentage for 'very important' is slightly higher and the percentage for 'not important at all' is slightly lower. This indicates that women have a stronger connection to the provincial organization than to the national organization.

Connecting to the internet:

When asked if they were interested in connecting with other Mennonite women on the Internet 85% of the women took the time to answer the question. Of those

21 % answered yes

79% answered no

Comment: These figures show that the younger the woman, the more interest there is in connecting on the Internet.

Activities women are involved in:

In the survey 72% of the women responded.

Service Projects	62%
Bible Study/Prayer	57%
Sharing Life Experience	46%
Giving/Stewardship	41%
Provincial Enrichment Day	40%
Fund Raising	40%
Spiritual Direction	26%
Provincial Retreat Weekend	21%
Women's Issues	19%
Family Concerns	19%
Educ./Bursary/Scholarships	15%
Peace/Justice Issues	7%
Environmental Issues	7%
Other	27%

Activities that would appeal to non-participants:

Women who do not attend a women's group indicated activities that would appeal to them. This was answered by 119 women out of 221 women. **(This question was only on the online survey.)**

Fellowship/connecting	75%
Bible Study	47%
Opportunity for service	45%
Social outing	44%
Book Club	34%
Affirmation from other women	33%
Sewing or quilting	22%
Opportunity to voice opinion	18%
Other	26%

Reasons for participating:

68% responded to this question.

Fellowship/connecting	96%
Opportunity for service	71%
Social outing	56%
Friends /relatives attend	48%
Affirmation from other women	44%
Special interest in topic	43%
Opportunity to voice opinion	24%
Other	9%

Comment: Most women are involved in the first three activities. 96% of women indicated that fellowship/connecting is one of the reasons they participate. Opportunities for service rank fairly high for most women who participate as well as those who do not participate. About 50 % indicated that Bible Study/Prayer is important to them. There were many comments affirming the Study Guide that is put out by the national organization. The Task Force found it surprising that such a small percentage of women (7%) were involved in peace/justice/environmental issues. 40% of women were involved in/attended Provincial Enrichment/Inspirational/Retreat activities. There were many positive comments about these programs. This is an affirmation for these programs.

Reasons for not participating:

456 women gave reasons why they do not participate in a women's group.

Lack of time	43%
Involved in other church groups	33%
Timing of the meetings	27%
No group in my church	23%
Not relevant to my age group	13%
No interest	8%
Don't see the need for a group	6%
Not sure of the groups goals	5%
Other	26%

Comment: This question was answered by women who do not attend and by women who only attend sometimes. The lack of a group in their church (23%), the timing of meetings (27%) and the relevancy (13%) are factors which can be addressed by leadership in the churches. To be an effective ministry to all ages, the church should find ways to include all women.

Closing Comments

The Task Force was very pleased by the response to our survey. The challenge was in interpreting the results. The number of comments made by the women was overwhelming and will definitely provide insight into the lives and hearts of women across Canada

For each of us this has been the first time serving on a task force. We have each brought to the table, our own perspectives, ideas, biases and gifts. It has been an interesting and challenging experience and we feel confident that we are providing the national organization with recommendations that can be implemented and bring new vision and life.

On behalf of the Task Force,

Liz Koop

*Compiler of 'The Task Force Survey Summary'
January 13, 2010*



1. A New Name

The Task Force recommends that the name of the national organization be “Mennonite Women’s Ministry, Canada”. This name suggests ongoing activity and reflects more accurately the goals of the new Mission Statement (below) which includes more than just “mission” as in the previous name “Women in Mission”. In the course of our survey and in our conversations with women across Canada, many comments were made to this effect. The Task Force is unanimous in its feeling that the current new name “Mennonite Women Canada” does not give an accurate picture or image of the organization and we feel this is important in choosing a new name.

2. Current Mission Statement

The Task Force recommends a new Mission Statement as follows:

The national women’s organization encourages women to:

- nurture their life in Christ
- acknowledge and share their gifts
- hear and support each other
- serve and minister across the street and around the world

This is similar to the current Mission Statement of Mennonite Women Canada (former Canadian Women in Mission) in that it has four points which move from an inward perspective of personal faith and commitment to its outward expression relating to women in their own communities as well as those from other communities and around the world. It is less wordy and more concise using today’s terminology.

3. Supporting & Blessing

Not surprisingly, our survey indicated that many younger women are finding more and more opportunities to participate in the life of their church and in the wider community other than by attending traditional women’s groups. Also many women do not find a need or want to meet with just women. We recommend that the national women’s organization find ways to include and support these women, to acknowledge their gifts with the church, to release and bless them in the roles and activities they are involved in.

4. Membership

Historically, the measuring tool used by the national and area church organizations to determine who belongs to the organization has been the filling out of the ‘Women’s Group Activity Report’. Currently the ‘membership’ of the national women’s organization is 2000 (as quoted in printed material) which is only about 10% of the total women of Mennonite Church Canada congregations (estimated). A shift of thinking is needed --- All women in Mennonite Church Canada churches should feel included in the national women’s organization. The Task Force recommends that the national women’s organization be open to all women of Mennonite Church Canada and that an expression of invitation be forthcoming.

5. Partnering

An observation was made that very few women of the emerging churches of different ethnic backgrounds that are now part of Mennonite Church Canada participated in the survey. This may be due our not having provided the survey translated into their native language or to apathy on their part.

The Task Force recommends that the national women's organization together with the area church women's organizations encourage and promote local groups of women to partner with women from other churches and ethnic groups.

6. Template as a guideline

The Task Force also recommends the use of a 'template' as a guideline for women of the church to follow which should address the questions: "Is it necessary to have 'membership'?" "How do you 'belong' to the national, area church and local organization?" "How is 'membership' defined?" "What are the responsibilities, obligations, benefits of 'belonging'?"

7. Partnership with Mennonite Church Canada

The Task Force recommends that the national women's organization together with Mennonite Church Canada and the area churches examine their working relationship/partnership. What does it mean if there is not a president elect for the organizations? What does it mean when a woman attends an Mennonite Church Canada Assembly and they are not part of a formal women's group (as membership now suggests)? What if all of the area church women's organizations shut down due to difficulty of filling leadership positions (as has happened in British Columbia and Manitoba)? If there are still monies donated and interest in the national women's group through an informal women's group in an area church, is there a possibility of voting representation and an official voice from that area church women's group? The national women's organization needs to clarify the procedures and policy with respect to its relationship possibly through Mennonite Church Canada Witness Council. Does Witness Council take over the responsibility for the national program/ministry if the area church organizations close down across the country? The Task Force recommends that a procedure or policy be in place so that if this happens, the organization will have a plan in place.

8. Acknowledge faithful supporters

In this new reality of diminishing women's groups we recommend that the national women's organization recognize and affirm the women who have faithfully supported the organization in the past, whether it be through prayers, service, encouragement, etc. Especially as the national women's organization grows and changes, their support needs to be recognized, affirmed and encouraged to continue.

9. Inform and Engage Women

During the analysis of the survey the Task Force realized that many women did not answer the questions asking about the importance of the national and area church organizations. Many also indicated they did not know enough about these organizations to answer the question. This would suggest that the national women's organization do more to inform and engage women. We affirm the efforts made in the past to connect women across the country but recommend that more is done in this area. Even though approximately 79% of the women who answered the question are not interested in connecting through the internet (with younger women the interest level was only 40%) the fact is -- the internet is here to stay. The Mennonite Women Canada page on Mennonite Church Canada's web site and the blog should be tracked to see how often they are accessed. Another electronic avenue might be Facebook as posting information on this site is quick and easy. Another suggestion that the Task Force discussed is a monthly/bi-monthly/quarterly newsletter -- a paper specific and relevant to women which could be a great connector. It could be filled with inspiring stories, recipes, births and passages, job postings, etc. Contributions could be from women across Canada. It would be important to have a few committed individuals willing to take this on as their ministry. This could be both an electronic and printed newsletter.