

In May members of Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster sat down with members of Bethel Mennonite for a shared meal and conversation. The intent of the gathering was to deepen relationships between congregations with diverse ways of understanding.

The invitation was sent from a member of CMCL to Bethel's pastor, inviting he and his wife, along with another few people from their church, to conversation. CMCL's pastor and several members, along with Warren Tyson, conference minister, rounded out the table. Questions were sent ahead of time for persons to ponder and bring to the conversation.

The evening allowed for deep sharing of how scripture shaped each one in their early years and how it continues to mold them today. In the sharing of stories around scripture, personal histories were talked about, leading to reflection on how church experiences early on influence our living out of faith and scriptural understandings today.

The intent was twofold; the first being to dialogue around what is core in our faith - what is most meaningful to each of us as individuals. Dialogue occurred through sharing what scriptures and events have shaped each of us as members of the body of Christ. Another intent was to deepen relationships between conference church members, believing that having some understanding of what shapes and is important to one another allows us to love each other more fully.

Our proposal to all members of Atlantic Coast Conference churches:

Invite one another to the table! It's as simple as that. (We will help you find a congregation with which to fellowship.)

Having 4-5 from each congregation works well, allowing for space for everyone to share.

Keep the meal simple. That's not the focus of the evening.

Encourage all kinds of members of your congregation to participate. One goal is for our members to know each other on a deeper level.

One person will be designated as conversation leader. This person will help move into the purposeful conversation, again naming the questions to be discussed and making sure everyone gets a chance to share.

Allow time for getting to know one another, then purposefully move to conversation around a few questions that everyone has had time to think about.

We encourage you to end your evening in song and or prayer as a way of holding and marking this time of fellowship.

It's helpful to choose one or two questions for the evening's conversation. This helps the group remain focused on the same question and to hear each other's stories. Chances are there will be a lot to share!

Suggested questions to use:

What scriptures shaped you in your early years?

What is it about those scriptures that impacted you?

What scriptures shape you now?

What excites you most about your church right now?

If interested in pairing with another congregation, contact Conference Coordinator Brook Musselman at the ACC office. We will match you with another congregation and offer additional support as you need. Your group will be welcome to invite a conference or oversight minister to share the experience and to aid in connection and follow up, but don't feel obligated. One congregation will be asked to act as host of the meal, the other to choose the questions and designate a conversation leader.

If this sounds interesting but you need more help in shaping the evening, let us know.