

## **Church Planter's Forum and Retreat 2017**

### ***Christian Order or The Remnant? Where does the Pilgrim Church fit in the Christian landscape?***

The word forum suggests that there are some things in life for which there are no simple answers.

My observation is that the churches and communities who are successful long term are those in which the founders go into the endeavor with their eyes fully open, with a healthy sense of reality and a good dose of humility. Anyone who goes into church planting thinking that the Lord is going to somehow cover over all of man's mistakes, is going to be in for a surprise.

A forum suggests that some things in life need various perspectives in order for us to better see and understand the truth.

Here is an illustration for how I see this working...

If I tried throwing this ping pong ball all the way to the kitchen door, I wouldn't get it there.

But if all of you were spread out between here and the kitchen, we could get it there!

I'd get it started, different ones of you would give it a little kick and before long we could get this ball to the kitchen.

That is what I would like to see happen at these church planters forums over the next several decades. I would like to see us all work together at this until we reach our goal for church planting.

(This idea of working together at something like this is a very central Anabaptist concept by the way.)

Whenever there is a health epidemic, there are multiple research teams working simultaneously at finding a solution for the problem. One group of researchers concentrate on one aspect of finding a cure, another group of researchers work on a different piece of the puzzle and eventually they may find a solution.

That is the goal of this forum. I am not content to wait until one little church in Chicago or San Francisco or Boston or Thomaston discovers through trial and error a way to plant churches that are comprised mostly of first generation Christians. That could take thirty years or fifty years or longer.

There needs to be teams of Christians all working intently on different aspects of the challenge before us, with each team contributing what they have for the good of the whole effort. In turn, each team needs to be humble enough to benefit from the work that others are doing.

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One of the strengths of Conservative Anabaptists is their family building and their ability to integrate them into a Christian community. Many of us have been the recipients of this blessing.

**But what is necessary for conservative Anabaptists to expand beyond their ethnic parameters?**

**Could Conservative Anabaptists and "Kingdom Christians" plant churches in North America by converting the lost and discipling the unchurched rather than defaulting to transfer growth as a way to grow churches?**

I say, "Yes. It is possible."

I haven't seen it yet but I still believe it is possible. I think this is the kind of the thing the Bible refers to as visions and dreams.

The task is two-fold.

**1. We need to be bringing the lost and the unchurched into the Kingdom of God.** (Not just one or two, but many. Dozens. Hundreds. Eventually Thousands.)

**2. There are thousands of Christian seekers throughout the world who should be disciplined and assisted in establishing New Testament church fellowships.** (Anabaptists have been reaching out to a few of these over the years but we have not been helping them establish churches.)

Overall we are not doing very well with either of these two tasks.

Yet these two tasks are the goal and challenge that we have before us. It is important that we build on a good foundation so that the building does not crumble with time.

So with that background I invite you to sit up and think with me as we move into the topic:

### ***Christian Order or The Remnant? Where does the Pilgrim Church fit in the Christian landscape?***

*Here at the beginning I'm going to lay the groundwork for a rather radical proposal at the end of my talk. So please stay with me. I am going somewhere with all of this.*

Many Conservative Anabaptists through most of the last five centuries have thought of themselves as being God's faithful remnant on the earth. (In recent decades there have even been some Kingdom Christian folks who have used this term as a self-identification label.)

It is not hard to understand where this mentality comes from. Our spiritual forefathers in Switzerland and the Netherlands, separated themselves from the Catholic church and from the Lutherans, and other Reformers and sought to establish a pure church. This is in our DNA. Because of persecution, only a small percentage joined this movement. This small percentage truly was a remnant.

However, because this idea of a pure church is in our DNA, and because our spiritual ancestors were relieved of persecution after about a hundred years, conservative minded Anabaptists retreated from the world into ethnic communities. Progressive and mission minded Anabaptists have enlarged their ethnic pools and brought a lot of diversity into some of their congregations over the last few centuries but have lost the concept of a pure church. I'm not convinced that this needs to be an either/or situation.

I think we as Anabaptists and other Kingdom Christians need to keep working at establishing a church that has pure religion. Pure religion means keeping unspotted from the world but it also means being a church that is actively involved in impacting people's lives. When a church has both these things, then that is a church where God can add people to the church daily as we read about in the book of Acts.

Now on the fringe of conservative Anabaptism there have been numerous attempts the last 30 years at expanding the church beyond its ethnic boundaries.

Most of these attempts have been focused on people who were already seeking more conservative Christian fellowships. Allen Roth and others have observed that many of these remnant seekers had learned how to stand alone against the tide, but had not learned how to function interdependently with a group of believers.

The remnant mentality can sometimes work if there is strong ethnic loyalty, and everyone is from the same ethnic background, but if you have many independent people coming together who all want to define what "the remnant" should look like, then you have a situation that is ripe for fragmentation or implosion.

This remnant mentality has also caused conservative Anabaptists to part ways over some of the most insignificant things. David Bercot has addressed this problem in his message titled, "The Spirit of Sectarianism". However, many of us are not comfortable drawing fellowship lines the way many conservative Anabaptists have been doing the last 50-75 years. Many conservative Anabaptists will only commune or share pulpits with those who are a part of the same organizational structure. A church can have all the same foundational beliefs and practices, but because they don't have the same standards or aren't part of the same organization, then they can't commune or fellowship together as brothers and sisters.

In the course of church life, there are indeed attitudes and directions that need addressed and purged from the church. But rather than dealing with the root issue (or meeting separately for awhile until the root issues are resolved), groups of individuals have tended to separate from each other with the idea from the beginning that this separation will probably be a permanent separation. Once talk of separation is on the table, there is often very little desire or vision for restoration of the two groups. When there is no desire or vision for reunification, the "We are the remnant" attitude becomes even further entrenched.

The remnant mentality gives onlookers the impression that Jesus went back to heaven 2000 years ago and left their group in charge of the church.

When we have this remnant mentality, we assume that anyone who is coming to our church is making a good step and if anyone leaves our church, they are immature or don't know all the good things they are missing.

This causes a foul smell in the air that surrounds us and this air pollution causes people to be repulsed. If people are repulsed by our attitude, we can be rather sure that some someday our group will implode or that we will eventually pull the roof down on ourselves. I believe that this has been happening in many Anabaptist churches the last few decades.

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In the next few minutes I am going to try to describe how I relate to this remnant mentality and you can decide whether you resonate with what I am saying or whether you look at this quite differently.

I do have the remnant mentality, but I don't apply it to certain fellowships or conferences.

I don't think of particular Anabaptist groups as being "the remnant", and I don't see conservative Anabaptists as a whole being "the remnant". But neither do I think of conservative Anabaptists as being outside of the remnant. (as some "remnant groups" have viewed conservative Anabaptists in the past.)

I think of my family (and the people we have lots in common with) as being part of the remnant, but I don't see us as being The People who God is particularly fascinated with right now. (This idea that we are The People is an age old problem that has permeated nearly every culture and civilization for a long, long time. The sooner we get rid of this view of ourselves, the better.)

I do believe it is good to draw fellowship lines, and I think it is good to give attention to who we invite to speak in our assemblies, and I do think it is important that certain foundational teachings of the kingdom of Christ are made nonnegotiable for Christian fellowship.

(I'm guessing that most of you are in agreement with me so far. )

If some individual or some group is walking in humility, and they are promoting principles such as non-resistance, simple living, sharing with the poor, the sanctity of marriage, modest dress, women covering their heads, and church brotherhood concepts; and if they are moving in the direction of aligning themselves with Apostolic teaching and

practice; and if they are concerned about putting unnecessary yokes on the necks of people who are coming to God; and if they sense the call of God to bring the good news of the Kingdom to people who have not yet seen and heard a clear presentation of this Gospel, then I feel like I am part of the same church as what they are, regardless of what ecclesiastical structure they are part of.

Conversely, whenever I notice people or churches who are not solid on basic two-kingdom teachings and are moving towards something more adulterated, I feel much less in common with them even though they may still have some good external practices such as modest dress and head-covering. When I notice individuals or groups that are moving away from a very non-conformed practice, toward something less non-conformed, I'm very interested in knowing what their doctrine is. If their doctrine sounds quite Evangelical [E], then I assume that they or their children or their grandchildren will probably be Evangelicals.

I feel more in common with those who have perhaps not yet adopted some of these external practices, but are moving in the direction of greater obedience to Jesus and greater alignment with Apostolic teaching and practice.

Now I do recognize that there are people who do not embrace what Anabaptists have stood for historically, who are sincerely following Jesus. I am glad to affirm them in any ways that they are following Jesus.

But just because they are sincerely following Jesus, does not mean that I would want to see such folks in positions of influence or authority in the church, even if there are many things they have to teach me.

I have a neighbor who operates a small house church. He is one of the many thousands who are disillusioned with choreographed church services and politicized Christianity and wants a church where they can go back to all drinking out of the same communion cup and meeting in homes like they did in the early church. Some parts of his home fellowship I really like. Yet my neighbor has come to the conclusion that God wants him to affirm gay people who want to get married.

So while there are things I can learn from him as a fellow member of the human race, He obviously doesn't uphold the biblical teaching on homosexuality that the church has held for many centuries. My neighbor seems to really like me, but he wishes I would be more open minded. He wishes that the only dividing line we as Christians would have would be based on I John 4:2- whether or not a person agrees or denies that Jesus came in the flesh. If a person is willing to confess that Jesus is come in the flesh, he considers them a brother or sister in the church.

(Just for the record,

If God decides to let my neighbor join the marriage supper of the lamb, I'm not going to get into any argument with God about this. I'm fine spending eternity with anyone God decides should be in heaven. But even though I am fine with letting judgment up to God, I still believe that we as Christians should give a clear defense of what we believe Jesus and the scriptures are calling people to believe and practice.

For some reason the majority of Anabaptist and Kingdom Christian church planters get intimidated by Evangelicals who are very articulate in their doctrines and beliefs, even if these same people have opted for a much lower common denominator when it comes to church ethics and practice. )

So coming back to our "Remnant Discussion", I think it is possible to take a strong stand on two-kingdom principles and apostolic doctrine, without thinking of ourselves as "The Remnant".

Whenever we get too strong on the remnant mentality we are setting ourselves up for an implosion. Youth, adults, missionaries, parents, and even grandparents are potential casualties in these implosions.

Here is how it often happens...

Christians who grow up with a "We are the remnant mentality" sometimes find themselves in a less-than-ideal church situation. Perhaps the leaders do not deal with things in a timely manner - perhaps the leaders are straining

at knats and swallowing camels - perhaps spiritual diseases and spiritual cancers are not addressed – perhaps there is no clear vision in the church for evangelism and church planting – perhaps the ministers are teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, maybe the people in the church are dwarfs when it comes to building strong relationships.

However, these Christians who grow up in churches with significant needs and weaknesses, are given the impression by the adults in their church that everyone around the world should be looking up to them as The Model and The People. They grew up with the impression that if a church needs planted somewhere, their brand would be the best one to do it.

Christians who grow up in such communities are in a very vulnerable position. All it takes (for these Christians who grew up thinking of themselves as The Remnant) is to meet some Evangelical folks whose lives have been changed by the Gospel, and these Christians that grew up in the protected bubble begin thinking, “Well these Evangelicals are Christian. They don’t have the problems we do in our church. I think I’ve been duped.” And they leave the Kingdom Christian world and become Evangelical or something else.

This has happened thousands of times and perhaps tens of thousands of times in the last century.

Now I’ve been using various terms in my address so far, so let’s stop and look at some of these terms as we consider who we are in the Christian landscape.

**Display chart 1 that identifies various terms.**

**4 main theological / ecclesiastical movements**

**Old Orders and Conservative Anabaptists**

-7 **Ethnic streams**, Swiss German Mennonites, Hutterites, Dutch (Russian) Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, Apostolic Church, Bruderhof.

-**Intentionalists**, tend to stay on the fringe of conservative Anabaptism; everything is up for discussion (just like it was for the above seven groups at one time)

**Display Chart 2**

**This chart is not based on stated beliefs but on functional beliefs.**

**As you can see, there is a portion of Old Orders and Conservative Anabaptists who do not fit the Two-Kingdom column when it comes to how they function.**

These various terms are rather complicated and difficult to communicate to new believers. I frequently have unbelievers or seekers ask me to explain the difference between the various Christian sects in the world. I find it a challenge to explain what I believe to be true without reflecting negatively on people who don’t practice non-resistance and modest dress, but are perhaps following Christ more ardently in other ways.

Most of the world only has one category for Christianity. (The majority of the world thinks only one thing when they hear the word “Christian”. They see Christianity as a world religion much like Islam or Hinduism. It wasn’t until recent years that I realized that there are sects within Islam or within Hinduism that are very different from each other.) It’s the same for many people who hear the word Christian.

There are many places in Europe where it is assumed that if you are not Catholic then you are either Orthodox or Protestant. If you claim to be a Christian but not identify with one of these three groups, it is assumed that you are part of a cult or a part of some fringe group whose beliefs and practices are not really valid or relevant.

So with that backdrop, imagine you are going to Europe with a plan to start an Anabaptist church.

How are you going to present yourself? As “The Remnant”? As “part of the Remnant”? As “Bible believing church with a conservative flavor or Anabaptist flavor?”

Some years ago, brother Ken Miller who lived in Ireland for awhile, told me about his experience there in trying to promote something different than Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. He sensed that people were really hesitant to join or affirm the Anabaptist church where he was a pastor.

As he talked with them, he discovered that didn't have any compartment for something other than Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. Anything other than your normal Christian denominations felt illegitimate.

So Ken started comparing the church he was with to a Christian Order. The folks in Europe know all about orders. The Catholic church has orders, the Anglican Church has orders. Orders in these denominations are made up of people who set themselves apart from the rest of society by adopting certain disciplines that enable them to accomplish certain spiritual purposes and nurture certain biblical values. They don't believe that everyone needs to be a part of their order and they are willing to commune with others in their church who are not part of their order.

Ken would explain to people that joining an Anabaptist church is something like that. He would explain that his conservative Anabaptist church does not believe they are the true church and that other churches are all wrong. Rather his church holds to certain doctrines that are central to the Gospel. In addition to this, there are certain values and practices that they developed as a community that they believe will help to nurture and encourage spiritual life and spiritual brotherhoods.

After explaining it this way, it seemed that “the lights would come on” and people would say, “Ok. Now I understand.” And he found that people seemed much more open to recognizing the church as legitimate.

So that conversation with Ken is the background for this term “Christian Order” that we are using in our topic title today.

You see, if we think of our congregations or our fellowships as a Christian order, we can welcome folks who voluntarily want to be part of our church. If someone decides they don't want to be part of our order, we give them that privilege. If we think of our church as a Christian order, there is no reason to hurt people who decide to leave our church. Since our primary concern is that they progress spiritually, we can help them find another Order where they can flourish if ours is not a fit for them.

I like this concept and this way of thinking about our churches. Taken too far, this comparison has problems of course. For example, Folks in many Christian Orders are willing to commune with people who are not living holy lives. Most of us here would not believe that is right.

But the reason I like this comparison is that it doesn't present ourselves as the only Christians in the world, and yet there are things we believe we are called of God to do, and we are willing to do these things even if it means going against the flow.

Perhaps we feel called as a church to give our children an education in a Christian environment. Perhaps we think

that here in North America, it would be God-honoring for the sisters in our church to wear dresses or skirts and the brothers to wear pants.

Perhaps we think that we should not be baptizing our children until they are at least a certain age.

Perhaps we believe that Christians from other faith traditions, should wait to commune with us until they have worshipped with us for a number of months and we get to know them.

Perhaps a congregation decides that they will commune with these certain groups of Christians but not with these other groups of Christians over here.

These are all examples of things are not spelled out in the Bible but are what makes up their particular Order. There could be many other things a congregation or fellowship would decide to make a part of their Order.

Most of us here who commit ourselves to these types of fellowships, don't think that all churches around the world must come to the same conclusion as what we do, and we don't think that our neighbors here in America must do all these things in order to be right with God. Yet we do believe that God has shown us a wise path to follow, and that we as a group of believers need to walk in the light that he has revealed to us - for our particular situation and our particular demographic.

This is the way that many people who are part of a Christian Orders view themselves within their larger church.

The other comparison I like to make with Christian Orders is this...

Christian Orders in Europe have their own rules and guidelines, but those rules and guidelines are not outside of the boundaries set by their church. A Christian Order under the Catholic church, can't be taking anti-Catholic positions on things.

Likewise, the congregational orders that we are a part of, need to give account to Kingdom Christians around the world. They can't go off on a tangent and still consider themselves part of the church.

As I said earlier, there are some aspects of Christian Orders that I am **not** comfortable with of course. Perhaps you can think of a better term than Christian Order and that would be lovely.

It would also be good to clarify at this point that I don't think our goal should be the setting up of Christian Orders as such.

If our goal is to create Christian Orders, then we are going to be contributing to exclusionism and sectarianism. Kingdom Christians who set out to create Christian Orders, are generally trying to clone or create a certain kind of spiritual experience or preserve a certain way of life. Christians over the centuries have tried this way too many times. Trying to create a certain kind of spiritual experience or preserve a certain way of life, are the aspects of Christian Orders that we should not be emulating. Jesus and the apostles didn't tell people they had to retreat into the desert or enter a monastery to experience the fullness of the Christian life. Early Christians like the Apostle Paul became all things to all men. He and the other evangelists took the Gospel to people. Many of them had normal jobs and lived in houses like everybody else.

So this Christian Order concept that I am talking about is a way to view ourselves in relation to the broader church, not something that we should be trying our best to emulate.

Instead of our goal being that of creating Christian Orders around the globe, our goal and focus should rather be that of aligning ourselves with the constitution of the Kingdom of God. (Often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount.

We should be presenting a life changing Gospel that is universal in nature and incarnated through Christian community.

The message that we have to present to the world should not require people to move to the country or move to the city or move to the remote tribal areas of the world. It should work in any culture and any environment.

Whatever Gospel we have to present to the world should work in urban United States, in Asia, or in Africa. This Gospel would include teachings of Jesus and the apostles such as non-resistance, modest attire, head-covering for women, etc. and should include the scriptural pattern of churches making decisions on matters that apply to their culture.

However the decisions that are made for a particular culture or setting, should not generally be imposed on other cultures.

If we need to talk about ourselves our focus should be on our role as ambassadors of heaven, who are inviting people to an authentic expression of Christianity. Our Order is simply the way we have decided to order our lives. (See where this word comes from?)

When people are willing to order their lives together, they can sharpen each other, display the harmony of relationship, and get much more done for the kingdom than if they attempt to do something solo.

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Now, what are some of the practical outworkings and considerations that we need to give some thought to as we think about Christian Order vs. "The Remnant"?

One of the challenges that the conservative Anabaptists and other Kingdom Christians have wrestled with over the centuries is what to do with Christians who are orthodox in their beliefs, who are committed to the scriptures, and who are evidently born of the Spirit; yet are not persuaded that the scriptures should be interpreted and applied as stringently as what Conservative Anabaptists think they should be.

Should such people be acknowledged as brothers and sisters in Christ and if so, how?

Should they be given the Christian salutation or the Holy Kiss?

Should they be allowed to participate in communion or included in the church?

Conservative Anabaptists have typically restricted the Christian greeting to those who practice outward non-conformity similarly to the way they do. In some settings, the Christian greeting is sometimes withheld from persons who leave a church and practice a different expression of non-conformity than what they once did.

Conservative Anabaptists and other Kingdom Christians feed this spirit of sectarianism whenever they only commune with people from their own congregation or their church fellowship.

Does the early church model from the first century provide us with an alternative? It is hard to know because the early church was not fragmented the way the church is today. However I do think there are some important principles we can learn from the New Testament record.

1. In the New Testament there are people in the church who are recognized by the church as being Godly influencers and others who not. I don't see this mentality, "Anyone over 18 who is a member of the church, should have equal influence and voting privileges."  
We don't have record of new believers being given the opportunity to vote on major decisions in the church, or all of them take a turn at having devotions or all the ladies being given a turn to teach Sunday School, or

such like.)

From what I understand in reading the New Testament, it was understood that in a church where there are lots of people coming into the church who were not raised in the church, there is going to be a wide variety of maturity in the church and not all will have the discernment that is necessary for guiding the church in a good direction. The Apostle Paul did not ask his converts how they would like to have church. He established a certain order for doing things and expected them to follow his instructions.

2. In the New Testament, anyone can become an influencer. The Jews who had received the oracles of God from childhood were soon outnumbered by Gentiles and many Gentiles became influencers as well. We don't see any indication in early church history that the Apostles tried to keep a majority of Jewish leadership. It was understood that the Gentiles would need their own leaders if the church was going to grow. (We generally believe this when we do church planting in foreign countries, but why wouldn't we apply this to church planting right now here in America?)  
There are expectations for influencers. A person can't just assume that if he joins the church that he is now entitled to being an influencer because he has certain preaching skills or administrative skills or whatever. There are doctrinal positions and character qualities and maturity levels that must be considered.
3. In the New Testament we see that Christians should receive other Christians who are walking in holiness and obedience to Christ. They should not be separating into clans of those who follow Peter, those who follow Paul, those who follow Apollos, etc.  
Any Christians who are seriously attempting to follow God the way Jesus and the Apostles instructed, should be given the right hand of fellowship and allowed to share in remembering the body and blood of the Lord.

I'm not sure how it was back then, but today, newcomers who are walking with the Lord can feel really hurt and ostracized if they are not included in various Christian activities because they haven't yet meet all the procedures or expectations of the Order. This is particularly true with communion.

So for some time now I've been wondering if there is a way we could apply these scriptural principles in a way that would honor the Lord and yet not trash our heritage of wanting a pure church?

It seems that many conservative Anabaptists withhold communion from newcomers for months or even years, and can really discourage those who are coming to God.

Or, they react to this and open the doors quite widely and let people commune without being clear about their expectations. Then in a few months or years whenever the church wants to hold them accountable for something, they get deeply offended and leave the church. I think it would be much better to be clear with expectations up front, but give people time to adjust to these expectations.

**Would it be possible for a church to have a gradual entry procedure for newcomers who have a strong interest in being part of our church, but need some time to observe and adjust to the church's way of doing things?**

Here is a proposal for how this could look in a church here in North America. This is not the only way that this could be done, but perhaps this is a way.

In my remaining time, I will attempt to get this "ball" rolling and when I am finished, your job will be to help get this ball to where it needs to go.

*Here is one way we might be able to do this in light of the present distress ..*

*When I say “present distress”, I’m referring to the fragmented church landscape that we find ourselves in. Churches in the western world do not have a unified vision or practice at all. Some have very few guidelines for their members while others are putting “yokes” on new believers that are not appropriate.*

*This present distress makes things really complicated.*

So how might this look.

***First,***

In order to commune, newcomers would be expected to be in support of some minimum expectations such as non-resistance, head-covering, separation from the world, modest attire, etc. This would be a minimum expectation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Orthodoxy refers to basic historic Christian belief and orthopraxy refers to basic historical Christian practice. (The minimum might be similar to the minimum standard you would expect from the speakers at a forum like this.)

***Second,***

Newcomers would be expected to submit to the church in areas where they are not yet in full agreement, but they wouldn’t be expected to defend these beliefs or practices of the church. In general they would be expected to have a supportive attitude of the church, even if they cannot see the necessity of all the positions and standards this church has. (For some people, practice and involvement helps them to understand.)

The church’s response to this might be something like this,

*“That is perfectly fine. We want you to give thought to what you are doing and seek the Lord. We are glad to give you a couple years to learn our expectations and make the necessary adjustments.*

*During that time we will consider you a brother or sister in Christ and relate to you accordingly. Whenever you feel like you are ready to go all the way in meeting our expectations, we will be glad to bring this to the church and if the church is agreed to receive you, we will be open to including you in such things as decision making, teaching roles, administrative roles, etc. These roles are based on ability, spiritual maturity, and character and we will be glad to discuss these qualifications with you. We hope that you can become more fully integrated as the months go by and that you will find yourself increasingly at home in this fellowship. If during the next two years you find yourself seriously questioning our direction as a church, and are concluding that we are not on the path God wants us to be travelling, then we would expect you to refrain from participating in communion. If two years from now you still aren’t sure you are ready to commit to our expectations, then we would expect you to refrain from communion until you feel you can be submitted to our expectations.”*

*Some people need to practice before they commit. Some need to understand intellectually. And some people simply need to “belong” before they can commit. Being allowed to commune with other Christians goes very deep with them.*

[Just a note on the two years, some folks I’ve shared this with feel that two years is too long. Others feel it is too short and that they would have wanted five years to make the adjustments. Each church would need to decide what this would look like.]

(Functionally, many conservative Anabaptist churches have some pieces of this proposal, but since their theology has no room for communing with someone outside of their constituency, they cannot intentionally develop a minimum standard that is based on historic Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

There are a few churches among us who are letting people commune without fully embracing the order of the church, but there is little or no communication about how long this relationship can continue. If there is little communication up front, it can be expected that there will be misunderstandings, offenses, and hurts a few months

or years down the road whenever the church decides that more commitment is needed in order for people to continue communing.

The proposal I am making has many challenges.

When you read the letters to the Corinthians, you realize that life can get rather messy when churches are taking lots of non-ethnic people and unchurched people into their churches. Some of the problems and sins they dealt with are outside of my comfort zone.

But when you think of the alternative, dealing with the problems that come from a church full of people who have been Christians for a long time, and have learned how to use Christianeeze to get you off their back, and you think of all the thousands of hours church leaders spend trying to solve problems in the church and get people to repent of their self-centeredness, perhaps our churches are not as different from the Corinthian churches (or the Protestant church down the road) as what we might like to think.

We may have a lot higher moral standards, (which is why I am happy to be associated with conservative Anabaptists). But I think God doesn't compare us with churches who have lower moral standards. I think he looks at what opportunities people have been given and what they are doing with the opportunities. I think he looks at the lines we have drawn between our congregations and our fellowships of a similar order, and is very grieved.

I think he expects much more from people who were raised with high moral standards and the scriptures, than what he does from those who just recently came to faith.

***Now in order for this "gradual entry" proposal to work, there are some ingredients that are going to be necessary.***

1. Those who are fully part of the church would need to view the newcomers as full citizens of the household of God who are not inferior in the eyes of Christ
2. Newcomers who are allowed to commune but are not fully integrated into the church would need to be submitted to the church, and be ok with not being involved in influencing the church. If they can't be ok with this, this could breed resentment.
3. A church would need competent leaders who are not intimidated by disagreement. It will need leaders who are not leading from their own fears and insecurities. It will need leaders who are knowledgeable enough about issues to give sound teaching and counsel.  
At the end of the day, someone is going to need to define orthodoxy and orthopraxy and if there are not competent leaders, these discussions can sink the ship or stall it's progress.
4. Kingdom Christians would need to define "oneness of mind" differently than what they have been doing the last 500 years. If "oneness of mind" means everyone thinking the same thing, or everyone getting on board with what the lead pastor is saying, then the proposal I am outlining here is not going to work very well.

***The model I am proposing will likely not appeal to Christians who believe that:***

1. Churches should not have requirements for communicants other than what is directly spelled out in the New Testament.
2. Christians should not be expected to submit to a local body of believers.
3. Communion should only be based on one's profession of faith in Christ and not be tied to one's commitment to a brotherhood and to orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
4. Christians are entitled to privacy and do not need to give account of their actions, their choices, their spiritual growth, or lack thereof.

***This “gradual entry model” will quickly fall apart if:***

1. The communicants of this church are not deferring to the Head of the church and guided by his Holy Spirit.
2. The minimum standard that a congregation establishes is significantly different from the minimum standard that would have been expected in the early church.
3. A church has values or practices that hinder or limit greater discipleship. (A church needs to be growing in its obedience to Christ. Not simply maintaining an Order from some time in the past.)  
Once a person is finished his gradual entry into the church, there shouldn't be an expectation that he is now finished growing. In many ways he might have just begun.  
But the whole church including the 50 year olds must be growing up into Christ also. If the church is fossilizing, those who are coming into the church will notice it.
4. If those who are fully part of the church treat those who are not yet fully part of the church as somehow spiritually inferior to those who are fully integrated.  
(Zaccheus's standing with God was “perfect” at the moment Jesus visited his house, even though I'm sure he had much more room for growth.)

***If this gradual entry model is a good one, I believe it has great potential for:***

1. Decreasing schisms over trivial matters and a foundation for promoting more unity among Conservative Anabaptist and Kingdom Christian churches.
2. More Christians around the world being able to enjoy fellowship with Kingdom minded Christians which will therefore give the second generation better church options.
3. The conservative Anabaptist movement being graced with lots of new last names.
  - a. Back in the 1600's whenever a couple men went to the Oberland and through preaching and church planting, they added scores of new last names into the Anabaptist world.
  - a. Lots of new last names in our churches could contribute to greater effectiveness in evangelistic and church planting efforts – (think about who brings the most visitors to our churches)
  - b. Lots of new last names helps us appreciate what Jesus is doing outside of our ethnic culture and outside of our little bubble
  - c. In some of our communities, lots of new last names could reduce the number of birth defects that result from generations of intermarriage.
  - d. Without lots of new last names, I am concluding that we are quite dysfunctional as churches.

**In conclusion...**

- I suggest we view “our church” or “the church” as being comprised of all those who adhere to basic orthodoxy and orthopraxy.
- I suggest we view our congregation or our fellowship as a “Christian Order” instead of viewing ourselves as “God's Faithful Remnant”.
- I suggest that if our practice is to only commune with people in our own congregation or those within our own church fellowship, we are contributors to a spirit of sectarianism.
- I suggest we be intentional about helping newcomers and Christians from other fellowships feel like they are fully part of the body of Christ. I think we can do this without compromising our desire for a pure church.

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# Christians

Catholic

Orthodox

Protestant

Anabaptist

Mainline

Evangelical

Main-stream

Plain People

Old Orders

Conservatives

7 Ethnic Streams

Swiss/  
German  
Mennonites  
1525

Hutterite  
1528

Dutch/  
Russian  
Menno's  
1535

Amish  
1693

Brethren  
1708

Apostolic  
Church  
1832

Bruderhof  
1920

Intentionalists

Denominational / Constituency Chart

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# Christians

## Nominal Christians

## Changed Christians

### Christians of this World

Assimilated Christians who mix politics and religion or adopt the world's values on things like finances, entertainment, recreation, education, marriage, clothing styles, retirement, etc.

### Two-Kingdom Christians

/  
"Pilgrim Church"

### "Evil and Vile"

Live no different than the heathen but call themselves Christian  
Murderers, openly immoral, drunkards, idolaters, swindlers.

### "Good Neighbors"

Folks who believe in Jesus and try to be good people but are blinded to some of the most important teachings of Jesus and the Apostles

Many early Christians, many Waldensians, many early Anabaptists, some Anabaptists & others today