

OPEN LETTER

Greetings from the USMB Board of Faith and Life.

We had our first meeting following the July convention in October. At the convention, the recommendation of the revision of Article 13 was presented and passed by a margin of 103 to 10.

We began our meetings by reflecting on the process that led us to the recommendation and expressed our thanks to God for answering our prayers that we could listen well, that we could recognize the leading of God's Spirit and that we could do our work in a spirit of unity. But we have said all along that if the only thing we do is to change the wording on Article 13 so we can place a revised version on our bookshelves, we will have failed at our greatest task. So our meeting quickly turned to the question of where to go from here in giving life to the new Article.

While we agreed upon numerous obvious, immediate tasks—such as updating the pastoral application, reprinting the Confession of Faith (Article 13) and considering new written materials—we believe we need to do more if the revised Article is to have an impact that can breathe new life into our conference.

Some of you are aware that the Leadership Board has initiated a process with a representative group from the constituency (see Sept/Oct 2014 CL) to assess where we are as a family of congregations and where we need to go if we desire to be a healthy conference that can have an impact in the world. The BFL believes that Article 13 can also contribute in a significant way to shaping our future.

At the present time our approach as a conference of churches for fulfilling our mission has centered primarily on the goal of making disciples using two primary strategies: church planting and foreign missions. We believe those are the right strategies. But we also believe that our effectiveness would be strengthened by incorporating the essence of Article 13 into our personal and congregational lives.

What if:

- we made a commitment to do everything in our power to develop healthy families,
- we actively worked in our communities to join others in providing spiritual, financial and physical support to those most in need,
- we made a covenant in our congregations to refuse to be divided over petty issues that destroy our credibility in our community, that result in fractures, that cause us to lose our members and that rob us of our joy,

- we worked to create opportunities in our communities to bring people together instead of choosing sides and causing ever-greater divisions,

- we took really seriously what we have decided we can confess together: "We actively pursue peace and reconciliation in all relationships by following Christ's example and His command to love God, neighbors and even enemies. We strive to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in families, churches, communities, in our nation and throughout the world. As peacemakers we alleviate suffering, reduce strife, promote justice and work to end violence and war, that others may see a demonstration of Christ's love."

What if we made a conscious decision for a relentless pursuit of these values in keeping with the heart of Jesus? God never expects us to solve all of the problems of the world, but He does call us to do what we can.

The Board of Faith and Life believes that God has provided an opportune moment in time for us to go forward as a conference of churches that could result in the beginning of a movement that could transform us through the living out of this newly revised Article. Let's not let the opportunity pass us by. The BFL wants to lead well and we need for you to lead with us.

While the BFL has brainstormed ideas of what we can do, we believe that you have the best perspective on what can be done in your community and in your districts to further this part of God's plan for the church.

Please pray with and for us, as we also pledge to do for you, as we continue on this journey. We will be happy for your ideas and we stand ready to meet with you as congregations or as districts to help work out steps toward a more faithful expression of God's calling on our lives.

Respectfully submitted,

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