Cut the Crap ...
if it’s not too much trouble

By Ben Weaver
Columnist

A recent discussion between students at EMU (in which I was a participant) revealed an interesting fact, although I would guess that it is not new to many students. The interesting realization was in relation to pride — more specifically the lack thereof — here at EMU. Many students, myself included, felt as though pride was significantly lacking at this institution among the student body.

Furthermore, it seems that at hard as we tried, we could not come up with a significant over-all vision for EMU. This was bothersome to the group and it is bothersome to me. I hope that it is troubling to you as a concerned reader as well.

Many students seem to express pride in various facets of EMU such as sports or their particular major. Others still have pride in a certain priority that EMU holds or possibly its uniqueness among other universities. There is pride for some in our status as Mennonite. For another group there may be pride in EMU’s history and those who helped establish it.

What seemed to be lacking was a synthesis of these feelings. When looked at in its entirety, EMU seems to be a mixed bag. Organized as a chaotic jumble of certain qualities and strengths that seem to lead nowhere in particular nor point in any one direction. Why do so many students seem to feel this way?

What is maybe more bothersome than the lack of a definable vision. Does EMU intend to be progressive with its policy and its curriculum? Or does EMU want to hold on to a traditional belief structure and maintain its identity in this way? Is our focus on providing students with knowledge to get employed or knowledge to change the world?

While all of these may be simultaneously possible (and I believe to a certain degree they are), it would seem that we as a university have not decided for ourselves exactly what it is we want. We seem to be treading water between many issues and ideas. We are hoping to include all but through the process fulfill none.

While this seems a harsh statement, this article does not intend to place blame. We are all a part of the lack of pride is the we are all responsible. To be a successful institution, though, in fact a successful community, there needs to be a central core of belief and a direction. It would appear from student reactions that this direction/vision is either non-existent or expressed poorly. Is it merely the fact that we are all here that keeps us together? Sure there is the official mission statement, but it is not what provides real vision, real pride, and real passion.

The people and actions of the institution are what provide these things and currently it would seem that the message is very, very mixed for many.

What are our priorities, our strengths, and why do we not emphasize them fully? This should be our main question and consequently our rallying call. EMU needs a degree of pride to produce. All institutions/communities have this need regardless of their nature.

This pride is resultant of a strong and accepted (by the participants in a group) vision. I hope, as do many others, that EMU can achieve success in these areas before it is too late. All institutions and bland in these areas will likely mean the death (albeit slow) of an institution.

I do not want to see EMU fail, nor do many others. Tragically, this may be our only current source of pride and our only truly substantive vision.

The reasons for this apparent institutional schizophrenia may be many. It could be the appearance of similar qualities in Mennonite Church USA as a whole. It could be the existence of tension between the faculty and administration. It could be the existence of those outside the school as to what it should be. It might even be our resistance as Mennonites to the very idea of pride.

Regardless of the causes, we as students can very clearly see the effect. To make EMU successful, both as an institution and as a community, we need it more fully. This does not have to mean agreement on everything, but at the very least it should be that we can see our institution as a whole. It could be the existence of similar qualities in Mennonite Church USA as a whole.

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