

Worship In Story Form

One of the most captivating and effective modes of communicating is through story. Jesus used stories to engage his audiences and so did those leading the four main worship services of Allegheny Mennonite Conference's (AMC) summer gathering at Laurelville. The reason?—the theme this year was, "Telling the Story." Worship times included a brief prelude, the theme song, "Lord Jesus, you shall be my song for the journey," the Lord's Prayer, an offering given to the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) and a number of songs interspersed throughout. Worship leaders Paul and Mary Ellen Lehman, from Crossroads Community Church, opened each session with stories and pictures of "God-moments" they experienced on a recent trip to New Zealand and Australia.

Ron Byler, Associate Director for MC USA, was the featured speaker on Thursday and Saturday evenings. On Thursday, Ron used 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 to frame his message, noting that the word reconciliation (used 4 times in 3 verses) means "thoroughly changed." Ron called attention to the immigration issue and its effect on 50 Mennonite congregations in southern California, where currently 86% of those congregations are comprised of those born outside the U.S. Pending laws could make "giving a cup of cold water illegal," Byler said. Applying quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. to this situation, Byler emphasized, "Christians should be the headlights, not taillights;" and "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." After citing three Mennonite stories of reconciliation builders, Ron concluded with these words, "Our words as Christians will only ring true when we exhibit the ministry of reconciliation."

In his Saturday evening message, Ron focused on Paul's letter to the Philippians (1:1-11). He began with a story of a special letter he once received



in his own life, which encouraged him to use his gifts for the church. It is a letter which still shapes him. Ron suggested that Paul's letter to the Philippians had a similar effect on them. Ron encouraged us to continue to tell our stories in order to counter the narrative giants taunting us in our culture. On two occasions, Ron paused and asked MC USA leaders that were present to pray for AMC, mirroring Paul's prayerful concern for the local church. Ron challenged us to joyfully follow Jesus by keeping our witness holistic (word and deed), creating a culture of call, honoring the dignity and value of all people, and building global connections. Ron noted that in his brief time with us, he heard many AMC stories and believes we are striving to become what Jesus wants us to become.

Between these two messages, Darryl "Doc" Dawson, pastor at Canan Station, preached Friday evening from the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead in John 11:38-44; a story that has pro-

Delegates worship together in the Meetinghouse at Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center.



Above: L. to R.: Betty Helmuth and Annabelle Kratz discuss which of the many stories about the International Guest House they should share with the delegate body.

Above Right: L. to R.: Brenda Benner leads the congregation in singing while Retha Thomas, Duane Frederick, and Kurt Horst accompany on stinged instruments.

foundly touched Doc's own life and ministry. It has motivated him to "reach out to a dying world." Doc captivated those in attendance with powerful stories from his ministry at New Day, in which he and others experienced the power of God at work in their midst. Throughout, Doc encouraged and challenged us to use the gifts God has equipped us with to bless others and develop relationships with them, so

that others might have the opportunity to be "unwrapped" from the effects of the world.

Sunday morning Kurt Horst, AMC conference minister, used Colossians 3:12-13 as a springboard for a message on forgiveness. Kurt told a number of stories and raised many difficult questions relating to forgiveness. Can we forgive and still want justice? Can we forgive and still expect restitution? Is forgiveness for my benefit or the benefit of the other? He often returned to the reality that forgiveness is difficult work. Part of the difficulty is "releasing the other person(s) into God's hands and releasing our need to take revenge." Kurt also pointed out that many Christians use the words confess and repent synonymously. But confessing is truth telling, while to repent is to change. Thus, John the Baptist and Jesus are saying, "Change, for the Kingdom of God is near." Our need for forgiveness is great and we were challenged to take the time necessary to plumb the depths of that need.

Each worship time concluded with a separate story-telling time. Thursday, Annabelle Kratz and Betty Helmick "parodied" their preparation time for their presentation, sharing stories and memories of both hosts and guests of the International Guest



House in Washington, DC. Friday, in groups of two or more, we told each other a personal story of our choosing and built an altar with stones that represented those stories. Saturday, Don Hamsher, pastor at Kaufman Mennonite, told an intriguing story about missional transformation that is evolving at Kaufman. Sunday we heard multiple stories. We heard first from about 12 children/youth and 6 young adults who told about their lessons, learnings, and activities of the AMC weekend. Mike and Ginny Hostetler closed the story-telling weekend by sharing snippets about their work and ongoing concern for Nazareth Village in Israel. The entire weekend concluded with the song known as #606/118, "Praise God from whom."

Of course, all these opportunities for worship and story-telling did not just happen. Those in attendance are indebted to the worship planning group of: Brenda Benner, Duane Frederick, Becky Horst, Olivia Hunsberger, Paul and Mary Ellen Lehman; and to the many others that were willing to contribute their gifts in seen and unseen ways to our worship times. These persons enabled us to come together and focus on the main character of THE STORY: JESUS. —Alan Kauffman, Maple Grove

Business In Story Form

The song, "We will walk with God, ... we will go rejoicing till the kingdom has come" introduced the theme, "Telling the Story," at Allegheny Mennonite Conference's annual meeting. The theme was foremost throughout the weekend.

Lester Lind shared personal testimonies of several youth in the Philippi Service Adventure unit and the Philippi Mennonite Church's role in involving the youth in the community and walking with them. Ron Spory shared some of the life of the Johnstown Service Adventure team.

Gloria Horst Rosenberger's moderator's address centered around the diversity that is present within the Mennonite Church. Many types, or groups, are present. Who are we? How do we know what, or who, is right in the interpretation of the scriptures? How does Old Testament law work with New testament grace? She shared the story of University Mennonite Church's support and involvement in the preschool setting for underprivileged children in State College.

Representatives from the church wide agencies (Mennonite Education Agency, Mennonite Missions Network, Mennonite Mutual Aid, and

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Sept./Oct. 2006 Volume 63 Number 5

Allegheny Conference News (ISSN 0746-7362) is published six times a year. Periodical postage paid at Scottdale, PA 15683.

Send all change of address notices, editorial and business correspondence to Donna Mast, editor, Allegheny Conference News, 531 Scottdale Ave., Scottdale, PA 15683; home phone: (724) 887-5563; e-mail: kingview@westol.com. Printed in USA.

Mennonite Publishing Network) were present and shared with us. We learned that in Mennonite Church USA there are 930 congregations within 42 states with around 110,000 members. Forty-Five percent of them are east of the Alleghenies. The average size of a congregation is 125 with the largest one in Hampton, Va., with 2500 members. There are 21 conferences with the five largest having 50% of the members. We are one body with many congregations. We are leaders, learners, faithful disciples who are joyfully following Jesus into the world.

Cathy Spory, chairman of Nurture and Education Commission stated that nurture includes encouraging, comforting, disciplining, and nurturing. Some of their activities have involved Katrina victims and the MAMA Project. Congregations are encouraged to list any educational or other church function on the web site. The Somerset office can be called to list them. The web site is amc-mcusa.org

Everyone was encouraged to use the new Sunday School curriculum, "Gather Round," which was prepared jointly by Mennonite Church USA and Church of the Brethren and is designed to teach the core values and peace emphasis of the church. Cathy is the resource advocate for the congregations.

Del and Linda Yoder from Morgantown Church of the Brethren shared their story of spending seven months with MCC in Indonesia in the Tsunami Recovery project. MCC partners with Muslims, and Interfaith Christians in their work. In the coastal city of Aceh in the state of Sumatra, where they worked, 23,000 people in part of the city lost their lives. Fewer than 10% of the houses were restored last fall. A peace process occurred following the tsunami. Sumatra had been a war zone for 30 years. The tsunami changed the focus on things as all international agencies came to assist in the relief. A cease fire was negotiated by the government, assisted by a Finnish leader, an agreement was signed in August, 2005, and an international peace accord was achieved.

Enos Tice, chairman of Faith, Life, and Procedures Commission, stated that the Fall 2006 delegate meeting would be held at Crossroads Mennonite Church. Affirmation was given for the replacement of Wayne Yoder for Alan Kauffman on the Leadership Commission and Conrad Mast for Russ Eanes on the Faith, Life, and Procedures Commission. Three goals of the Commission are: (1) Increase communication between Allegheny Conference and the members; (2) Help commission members appreciate the diversity present; and (3) Increase interest in conference.

After receiving letters from churches in other conferences regarding Allegheny Conference actions with Hyattsville Mennonite Church, the question arose, "How should Allegheny Mennonite Con-

ference congregations deal with concerns regarding Mennonite Church USA congregations or conferences outside of Allegheny Mennonite Conference?" The guidelines given by the commission are: (1) Mennonite Church USA is a denomination of conferences; (2) Concerns should initially be addressed conference to conference; (3) If not resolved at the conference to conference level, it may need to be addressed through the Constituency Leadership Council. In clarification, it is okay to send letters in support, or condolences directly to a church in another conference, but carbon copies should be sent to both conference ministers. Requests for a conference to change, or make a certain decision should be processed through Allegheny Conference.

As Enos leaves his position on the commission, he shared some of the frustrations and challenges that have been faced. A joy was Canan Station's decision to stay actively involved in conference. In keeping with the humility that Enos has shown, the love gift, which was given to him for the extra hours that he had encountered in his commission position, was used by the family to travel to the Katrina area and assist in the relief work rather than used for a family trip to Europe.

Ron Spory, chairman of Mission and Service Commission, reported that International Guest House is in need of volunteers, both long and short term, and World's Attic is in need of a treasurer. Don Speigle has retired from his prison ministry work and they are in need of a replacement. Delegates were asked to refer any qualified person who may be interested to the commission.

Part of the commission's vision is to have individual congregations involved in some mission or service project. Any congregation that has a vision for service should contact Allegheny Conference for financial and other support. The prayer commitment for each congregation will continue through next year. Each congregation was asked to submit a name and telephone number for a contact person

Kurt Horst, conference minister, for the past year, has been working 1/2 time for Allegheny Conference and 1/2 time for Mennonite Publishing House. He stated that for the first 1/3 of the year it seemed like a full time plus a 1/2 time job, but when Russ

Conference Statistics 22 congregations represented 86 registered delegates: 16 visitors/AMC 8 guests/church-wide agencies
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Below: At the close of Friday's session, the bowl and pitcher were passed from Gloria Horst Rosenberger to Carl Geissingner as she leaves and he assumes the position of conference moderator. Prayerful blessings from each of the commission chairmen were poured into the bowl and shared with him. To end this time, Conrad Mast led the congregation in a song of blessing.





Delegate sessions can make people tired and here's proof. Duane Frederick holds his sleeping daughter while going through the buffet line.

Eanes joined the office staff in October, 2005, some of the responsibilities shifted and he was able to set some boundaries. Most of his time has been utilized in working with eight churches who are in a pastoral transition. Sharing the frustrations of the pastoral search committees in their transition agendas has been a low-light for him, but, using Jeremiah as an example, he said, we can learn much in tough times. Those who run from tough times fail to learn. His highlights have included seeing University Mennonite Church prepare to move into a new building and face the challenges that it may present, having Merle Durst step into the pastoral position at Red Run Mennonite Church, and worshipping with several congregations in special meetings.

Russ Eanes challenged us to take risks. Abraham, Moses, Amos, the disciples, and the rich young ruler were all asked to take risks. Those who took the risks grew. When you are going where God wants you to go, you can be a risk taker.

Joy Cotchen, conference youth minister, has been working one day a week at a hospital. She was in charge of children and youth camps at Laurelville again this summer. She stated that it is an awesome place to see youth grow in Christ. She loves "stretching" people. She presented the challenge and the need of nurturing our children, of teaching them what it means to live for Christ, of telling them our story, of teaching core values. The new Sunday School curriculum "Gather Round" was also highly recommended by Joy for teaching our Anabaptist theology to our children.

Members of the youth cabinet were asked, "What does it mean to be a Mennonite and a part of Allegheny Mennonite Conference?" They answered: "sharing with other youth that share the same values," "people's humbleness," "the ability to serve God wherever He wants them," "Anabaptist beliefs: baptism was MY decision; the peace position; the community; strong believers, mentors," "the chance of having the experience of being a leader, the singing and the worship," "our whole stand on peace and its importance."

Jerry Troyer, Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center, briefed us on the capital campaign that began in 2004. The Youth Village with six cabins was completed in 2005 and the kitchen/dining room remodeling was finished this spring. Plans to expand the Meetinghouse have been put on hold until further finances are available. Various special seminars are being planned and hosted by Laurelville for the next year. In addition to these, groups such as Pittsburgh Youth Network, utilize the facilities and provide their own programs. The goal of the center is that every guest experience God.

Brenda Benner, chairman of the Finance and Stewardship Commission, rose to Carl Geissinger's

challenge to present her report in the form of a story.

The income and expenses for the past year were both around 85% of the budget so income funds were sufficient to meet the expenses with a small surplus. However, congregations still need to increase their giving because all commissions are operating on the bare minimum and there is a goal to increase the office staff back to 100% support.

Our giving to church wide agencies is currently at 10%, down from our previous 13%. Brenda reported that the average giving to conference from congregations is 5.5%. She encourages everyone to increase their giving. She has a dream of having congregational giving increased to 10%.

Steve Sauder, chairman of the Leadership Commission, reviewed the credentials issued and the pastoral positions approved by their commission. Brenda Benner has been licensed as associate pastor for St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church in Somerset, Pa. Steve Heatwole has transferred to Lancaster Conference. Chris Weaver has moved back to Kansas. Cameron Kauffman-Fry is moving to Canada.

Sherry Roos has been ordained for her pastoral work at the Kodaikanal International School in India. Joe and Sherry Roos will be leaving for India in late September. Sherry will be the chaplain for K-12 and the faculty in the school and pastor in church, and Joe will be on the faculty in the religious education section. This will allow their daughter, who is from India, to experience her homeland.

Everyone was encouraged to send their pastor and spouse to the pastor/spouse retreat at Laurelville on September 8-10. A Mediation Workshop is scheduled for October 13-14 in Pittsburgh and Kurt Horst will be conducting a four-session Preaching Workshop this winter.

Two motions from the coordinating council were given. One, that Kurt Horst's contract be continued for another two years and, two, that Joy Cotchen's contract be continued for another three years with an evaluation at the end of 1 1/2 years. Both motions passed unanimously.

During the discussion time at the close of the business session, it was again stressed that we are at a low point in our budget. We want to see ourselves in an increasing role. Next year's budget requires a 10% increase in giving to meet it.

Carl Geissinger shared of his work as a chaplain in the Snyder County Prison System. Prison ministry is an open door and volunteer workers are needed. Wayne Yoder from Pinto Mennonite Church shared of how inmates have become open and receptive through their work with plants and landscaping as he works with them in horticulture in a prison in his home community.

—Mary Ellen Lichty, Gortner

Seminars at Summer Conference Sessions

Local Church in Mission

Ron Spory, chair of Allegheny Conference Missions and Service Commission, led us in a discussion about the local church and missions. He challenged us with three questions.

The first question was “Who are we?” We must be people not only with a message to give, but people with a story to tell—a people with a concern and compassion for the lost around us. Ron pointed out that this may be uncomfortable and difficult for us. If we touch people around us who have never been in a church, we may face some unruly children who simply don’t know how to act in church. This could also be a problem with some adults. Ron said we may have to learn to be accepting and tolerant of some less than desirable actions from the unchurched. We need to be willing to give time and space for the Holy Spirit to teach and show them new ways of living.

Identifying & Calling Leaders

Alan Kauffman, Maple Grove Pastor, began this seminar by asking participants to imagine they were five or six years old (a long time ago for many of us). Then we were asked to focus on what three or four persons and/or events helped to shape us to have the confidence we have to do what we do today, particularly in leadership roles. As participants shared, most related that there were persons who were important in their life as youth who gave them opportunities and encouraged them in things they volunteered to do or were asked to do. Being able to use and develop gifts and abilities in ways that were constructive, not threatening or destructive, and being given encouragement at significant times were important. Some had mentors assigned, others shared of a variety of persons who were important to them. Some of the types of activities that were mentioned that helped individuals to develop leadership ability were: serving on various church and youth committees, leading music, participating in a praise team, leading children’s stories, helping with Bible school, reading scripture and helping to lead worship, setting up sound systems or recording services, and giving short presentations on a given topic.

All present were asked to look at every young person’s gifts, and how their gifts are used and developed in the life of the church. They need to be given the freedom to participate and grace to fail.

The second question was “What can we do that reaches people for Christ?” Being real, compassionate, truthful and loving is probably the basis for getting through to the non-believer. These are needed no matter what form of mission outreach we engage in. We need to be willing and available for God to use, even if it means we may have to be stretched past our comfort zone at times. Also discussed was the fact that many of us are in need of more motivation and more training in evangelism.

The third question was, “Are we fulfilling the great commission?” I think the outcome of our discussion and the answer to this question is: we know it is what we are called to do, we want to fulfill it, but there is a fair amount of room for improvement both on a personal level and a church wide level. We all recognize there is a lot of work left to do to bring this hurting world into knowing the peace of Christ living in them.

—*Jack Styer, Canan Station*

Persons sensing a call to ministry should be encouraged and supported in programs such as !Explore: A Theological Program for High School Youth, (Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary), and Cultivating a Culture of Call (Eastern Mennonite Seminary). In light of the fact that there are 3-5 positions for every registered candidate for pastoral ministry in Mennonite Church USA, it is obvious that congregations need to give serious attention to how young and older may be called to ministry. We need to be sensitive and give encouragement to God’s call to ministerial leadership in the life of every person, regardless of age.

—*Wayne Yoder, Pinto*



Top: Zach Good brings the Lord’s Prayer to life as he talks with God in a skit during worship Sunday morning. Above: Young adult leaders in the church, L. to R., standing: Seth Crissman, Anna Mast, Michael Horst, Hannah Speigle. Seated: Deanne Delp and Becky Horst.

Seminars at Summer Conference Sessions, cont.

MAMA Project

According to Priscilla Benner, director of the MAMA project, there are two things necessary in medical missions. The first is to let your heart be broken over the illness and loss of life in the global south that is preventable with very basic health care. The second is to not despair over such vast injustice, but to invest ourselves in making a difference.

The MAMA project, begun in 1987 through a joint effort of Honduran Mennonite Women and Franconia Mennonite Conference, works to bring health care and education to Hondurans living in severe poverty. This seminar presented stories of how the MAMA project is working to make a difference, and ways that Allegheny Conference members can contribute. In three locations in Honduras, volunteers can help with medical and dental brigades, help homeowners install concrete floors, play with children, or offer a variety of seminars to Hondurans, on just about any topic that a volunteer would like to present. The project anticipates broadening its scope to include ministry in Haiti, Liberia, Kenya, and Nigeria. Currently, the MAMA project hosts work teams for one to two weeks at a time. More information about volunteering, contributing, or future plans of the organization can be found at www.mamaproject.org. —*Katie Chaffinch, Tressler*

Countering the Culture of MORE

This seminar was led by Jim Miller, of MMA, with input from Ron Spory and Beryl Jantzi. These men reviewed their experience and information they obtained at the Stewardship Leaders Conference held March 3, 2006 in Lancaster, Pa. This conference will be planned for every 2 years (on the off year from the Mennonite Church USA Conference). The keynote speaker at the conference was Nathan Dungan, President of Share-Save-Spend, LLC, Minneapolis, Minn., an organization that helps people of all ages develop and maintain healthy financial habits. Among the topics discussed, were internet gambling, credit card debt, and medical expenses. It was emphasized that the church needs to be the voice of reason. Parents/congregations need a plan to educate for responsible use of money. Those that tell the stories will shape the culture. Nathan Dungan has written financial curriculums for youth and for adults, entitled “Share-Save-Spend” (emphasizing money management in that order). Other speakers at the above mentioned conference were Dick Towner, Lynn Miller, Mark Wenger, and Steve Lane. —*Joyce Hall, University*



Children and youth reported their activities of the weekend in music and story.

Immigration, abortion, Iraq, and healthcare

Resolutions. What exactly are they good for? And is anyone even using them? Ron Byler used these questions to lead a group looking at recent MC USA statements on immigration, health care, abortion and the current Iraq war. The statements, whether individual Mennonites agree or disagree with them, do have a lot of positives. While their impact on state or national governments is debatable, what the Executive Board is looking at is their impact on local churches and communities.

For example, the immigration statement “has equipped people for a certain ministry,” Ron says, and has remained relevant because this issue is, and will continue to be, of deep concern to some Mennonite churches. The healthcare statement has triggered discussion, as a number of seminar participants confirmed, in some churches who are using it as a small group or Sunday School class discussion guide; that then hopefully spurs those churches to local actions.

More generally, the statements can also serve as identity documents for new members and ecumenical work, shaping our identity in ways that we don't always think about.

Possible future statements spurred some discussion; the current Middle East situation seems to call for a statement but as a divisive issue (and with memories of the heated abortion and Iraq war statement discussions still fresh), there's little hope of anything coming out. A more likely subject is a statement on environment, energy and sustainability issues which got a lot of positive feedback among the AMC group.

In the end, while statements are beneficial, MC USA is trying to do less of them. After all, Ron said, they are an important part of our work but not the most important part of what we as a missional church do. —*LeAnne Zook, Hyattsville*

Questions and Answers

Faith, Life, and Procedures Commission highlighted the important responsibilities of delegates to conference during their Saturday afternoon workshop. Enos Tice, chair of FLP, said that the primary role of the delegates was to put God's priorities into conference action. To help the delegates with this the commission handed out and went over a packet of materials that delegates were asked to add to their delegate folders. The delegate body does the official work of Allegheny Mennonite Conference. Delegates, therefore, were charged by Enos to attend conference sessions, be informed of conference happenings, and understand the procedures of business and decision making strategies adopted by the conference and MC USA. Enos highlighted the documents contained in the delegate package that deal with the structure and procedures of the conference. These documents guide the way that conference does its business. The commission wanted to be sure that each delegate had packet in hand to study and were receiving the updated relevant materials. Any delegate who has not received a packet or updated materials should contact the AMC office to find out about their materials. —*Lawrence Brenneman, Pinto*

