

Freely Receive; Freely Give: Worship at AMC Annual Meeting



He said, “Freely, freely you have received; freely, freely give. Go in my name, and because you believe, others will know that I live.” The words of this hymn gathered worshippers as the annual conference of Allegheny Mennonite Conference opened on August 1. The hymn was sung in each worship service during the conference as we centered around the theme, “Freely Receive; Freely Give.” Each service repeated the theme; each service repeated

hymns; each service received offerings; and each service heard a sermon from the same biblical text. In the repetition, worshippers heard a new call each day, a call to move beyond our

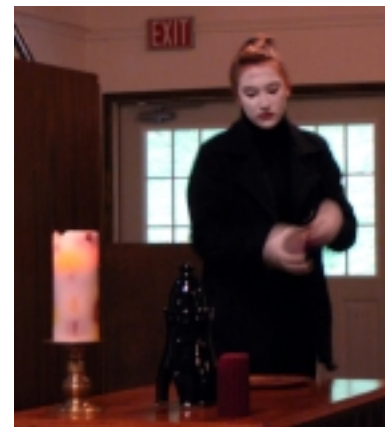


comfort zone, a call to freely receive, and to freely give.

“Do Your work among us this weekend,” we prayed as we worshipped on Friday evening. After prelude, words of welcome, and hymns of praise it was time to collect the offering. But before we gave our money, in

Allison Eanes’ mime we saw that the offering God wants is not so much our money as our selves, our lives. Welcomed and received to the pulpit, James Miller’s sermon asked listeners to hear “Passion, Risk, and Opportunity” in the Matthew 10:7-15 account of Jesus sending his disciples into mission. James directed us to the action verbs in this text, noting the entrepreneurial nature of Jesus’ training and mission. Once Jesus had completed the training of his new disciples, he asked them to go to the next level, to give themselves to the mission. They didn’t need any equipment to carry the Gospel into new communities—they were the equipment. Similarly the disciples, our lives, our selves are the equipment of the church’s mission in the world. From the Matthew narrative we see that being missional requires risk, vision, passion, optimism, commitment, and flexibility. James reminded us that God’s passion is limitless, and that God has “freely given a piece of it to each of us.”

On Saturday evening we again used the Matthew 10 text in singing, offering, sermon,



Left: L. to R.: Laurie Weaver and Conrad Mast accompany as Erin Clymer leads worshippers in song at Friday evening worship.

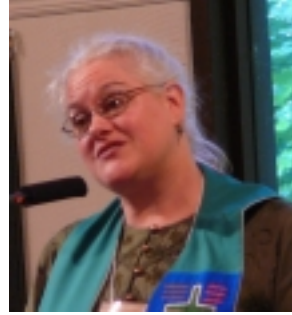
Above: Allison Eanes demonstrates through mime that God desires us as offering.

Below Left: James Miller encourages worshippers to give themselves to God’s mission.

Worship at AMC Annual Meeting, cont.



Above: Kurt Horst.



Right: Donna Mast.

Right Below: Rose Bender.

Below: Communion on Sunday morning.

Bottom: Carl Geissinger ended his term as conference moderator and Dave Garber began his term as conference moderator for Allegheny Conference at the conclusion of Sunday's worship service.



and storytelling. Donna Mast, in her “Footloose and Baggage-free” sermon noted that “we like our stuff.” But our baggage can get in the way of our mission, of our message; our baggage and our stuff weigh us down in our journeys of faith. In response to the message, worshipers were asked to reflect on our baggage—our things and our ways of thinking—to consider what we were being asked to set aside. In our offering we were called to “uncurl [our] fists” as we gave our money and our selves. In her testimony, Rose Bender told several stories of how she has freely received from God through the hands of other people, so that she “can walk with my hands open.” A second reading of the text took us to a deeper level.

A larger crowd gathered for Sunday morning worship as our youth and members from Pittsburgh and Johnstown came to Laurelville to participate in worship. For a third time we heard Matthew 10:7-15 read; and a third time worshipers heard a message from the Living Text as Conference Minister Kurt Horst talked about Freely Giving. Because all is God's, the paradox of giving is that we can give what we don't have, and when we've given something away, we still have it. Kurt reminded us that our God is a Prodigal God, Who sows seeds on sidewalks as well as on fertile fields; he called worshipers to remember our God who has freely given to us. What we have received from God is eternal, and it is our remembering what we've been given that enables us to freely give.

In the weeks following conference, I have continued to reflect on this theme, the messages, and the calls given by James, Donna, and Kurt. New to AMC, I listened primarily at a personal level: Where is my passion for mission? What baggage am I carrying? Am I freely giving? These questions call me to stretch and expand, and cause appropriate discomfort in my relationship with God and community. Beyond the personal level, I have been considering how these questions and calls are heard in the local church, the regional church, the denominational church. Do we as Mennonite Church USA have an entrepreneurial spirit for mission? Is there evidence of our passion? What is the baggage that AMC carries? Is there baggage that gets in the way of the message that we as the regional church want others to receive? In our local churches, do we remember that God has freely given to us, that we have freely received God's liberation and grace? Do our local churches freely give to each other, to our communities?

And perhaps as we reflect, it may be useful to look back for a moment. As we journey forward into the 21st century, our faith roots can provide guidance and instruction. First century Jews and Gentiles demonstrated an extraordinary entrepreneurial spirit as they gave birth to a new faith, a new way of worshipping God by responding to Jesus' Gospel. The early Christian church modeled what it means to let go of our stuff. They were willing to let go of all their baggage, freely giving to each other so that the Good News—of feeding the poor, caring for the orphans and widows, and showing hospitality to the stranger—would be realized on earth as in heaven. Similarly, the early Anabaptists, as they remembered what God had given to them, found a renewed faith and trust in God and in the Church. When they remembered, they were willing to freely give, even their very lives.

May we continue to freely receive from our gracious God, and freely receive from each other. In turn, may God give us the courage to go in God's name, and because we believe, freely give. —Suella Gerber, *University*

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Freely Receive; Freely Give: Reporting at AMC Annual Meeting



People like God, but not the church. Carl Geisinger, Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) moderator used a story about a seven year old boy to illustrate this point. Carl said that this is a

wonderful time to represent God by being the Body of Christ. Love God and be loved by him, this is our primary purpose, he said. Secondly, love our neighbor as ourselves. Carl petitioned the conference to go search out those opportunities to call neighbors to God.

Carl envisions that five years from now the conference will work toward four goals. In an area that has three million people, 60% un-churched, AMC should begin 35 mission centers. It is a reasonable goal to see membership increase by one thousand with five successful church plants. Finally, Carl called for increased racial diversity among the membership represented at conference.

The moderator reported that Coordinating Council set priorities for the conference. Included in these are ministries toward children and youth. Churches are called to work toward regional cooperation, with emphasis on increased individual witnessing. Church planting efforts will be encouraged. To help congregations facilitate these goals, a missional leader has been retained.

On behalf of the Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) Executive Board (EB), Linford King highlighted the priorities of the national church. These are holistic witness, leadership development, anti-racism, and global connections. King then introduced representatives of the program board that are working to implement these goals. Mennonite Education Agency serves to strengthen the church through education and leadership development. Mennonite Mission Network is the mission program board with service and mission opportunities for young and old, both in the United States and overseas. This includes media ministries as well as connections between American congregations and international churches. Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) provides many financial services both to individuals and congregations. Loans for

church buildings, sharing funds for mission efforts, and education financial assistance are ways MMA has worked with conferences and churches. Mennonite Publishing Network provides printed materials that support faith from the Anabaptist perspective. Leadership resources, worship planning guides, scripture commentaries, and multi-lingual lessons are some of the pieces developed for the churches.

Linford addressed delegate questions about Executive Board proposals recommending restructure of organization of MC USA. He said that because of many questions submitted to the EB, plans for restructuring have been put on hold. King said that he will take back to the board other questions and concerns expressed by the delegates.

Reorganizing MMA under the leadership of new president Larry Miller is the priority of the agency featured at this year's conference session, according to spokesperson, Jim Miller. Focusing on helping people to apply faith values to finances, and increasing missional efforts outside of the Anabaptist tradition are part of these efforts. Targeting specific populations such as youth and young adults and those facing and in retirement years are examples. Another emphasis is green investing and other forms of socially responsible investing. Jim pointed out that nineteen AMC churches have participated with MMA in the Sharing Fund Grant Program.

Pastors in AMC are getting younger, according to Kurt Horst in his conference minister's report. He doesn't remember a time when there were fewer pastoral searches in progress. The current emphasis is congregations working together, regionally, nationally, internationally, and ecumenically. Toward this end, worship, fellowship, and youth events have been planned. Lay leadership workshops, especially for treasurers, have taken place. Kurt highlighted several examples of conference congregations and individuals who are making international connections in countries such as Honduras, Ghana, and Haiti.

Health care access, a mutual health care plan for all pastors, was mandated by the MC USA delegates at San Jose last year. Kurt reported that the issue of those congregations that cannot afford the plan receiving help from those that can is of first importance. For all pastors to receive health care it is estimated to mean a cost of ten dollars per member across the church.



Above: Linford King

Left: Carl Geisinger

There were 23 of the 29 congregations represented at the roll call. (Tressler had the most persons represented with a total of 13!) There were 86 delegates and 33 non-delegates present, along with 11 guests from church-wide boards and agencies, for a total attendance of 130 at the roll call.

Reporting at AMC Annual Meeting, cont.



Above: Kurt Horst with Lawrence Brenneman. Below: Joy Cothen with youth. Bottom: left and right: Youth work on service projects at Laurelville. Right: Alan Kauffman. Right Below: Steve Sauder.

What priorities does Kurt challenge AMC with? Leadership development has met with some success in the conference, but still needs to be emphasized. There is much room for improvement in anti-racism, according to Kurt. Churches need to see those cross-culture connections available all around them in their communities. More effort needs to be placed in holistic witness, sharing Jesus in neighborhoods. Kurt challenged congregations to ask the question, "How are we doing in our witness?"

Kurt introduced the Missional Leader for AMC, Lawrence Brenneman. This is a position of coordinated effort with Mennonite Mission Network.

Joy Cothen, conference youth minister, challenged the conference to put youth at the heart of congregational passion. Youth need adult influences. Joy then introduced six youth

leaders, Leah Rittenhouse, Amika Miller, Jeanna Spory, Emily Spory, Allison Eanes, and Alisha Bender, who highlighted those influences and activities that have meant most to them. Service opportunities, youth conventions, Mennonite education, and leadership development activities have given these youth a wholesome view of the church and encouraged them in church life. Joy reported her continuing participation in the planning for the national youth assembly in Columbus, Ohio, in 2009.

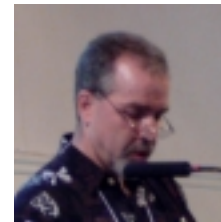
AMC commission reports concluded the business part of the conference. Faith, Life, and Procedures (FLP) chair, Alan Kauffman, proposed to the delegates that membership in AMC for Beaver Run congregation will continue to be provisional for another year. FLP will bring to the delegates a new proposal within the next year. This motion was passed by the delegates.

Brenda Benner, chair of Finance and Stewardship commission, pointed out that the 2007-08 financial report was \$5679.12 in the red. This raises concerns for next year. To that end a staffing committee has been established, composed of J. Lorne Peachey, John Bender, and Jamie Horst, to study AMC staffing needs in light of financial constraints. Brenda pointed out that a new treasurers' handbook for congregations has received favorable reviews.

New pastors, Adam Tice, Sandeep Thomas, Lewis Beechey, Bob Larimore, Brent Siegrist, Herb Zook, and Merle Christner, were introduced by Leadership commission chair, Steve Sauder. He also announced the date for the pastor/spouse retreat, October 10-12.

The Mission and Service commission, on behalf of the International Guest House, announced that grant moneys are available from the Guest House to congregations that develop a hospitality initiative. Applications should be made through the M&S commission.

—Lawrence Brenneman, Pinto



Saturday Seminars

Why I Am An Anabaptist

This seminar, led by Kurt Horst, gave the 20 plus participants the opportunity to come up with a good working definition for the word Anabaptist. Words such as re-baptised, lordship of Christ, mutual accountability, Christ centered community and others were discussed.

From the very beginning of time, starting with Adam and Eve in the garden, God granted choice. They were told “Do not eat.”—They ate. Today persons are still called to make their own individual choice and decision to follow Jesus.

Three characteristics of a marked Anabaptist vision are peace, community and discipleship. Most of the time was spent discussing discipleship. A disciple understands that “Jesus meant what He said and Jesus was talking to us.” The teachings of Jesus should be the starting place for what we believe and do as disciples of Jesus. Community was discussed a bit—community can be the “goofy” part!—give and receive counsel, gather together to give accountability and the priesthood of believers.

Anabaptist writings express a deep desire for an authentic Christianity; in heart, soul, mind, and body expressed in word and deed.

“Thus, my dearest daughter...you will find, that we must follow Christ Jesus, and obey Him unto the end; and you will also truly find the little flock who follow Christ....for we must follow His footsteps, and be like our Lord, the disciple like his master.” (The last testament of Jan Wouters to his daughter [1572], *Martyrs Mirror*, 914-15) —*Marlene Zook, Maple Grove*

It Should Never Happen Here, But It Does: Sexual Abuse In the Church

This seminar really opened my eyes on sexual abuse in the community and the church. Eighty percent of abusers are someone the victim knows and trusts. Forty-two percent of abusers are volunteers. This committee gave us recommendations regarding alone time and screening, as well as when and how to report. They recommended that all workers, paid and volunteer, receive training on sexual abuse prevention. A big thank you to the committee that put a lot of work into these recommendations. We need to take this seriously.

—*Loretta Schrock, Tressler*



(Right) Keith Hershberger and Erin Clymer delight young (left) and old with their music on Saturday evening. Mark Horst assists with drumming on some of the songs.

Stewardship of Health

The goal of maintaining good health is to nurture the body we have been given so we can do the work God has for us. Many Old Testament laws are related to caring for the body. Much of Jesus’ ministry was dedicated to healing. How do we view our health in light of the wholeness of our lives? Stewardship of health involves good care of our bodies, using health resources wisely, and caring for one another in our communities. —*Betty Helmick, Pinto*

Gospel According to Kumar Chandrakuntal

The presenter was Sandeep Thomas of the Asian Indian Christian Church of Pittsburgh. Kumar was a Hindu student of Sandeep’s and this seminar is a reflection on their interaction.

In response to the Great Commission, is it not important to understand our target audience? What do Hindus believe, and at what points in their belief system are they most open to hearing the Gospel, were the seminar goals.

We talked about how Hindus generally have unspoken longings such as: 1. The need to elevate their spiritual thinking, (Hindus are deep thinkers), 2. The need to make God relatable, and 3. The need to have some control over life and death. The Good News of the Gospel is that it speaks better to these needs than does the Hindu religion.

The Good News for Hindus is that: 1. God is not an impersonal force but a person engaged in the world, 2. God loves the world and redeems it for Himself, 3. God lives in us (a very intimate relationship through Christ), 4. God offers us control over life and death in our unity with Christ, and 5. God as a loving Father, challenges our natural human urge to create and worship objects (idols). —*Jeff Jones, Cornerstone Fellowship of Mill Run*



Children, Junior High, and Youth present songs and experiences during Sunday Morning’s worship time at Annual Meeting.

Saturday Seminars, cont.

Hospitality Grant Program

The International Guest House (IGH) at 1441 Kennedy Street NW, Washington, D.C., is a joint ministry of Hyattsville Mennonite Church and the Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC). Having served nearly 50,000 guests from over 180 countries since it opened its doors in 1967, the IGH continues to emphasize the ministry of Christian hospitality to all those who come. The IGH is staffed and managed by Mennonite volunteers from across the United States and Canada.

In an effort to encourage our brother and sister congregations across AMC to initiate new ventures in Christian hospitality and fellowship, or to strengthen existing programs, the Executive Board of the IGH will make an annual award of up to \$500.00 to groups of congregations, individual congregations, or groups within congregations to support or extend such initiatives or programs. The grant award may be used as seed monies to help cover start-up costs, or to expand an ongoing program.

Within the context of its general decision to support long-term initiatives in Christian hospitality, the IGH Board will consider any and all reasonable applications for funding by any church group affiliated with AMC.

Applications should include the following:

1. The name of the congregations(s) sponsoring the project, including the name, address, telephone number and e-mail of the primary contact.
2. Several paragraphs describing the initiative to be funded, including origins, purposes, and long-term goals.
3. A clear statement of how the grant monies will be used, including a timeline for implementation.

All applications should be submitted in writing. (See sidebar for address) Deadline for submission of applications: December 31, 2008. Decisions of the IGH Executive Board will be arbitrary and final. Announcement of awards will be made at the Spring AMC Conference Session. If you have questions, please contact Annabelle Kratz, Chair of the Executive Board at 302-596-9057 or via e-mail at dacratz@juno.com —*T.J. Tennefoss, Tressler*

Send applications to:
International Guest House
1441 Kennedy Street NW
Washington, DC 20011
Attn: IGH Grant Program

ACNews
531 Scottdale Ave.
Scottdale, PA 15683
ph. 724-887-5563
e-mail: sendamcnews@gmail.com

Disability in the Missional Church

Christine Guth, Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADNet) Associate, offered this seminar. We were challenged to check how our congregations in Allegheny Mennonite Conference are doing in the following areas:

“Do persons with disabilities and their families feel welcome in our congregation?”

“What is our congregation doing to call out and use the gifts of all persons with visible or invisible disabilities?”

“Is our building wheelchair accessible by providing ramps, bathroom facilities, and doors that are wide enough for those wheelchairs?”

Jesus died for all persons, and calls all to faith and service in His church.

—*Joyce Kisamore, Gortner*

A Little Bit of this.. and a Little Bit of That!

Will I need one million dollars to retire? Will Social Security be enough? These were common misconceptions and concerns about retirement examined by Preston Sharp, Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) representative. With our surrounding culture telling us that, “You can and should have it all!”, what is a Christian with an Anabaptist perspective supposed to do when it comes to planning for retirement. MMA is offering a free booklet entitled “Your Enough” which will help you identify your strengths, get your dreams down on paper, prioritize your dreams, determine the actions you need to take, and help you connect with your MMA partner. As a practice illustration, Preston lead the group through a case study demonstrating that it is possible to volunteer your way to a secure retirement: You can save money for retirement while volunteering, and you can delay the time until you must dip into your retirement savings. For a copy of the book contact MMA. —*Everett Ramer, Pittsburgh*

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Pastor's Meeting in Bedford



Christopher McMahon

Allegheny Mennonite Conference pastors will meet on Tuesday, Nov 11 to think about the ways we teach about the meaning of Christ's life and death. This meeting continues a five year tradition of encouraging pastors to freely speak with one another on matters of theological importance in our churches. Christopher McMahon will provide input for the day.

Christopher has a Ph. D. from Catholic University and teaches in the Theology Department of Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa. He is the author of *Jesus Our Salvation* (Winona: St. Mary's, 2007) as well as many essays and reviews. Dr. McMahon is Roman Catholic. His wife, Debra, is Mennonite. Both attend Scottdale Mennonite Church.

The schedule of the day begins at 8:45 with registration and will include worship times along with three presentations titled: "Distorting the Cross of Christ"; "Linking Conversion and the Cross Theologically"; and "Linking Conversion and the Cross Pastorally".

In three sessions of both lecture and dialog between participants, pastors will examine ways we speak of the meaning of the cross in our teaching ministries. Registration is through the Conference Office at kathy@amc-mcusa.org.

—*Conrad Mast, Scottdale*

Pittsburgh Mennonite Celebrates 40 Years

This fall Pittsburgh Mennonite Church will be celebrating our 40th Anniversary Celebration as a church. We are working on plans for the anniversary activities to be held October 4-5, 2008.

We hope you will save the date and put October 4 and 5, 2008 on your calendar and come and help us celebrate this important occasion for our congregation. Come and reminisce and re-connect with old friends or make some new friends. We want to hear the stories, memories and experiences you may have had in relation to Pittsburgh Mennonite Church over the years. We are excited about the good things that are currently happening at PMC and want to celebrate this milestone of being together 40 years.

Plans are underway for the weekend. If you have any questions you can contact the church at 412-421-8007, e-mail kenthechurchfly@yahoo.com, contact a member of the Anniversary committee, Kathleen Good, Karen Howard, John Bender or Shari Lediig Holland or someone you know at PMC. We look forward to seeing you in October.

—*Shari Leidig Holland, Pittsburgh*

TriState Relief Sale Supported By Many To Help Others

Attendees not only went home with unique and handcrafted merchandise, but also enjoyed the wonderful foods, surrey rides, and the musical performances. Children brought their pennies and small change to be applied to food projects in the United States and around the world. During the day they knotted comforters to be sent where warm bedding is needed, filled bags with school supplies for those who would otherwise be unable to attend school, pumped water using simple pumps used in third world countries, rode on a hay wagon and had fun bidding at an auction just for them. Lots of fun while learning about sharing to help others is an important component of this event.

In response to the needs of cyclone victims and war refugees such as in the Darfur region of Africa, bidders donated to such items as the opportunity to sit in a handcrafted glider/rocker during the auction, a guided nature walk by a local botanist as well as lovely quilts and wall hangings and art items created especially for the TriState event. Parents and grandparents were delighted with the wide array of items for children such as porch gliders, rocking horses, battery powered ATVs and child-size picnic tables.

The TriState Relief Sale Board would like to extend their thanks to all of the volunteers, donors and attendees who made this event such a success and who have made possible a better life for many by providing shelter, help in producing enough food and encouragement to the discouraged. (Editor's note: Look for photos of the 2008 TriState Relief Sale in the next issue of *Allegheny Conference News*.)