



Calling people into a transforming relationship with Jesus and His Church

# Allegheny Conference NEWS

January/February 2009

## Fall Delegates Meeting

November 1, 2008 started out as a beautiful day in Soap Hollow. As I walked down the Stahl church driveway to get the newspaper from the box along the road, I saw that Joy Cotchen's car was already at the church. The youth were in charge of serving the noon meal for the Allegheny Conference delegate meetings. Joy, a member of the Stahl church, and the conference youth minister and was helping get things ready for the arrival of those coming from a distance who might enjoy refreshments before the meeting started.

I watched from my bedroom window to see when the delegates would start arriving. I walked over to the church and went to the basement where people were greeting each other with happy faces, and enjoying the refreshments.

Around 9:30 I found the place where I usually sit on Sunday mornings and watched the people slowly enter the auditorium. At 9:35, Rose Bender, interim pastor of Stahl, stood up to welcome the people and said to Don Hamsher, standing by the door, "Bring the people in." When everyone was quiet Rose made a few announcements about lunch, etc., and then led the opening prayer.

Dave Speigle led the opening songs. Then Psalm 145 was read by Joy Cotchen and Chris and Floyd Lehman. After two more songs, Rose had the devotional. She talked about the majesty of God's kingdom and ways to give glory to God. She read Psalm 67 and closed with prayer.

After another congregational song, Dave Garber, the moderator, called for the roll call and accepting of the minutes of the August conference meetings.

Carl Geissinger was next on the program. He told a story he had read about a woman who was arrested for preaching outside the local police station. She was sent to a woman's prison where she

proclaimed the Gospel and 800 women believed. The atmosphere was changed so much that she was asked to work there after she was freed. She was released and continued her mission.

Carl challenged the audience to think of a positive change that would move the church toward a mission center where people are being reconciled to God and growing in a life transforming relationship with Jesus.

Lawrence Brenneman talked about his new role as Conference Missional Leader. He said we should expect the unexpected. He would like to be invited to visit churches and learn of visions for the church. He would like to bring energy to the churches.

Kurt Horst gave a report on health care for pastors. Time was allowed for a 5 minute stretch before John Bender talked about conference staffing structure.

At 11:00 reports were made by commissions. Cathy Chapman spoke for the Nurture and Education Commission. She presented recommendations for church workers to follow to better ensure safety for all who enter our church buildings.

Ron Spory reported for the Mission and Service Commission. World's Attic Thrift Store sales are good. Would it be possible to have the store open on Friday evenings? The International Guest House guests are averaging around 11 per night.

Alan Kauffman reported for the Faith, Life, and Procedures Commission. He said there is a new church in Delaware called Grace Fellowship which would like to be accepted into conference. He requested prayer for both churches in Delaware. He said the nominating committee is working on a slate for the March delegate meeting.

Brenda Benner from Finance and Stewardship Commission presented the current budget and said she was able to pay the bills. Steve Sauder an-



**Above: Rose Bender**  
**Below: Dave Garber**



**Lawrence Brenneman, Conference Missional Leader, can be contacted at Route 6, Box 6636, Keyser, WV 26726 or 304-788-0277.**

## Fall Delegates Meeting, cont.



**Top: Lunch was a time of good food and good conversation.**

**Above: Steve Sauder speaks during open microphone time.**

**Top right: Thomas Odura offers words of encouragement and inspiration as he speaks of the Good News Theological College and Seminary.**

**Below: Dave Speigle leads in song.**



nounced and introduced the new pastors in conference. He spoke for the Leadership Commission.

After the reports there was time for the delegates to share how they have seen God work in churches. One told of a church where a cash offering was taken and left sitting in front of the church so that anyone who was in need could feel free to use the money. Another told of resources that could be used to help military vets in healing. Another talked about the Philadelphia Mennonite High School and the good results there. Another talked about MCC administration staff moving from Akron to Philadelphia and that relief kits are needed for Iraq. An update was given on Tom and Karla Croyle. A nurse had attended a conference on combining spirituality and visual arts. Another told about using different forms of worship for different people.

After prayer for the meal we made our way to the basement. I was privileged to go down the steps with the afternoon speaker. I learned that English is taught in the schools in Ghana and Thomas Odura is the father of five children.

During the lunch of soups, salad, crackers, and desserts, the topics of conversation ranged from conversations about church growth and decline, to memories of ground cherry pie.

After lunch there was a Constituency Leaders Council report about the restructuring of Mennonite Church USA. John Bender talked about the coming conventions in Columbus, Ohio.

Another "open mic" time occurred, this time to share dreams for Allegheny Mennonite Conference. Some dreams were: to not be forgetful, to have a service adventure reunion, to have more youth from communities take part in church activities, a larger campus ministry for college students, and more patience with children in venture clubs.

At 1:30 the Maple Grove/University Troupe told of their visit to Africa. When they left the U.S., it was 45 degrees and when they arrived in Ghana it was 95 degrees and the streets were crowded. They were impressed by the simplicity of life there and the dedication and passions of the students of the Good News Theological College and Seminary (GNTC&S). Worship services were very moving. They sampled foods from many food vendors. People take off their shoes when entering a church because they are on holy ground.

Although English is the national language in Ghana, there are many national languages. The students are told to preach to the people in their own languages. The school traces its roots to Mennonite mission work, but it is not a Mennonite institution. Mennonites do help with resources and some staff.

After prayer, Thomas Odura was introduced as a minister of the African Independent Church and a teacher at the GNTC&S. He told about the churches that are planted, led, and administered by Africans. They are one third of the Christians in Africa and the fastest growing churches in the world. Led by the Holy Spirit, their services consist of prayer, fasting, faith healing, evangelism, praise and worship. About 1 mile from the church building the worshipers begin to meet and march into the church with drums and singing.

The ministry of GNTC&S was begun in November of 1971 when they broke away from established churches because of unpopular mission policies and out of context beliefs and practices. The school is nationally accredited, owned and managed by African Christians and supported by Mennonites and others. The students are trained after they are ordained. The school teaches witnessing by students, short term missions, conferences, a theological and degree program, field trips, seminars for leaders, and leadership education. Some of the needs of the school are salary money, student text books, scholarships for students, more computers, library materials, and a photo copier. One of the buildings was built in memory of Emma Grove, a Mennonite who taught there for 12 years. The school looks for gifted people, not gender.

After prayer for Thomas and his ministry, it was announced that the spring delegates meeting will be in Martinsburg. Dave Speigle led the closing song and Dan Hertzler gave the benediction.

—*Ruth Y. Thomas, Stahl*

Attendance figures for the session:

- Congregations represented: 24 of the 29
- Delegates present: 109
- Non-delegates present: 9
- Visitors present: 1

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## Merle Christner Installed at Pinto

Pinto Mennonite Church has called Merle Christner to become their full-time lead pastor. (Phillip Dayton continues as half-time pastor for children and youth.) During the Sunday morning service on September 9, Merle was installed to his task by Kurt Horst, Allegheny Conference Minister. Duane Yoder, pastor of Lindale Mennonite Church in Virginia, and a close friend to Merle, preached the morning message. He used Titus 2:7-8 and 11-15 as his text and encouraged Merle to “preach the word, love the people, and it will go well.” From 1 Timothy, her admonished Merle to “fan into flame the gift within you” and reminded us that Merle’s job is to equip the congregation to do the work of the church together with him. To the congregation he gave the caution, that we not expect that our pastor should do it all and that we should lock arms with him and walk together. He reminded us that he would be checking on us; he knows the way to Pinto from Virginia! From Duane’s own life, he

suggested that if he were beginning his ministry again, he “would worry less about what people thought and work more on building a closer relationship with Christ.” He would preach the same sermon over and over, “I want to know Christ ...” Following Duane’s message, Kurt Horst conducted the installation service inviting Merle’s wife Evie and the Pastoral Search Committee to join him in laying hands on Merle for a prayer of dedication.

Merle and Evie come to us from Hesston, Kansas where Merle worked in the printing business and Evie was a nurse. They are the parents of three grown children, married and living in Wisconsin, North Carolina and Virginia and grandparents to Benjamin. —*Roveen Yoder, Pinto*



**L. to R.; Duane Yoder, Evie and Merle Christner, and Kurt Horst.**

## Herb Zook Installed at Maple Grove Mennonite

The resignation of Maple Grove’s youth minister fall, 2007, gave opportunity for Pastor Alan Kauffman to focus on ministry to children, youth and young adults, a ministry in which he had a keen interest and experience. To do this some tasks in his current covenant needed to be reassigned. Maple Grove needed an associate pastor!

A search committee, chaired by Ken Hartzler, began work January, 2008, with the goal to have in place an associate pastor as soon as expediently possible. The committee studied a profile of qualifications needed in a candidate. Kurt Horst gave orientation to the committee and channeled resumes to them. For almost four months the committee reviewed resumes considering implications of full-time/part-time position, age, compatibility with church leadership vision, and gender.

During this process, days of prayer and fasting were set apart. Mid-April the search committee felt the leading of the Holy Spirit as Herb Zook, a member of the congregation and long-time teacher and coach at Belleville Mennonite School, indicated a willingness to consider the position. Following review by the committee and Conference Leadership Committee, a vote by the congregation was taken with ninety-one percent approving Herb’s candidacy in a part-time position.

With this approval, Herb became a part of the church’s administrative team effective September 1, 2008. Visitation, counseling, nurturing attenders’ spiritual gifts and invigorating witness/service activities are all foci of his ministry.

An installation service was celebrated September 14 to bring to Maple Grove an associate pastor for the first time in our 140 year history. Pastor Alan Kauffman directed his message to Herb as a new pastor and to the congregation as minister in fulfilling their varied roles in the church. Using Mark 12:28-34—loving God and neighbor—as the basis for his remarks, we heard how keeping our relationship with God fresh and alive is essential. Eugene Peterson’s three pastoral duties were cited: praying, reading scripture and giving spiritual direction. We lead to living waters only as we have been there.

Loving neighbor as oneself means first, care of one’s physical, family and spiritual needs. Herb was directed to this care in the midst of the demands of pastoral role. Maple Grove was challenged to do our part to grow a first time pastor, to expect much from Herb’s leadership and to help him keep his feet to the mission, but with a good measure of grace, forgiveness, and trust. For all the priority is to know God above any negatives that intrude into our lives.

Following a brief review of the search process by Ken Hartzler, our conference Overseer, Don Hamsher, led a meaningful service of commitment and charge to Herb and his family—wife Marlene and daughters Michelle and Kim. Laying on of hands and prayer followed.

The celebration concluded with a bountiful shared meal among Maple Grove attenders and extended family and friends of the Zook family.

—*JoAnn Byler, Maple Grove*



**Herb and Marlene Zook listen to Don Hamsher’s words.**

# Allegheny Conference Slate—2009

*Nurture and Education Commission*

**Marsha Carr**  
Davidsville, Pa.



*Congregation:* Carpenter Park

Married to Jim Carr for 30 years. Three grown children: Jim, Angela (married to Joel Yoder), and Frank. Two grandchildren: Nicolas and Christopher. Teacher at Johnstown Christian School (grade four). Master's in Education. Have taken three of the five PSDE units from AMBS. Working on ACSI certification. I enjoy reading, needlework and playing with my grandsons in my spare time.

*Nurture and Education Commission*

**Mary Kathryn Miller**  
State College, Pa.



*Congregation:* University

Mary Kathryn Miller is an active member of University Mennonite Church. In the congregation, Mary gives leadership to children's education and teaches Sunday school. In the community, she has been a pre-school teacher and 4-H leader. Currently, Mary serves as a Board member and Treasurer for Bridge of Hope Centre County. Mary and her husband Dave are parents of four adult children.

*Mission and Service Commission*

**Jeff Jones**  
Hollidaysburg, Pa.



*Congregation:* Cornerstone Fellowship at Mill Run

Pastor of Cornerstone Fellowship at Mill Run. Graduate of Penn State and Fuller Seminary. Served 20 years as an Area Director in Young Life, (an evangelical outreach to high school students). Served two years as a youth minister at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Hollidaysburg, Pa. Hobbies include gardening, camping, theology. Treasurer for the Hollidaysburg Area Ministerium. Married 35 years to Chris, two children: Gwen and Katie.

*Nurture and Education Commission*  
**Shirley Brandes**, Grantsville, Md.



*Congregation:* Springs

Born and raised in Franconia Conference, in the Plains congregation. Completed a diploma nurse training course. Attended Goshen College 1 year, then entered the BS in Nursing Program at University of Pennsylvania. Spent 17 years in an intentional community in upstate New York. While there, married and had 7 children. When youngest began school, re-entered the work force as a nurse in a residential institution for developmentally disabled adults. Spent 20 years there before retirement. Presently visits the elderly of the congregation, volunteers for hospice and is secretary of the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate.

*Nurture and Education Commission*

**Miriam Ramer**,

Pittsburgh, Pa.



*Congregation:* Pittsburgh

Has been involved with the children's Sunday School program and the education commission of her church. Served as congregational chair, a member of the pastoral care team and chair of the pastor search committee. Teaches high school math in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. In the past, offered foster care to infants whose parents were considering adoption. Miriam and husband, Everett, have two daughters, Lydia and Sarah.

*Faith Life, & Procedures Commission*

**Enos Tice**  
Salisbury, Pa.



*Congregation:* Springs

Presently: Adult SS teacher, Congregational Webmaster, AMC Parliamentarian (ad hoc). Formerly: AMC FLP Chair, Springs Constitution Revision Committee. Married to Carolyn, 2 children: Isaac, high school junior & Naomi, Goshen College junior. Enjoy music, reading, pondering philosophy, and thinking about theology. Self-employed as a ruminant nutritionist and Dairy Advisory Teams member and facilitator.



*Leadership Commission:*  
**David Miller**  
State College, Pa.

*Congregation:* University

Pastor of University Mennonite Church since August 1997. Married to Mary Kathryn Schmid Miller (1978), together they are parents of four children. David represents MCC on the Board of the Center on Conscience and War in Washington, DC and serves on the board of United Campus Ministries in State College. He graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MDiv, 1993) and Columbia Theological Seminary (DMin, 2006). He served as an instructor in Pastoral Ministry at Hesston College (1993 - 1997).



*Leadership Commission*  
**Don Hampsher**  
Davidsville, Pa.

*Congregation:* Kaufman

Pastor of Kaufman Mennonite Church. Previously served as pastor of Moorhead Mennonite Church in Holmes County, Ohio. He and his wife, Brenda, have two adult children and four grandchildren. Is the current overseer of Maple Grove Mennonite Church. Birds in Don's yard are happier than most because of the interest an attention he gives to watching, feeding, and caring for them.



*Constituency Leaders Council*  
**Donna Mast**  
Scottdale, Pa.

*Congregation:* Scottdale

Since 1997, has served as co-pastor with her husband, Conrad. Together, they have three young adult daughters, Katie, Anna, and Rachel. Served as overseer for Pittsburgh Mennonite Church. Editor for Allegheny Conference News since November, 1998. Prior six-year experience serving as Allegheny Conference Representative to Constituency Leaders Council. Enjoys reading, sewing, baking, spending time with family and friends.



*Constituency Leaders Council*  
**Cathy Spory**  
Boswell, Pa.

*Congregation:* First

Cathy enjoys traveling, reading, learning, teaching, and playing. She is married to Mel and they are the parents of four adult children and grandparents to Miranda and Melina. She teaches kindergarten, volunteers in an after school tutoring program, is an active member of First Mennonite congregation, serves as conference Nurture and Education Commission Chair, and is the Allegheny Conference Resource Advocate for MC USA.



*Finance and Stewardship Commission*  
**Dave Mishler**  
Johnstown, Pa.

*Congregation:* Crossroads

CEO, Laurel View Village. Wife - Becky. Three adult children. Elder, Crossroads Community Church. PIAA Soccer Referee and former coach. Served as pastor at Blough from 1977 - 1990.



*Finance and Stewardship Commission*  
**Ken Litwiller**  
Lewistown, Pa.

*Congregation:* University

Chairs the Adult Sunday School Committee and regularly teaches Adult Sunday School. Formal education includes 2 degrees in Engineering and a Masters of Divinity from AMBS. Ken has served the church and needy world in Illinois, Indiana, Kenya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Pennsylvania. He has served as a pastor within 2 congregations for a total of 5 years and as a hospice chaplain for 2 years and counting. Previous Allegheny Mennonite Conference service was with the Missions and Service Commission. Related to the current position are 5 years experience with Aflac benefits and 2 years as Treasurer of the Juniata District of Lancaster Conference.

# Allegheny Conference Slate for Nominating Committee—2009

## **Carol Benner Chaffinch**

Greenwood, De.

*Congregation:* Tressler

Currently involved in music and children's ministries. Former responsibilities in AMC include serving on the nominating committee and, occasionally helping with worship planning. She teaches pre-k children with special needs in the public school system. She and her husband Mickey love being the parents of 2 adult daughters and a jr. high son. She enjoys reading, all kinds of music, traveling, playing with big and little friends, riding bike, sewing, and more.



## **Mary Ellen Lichty**

Oakland, Md.

*Congregation:*  
Gortner Union Church

In her congregation, has served as Sunday school teacher, church moderator, and delegate to Allegheny Mennonite Conference. For the conference, has served as delegate to general assembly and as a member of Mission and Service Commission. Is a retired registered nurse. Married with three adult children and four grandchildren. Has been on numerous medical trips to Haiti and Honduras. Has worked with Mennonite Disaster Service and Service opportunities for Older Persons projects in the U.S.A.



## **Matt Alwine**

Hollsopple, Pa.

*Congregation:* Thomas

Born on a dairy farm in the Johnstown area, 32 years old. Recently married to Melanie Peters in September 2008. Delegate for Thomas Mennonite Church as well as other involvements. Committee member of the Johnstown Service Adventure program. Employed as a John Deere mechanic and shop manager in Johnstown. Hobbies include skiing, motorcycle riding, softball, misc. sports, and dirt track racing.



## **Hannah Speigle**

Mt. Pleasant, Pa.

*Congregation:* Blough

Recently graduated from California University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Special Education. She is currently serving as guest services at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, while also working at Valley Community Services.



## **Nominee Information**

Each year at their spring session, Allegheny Mennonite Conference delegates select and affirm persons to serve on the commissions and Nominating Committee of the conference.

The five commissions and their committees involve over sixty people from across the conference. These persons use their skills, talents, and vision to further God's work in the conference.

On this page and the previous two pages is information about persons who have agreed to allow their names to stand on this year's slate.

The Allegheny Conference Slate, shown on pages 4 and 5 was respectfully submitted by Allegheny Conference Nominating Committee, comprised of David Eckman, Anna Sauder, Julie Swartzentruber, Ray Yoder, Mary Hertzler, and Myrah Sinko.

The Allegheny Conference Slate for Nominating Committee was respectfully submitted by the Allegheny Mennonite Conference Faith, Life, and Procedures Commission, comprised of Lynette Plank, Conrad Mast, and Alan Kauffman, chair.



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## The Lighthouse



**Daryl "Doc" Dawson**  
**Mar. 31, 1943 - Nov. 28, 2008**  
**Survived by his wife, Sandra Cheryl (Gainer); two daughters: Kim, wife of John Parrish, of Fort Worth and Jenny Dawson of Bedford; two sons: Julius Dawson of Dallas, Texas, and Billy Dawson of Birmingham, Wash; a brother, John Dawson of Jacksonville, Fla.; and a sister, Joyce, wife of Paul Blough, of Jennerstown. He was preceded in death by a sister, Elaine Schmidt. Doc operated a prison after-care for inmates and was pastor of Canan Station Mennonite Church.**

On November 26, 2008, Daryl (Doc) Dawson went to be with His Lord. Thus a great ministry has come to an end, but a good time in heaven has begun.

Doc loved Blue Grass Gospel music. I believe one of his favorite hymns was "The Old Lighthouse." One verse says, "If it wasn't for the lighthouse, where would this ship be? That line is an example of Doc's relationship with Christ.

Christ, the guiding light, guided Doc, and he told many a soul that he didn't know where he would have ended up without Christ's guid-

ance. "The Old Lighthouse" was Doc's theme song.

Light houses, at one time, were very important to ship captains, who sailed along coastlines. Over the years they became run-down, so the Corps of Army Engineers replaced them with radar and radio communications. The great ones, however, were placed on the Register of National History and preserved for future generations to see! They were restored or moved for safe keeping, because of their value and given honor for their many years of service.

Doc Dawson was a great lighthouse for the Lord, serving well. God has restored him to wholeness. He has been promoted and one

day will accompany Christ when he returns for His Church.

During his life, Doc's light of faith shone and guided many a lost soul from dangerous troubled waters. He was a lighthouse for all.

Social status didn't matter to Doc, just as it didn't matter to Jesus. Jesus ate with tax collectors and so did Doc.

If you called him anytime, from anywhere, he would be there shining the love of God, and showing mercy so you could escape from harm's way. He would offer comfort, shelter, peace, and forgiveness through Jesus, so that you could have a new day.

Doc gave many of us a new day through faith in Jesus. He had a common bond with everyone he met.

If you wanted to see Jesus, all you had to do was go with him as he worked. Doc had the leadership quality of a general and the humor of a comedian.

He could talk about country music, restoring cars, fixing Christmas lights, or how dirty you can get at work, or how to make a great onion sandwich. He would come in and make himself at home anywhere.

When you read the Psalms, you get a feeling the authors have been where you are and have already gone through what you are experiencing. That's how Doc touched you. He felt your pain and loved you in spite of yourself. That's what made him a valuable lighthouse for Christ's work.

Well, the lighthouse has been retired, but Doc passes the mantle on to each of us. It now rests on our shoulders. Take it and let it shine so others weathering the storms of life will find a safe haven of rest in Jesus.

Shalom, old friend.  
 —David Crable, Masontown