

Moderators Report 2012

Jesus summed up all the commandments with two. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus said the first commandment is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And the second commandment is “you shall love your neighbor as yourself”.

The heart of the Christian life is learning to love God with everything you have and learning to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Following Jesus is not just believing the right things about God, but is belonging to a local body of believers where we are learning to love one another.

Jesus didn't say people will know you are my followers if you are part of the right political party, sing well, can quote the confession of faith, have a PhD in theology or give a lot of money to the church. Jesus said they will only know you are my followers by how you love one another. It seems that God wants us in regular, close fellowship with other Christians so we can learn the skill of loving and show the world what our God is like.

Over this past year we have had opportunity to show love for one another as we adjusted to changes in Allegheny Mennonite Conference that we believe will help us better carry out our mission. The following changes, along with others, have not been easy and have required of us sacrificial love for one another:

- We affirmed a new structure for a two year trial period.
- We hired a full-time Conference Minister and reduced the Conference Youth Minister to half-time.
- We went to an electronic newsletter and we have put all conference reports and information on the conference website.
- We made a decision to repair the conference office building and put it on the market to see if it is sellable.
- We discerned God leading us to pursue reconciliation with Hyattsville Mennonite Church.
- We committed to raising support for the Bhutanese-Nepali Church of Pittsburgh.

Through all of these changes I have experienced God with us and a warm spirit of cooperation and love for one another. As we move into this next year Leadership Council's desire is to see each congregation in AMC fulfill its missional calling in its context. Each congregation in AMC has a unique mission and we want to see each church maximize its gifts and released for ministry.

Leadership Council recognizes that as a congregation carries out its unique mission that it will look differently than how another congregation chooses to live out its mission. Our prayer is that we would learn from each other and encourage one another in our respective ministries. As a conference, we are stronger when all of our congregations are pursuing their respective ministries and staying connected through regional bodies to

conference. This next year Leadership Council wants to work at making sure each congregation is connected in meaningful ways to conference.

With all of the changes taking place in conference sometimes our conference identity and vision can become blurred. Over this next year Leadership Council will work with the Scriptures and the priorities of MC USA in its Purposeful Plan to help AMC clarify its own vision and identity. For this to happen we need each congregation engaged and we need the input of the delegate body to discern our future direction together.

I know that all of these changes can strain relationships and test our patience with one another. At the same time, I believe God wants to do new things among us and what will be required of us is this willingness to stay connected and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

I believe our theme, “The Greatest of these is Love”, for our Celebration of Congregations and Conference weekend is a timely focus. This love for one another is not just words and talk, but a sacrificial kind of love shown in action. In I Corinthians 13:4-7 Paul describes the kind of love we need for one another. He writes, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

Learning to love one another unselfishly and sacrificially as Paul describes it here, though, is not an easy task. And yet, because God is love, the most important thing God wants us to learn on earth is how to love. It is in loving that we are most like God. In Galatians 5:6 Paul writes that the only thing that really counts is “faith expressing itself in love.” Our love for others is something that will last forever. Love always leaves a legacy. How we treat others is the most enduring impact we can leave on earth.

As we end this year, I want to thank God for all the people who have served in conference roles for this past year. I am also grateful for our conference staff and all the ways they serve us. I invite you to continue to pray for our conference staff, Leadership Council, and for J. Lorne Peachey as he becomes the new moderator.

I look forward to our conference assembly in August. We are delighted to have Loren Johns with us this summer and to be the main speaker in our worship sessions. Pray for God’s Spirit to move among us and help us learn to love God with all our heart and to love one another sacrificially.

John Bender, *Moderator*