



Allegheny Mennonite
Conference

A conference of Mennonite Church USA



AMC NEWS

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2012

CELEBRATION AND LOVE IN ALLEGHENY CONFERENCE

A buzz of conversation punctuated by laughter rose in the Meetinghouse of Laurelville Mennonite Church Center on Friday evening, August 3. John Bender, Allegheny Conference Moderator, called the group to order and the first Celebration of Congregations and Conference under the new structure began.

The theme of the weekend, "The Greatest of these is Love..." was exemplified in various ways of reading the I Corinthians 13 scripture, in song, in story, and in drama. Members of Pittsburgh Mennonite Church gave leadership to the inspiring and thought-provoking worship on Friday evening, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning.

Loren Johns was the featured speaker for those sessions. Currently at AMBS since 2000, he previously served as a pastor in Allegheny Conference. His meditations focused on God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for each other.

A celebration of transitions in conference leadership was a part of the final worship service on Sunday morning. Donna Mast, Conference Minister, recognized outgoing members of the Leadership Council and the ending of the formal position Lawrence Brenneman has held as Missional Leader for the conference. John Bender was presented with a gift of a clock in appreciation for his service during the last four years, first as Moderator-elect and then as Moderator. Lorne Peachey was welcomed as incoming Conference Moderator and the passing on of those responsibilities was symbolized with a pottery basin and pitcher.

Though the main focus of this weekend gathering was on relationship-building rather than decision-making, a delegate session of "worshipful work" took place on Saturday morning and early afternoon.

This primarily consisted of reporting from conference leaders and from several church-wide agencies. John Bender and Donna Mast dialogued about the areas of joy, growth, and challenges they see within the conference. Joy Cotchen reported from the youth ministry area following a very busy and fruitful summer camp season. She rejoiced that "Ministry refreshes me and gives me strength!" Ken Litwiller updated the group on the state of the conference budget, stating that unless we see a dramatic increase in giving by the end of the year, we will need to implement painful decreases in spending.



Following brunch, a group of youth from the Bhutanese-Nepali Christian Church in Pittsburgh offered a glimpse into their culture with songs and dancing

John Bender reported on behalf of the trustees about repairs done on the conference building and possible options for sale of this property. He also gave an update on the process being used in working toward reconciliation between the conference and Hyattsville Mennonite Church. An ad hoc committee will be appointed to continue to explore reconciliation and John emphasized that both the leadership council and Hyattsville believe that the process is important and that it should proceed prayerfully and slowly.

Donna Mast welcomed several new persons recently licensed or soon to be licensed. Eric Haglund is the new pastor at Springs Mennonite Church. Matt Pritchard will be licensed and is working toward a new church plant in the Oakland area of Pittsburgh. Prayer was offered for these and others in the ministry taking place in AMC.

Significant time was spent on two visual activities focusing on the expression of our faith in individual churches and where God is calling the conference to place its energy and resources.

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Teaching Heilsgeschichte-The Salvation Story

When Pastor Ser Darji of the Bhutanese-Nepali Christian Church told his support team (Sandeep Thomas, Dale Miller, Donna Mast and Lawrence Brenneman, chair) of his desire to hold a Heilsgeschichte class for the youth of his church, I thought this would never happen. But Pastor Ser has a way of dreaming big God-directed dreams!

Pastor Ser had received a brochure of Allegheny Mennonite Conference's annual Spring Study, along with all the other pastors of the conference. This spring's study was the Heilsgeschichte, or the biblical salvation history, taught by Marion Bontrager, professor at Hesston College. When he read the brochure he thought this was just what his youth class needed.

The support team talked it over with Pastor Ser. We knew we couldn't bring Professor Bontrager here to teach the class. But we do have a number of persons within Allegheny Mennonite Conference who had taken the course when they were students at Hesston. Could we find six people who would be willing to teach one day each? We decided on a two-week schedule of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday classes, to begin July 9 and end July 20.

On my next office day, I began to make phone calls. The first call went out to Merle Christner, pastor at Pinto Mennonite Church. I barely had explained what we were trying to do when he said, "I'd love to do that!" I had my first teacher. And this was the kind of reaction I received from almost everyone I called. I made eight contacts and received six "yes" answers. The two who needed to decline did so regretfully because of previous commitments. Most, but not all, were Hesston grads.

We received permission from Professor Bontrager to use the materials he had used with the pastors for Spring Study. Merle very kindly helped with organization details, dividing the biblical story into manageable chunks and creating a communication line between the six teachers. Those teaching and the material they covered were:

- July 9: Sandeep Thomas from Pittsburgh Mennonite Church – Intro to the study, Creation through the Patriarchs
- July 11: Naomi Tice from Springs Mennonite Church – The Exodus through Rise and Role of Prophets
- July 13: Conrad Mast from Scottdale Mennonite Church – Divided Kingdom through Intertestamental Times
- July 16: Steve Sauder from Gortner Union – Jesus
- July 20: Merle Christner from Pinto Mennonite Church- Review of Story, Application including Church History and Hermeneutics

After each teaching session, the teacher of the day sent out an email to the other teachers with a brief review of the day. It was delightful to read comments like, "What a great bunch of students." "I enjoyed my day." and, in Alan Kauffman's words, "Thanks Donna and Merle for arranging this for us. If they were blessed in any way close to what I was, it was a tremendous day all around."

The two weeks ended with a brief graduation ceremony, with singing, prayer, celebration, and receiving a certificate of completion. Pastor Ser told me I should number the certificates and keep good records because he expects to hold more classes in the future. He also hopes to find a seminary-level class for this year's students to attend next summer. As I said at the beginning, Pastor Ser dreams big, but when we are dreaming God's dreams, they have a way of coming to fruition. Thanks be to God!
—Donna Mast

CELEBRATION

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Further opportunities were offered for dialogue and information on Saturday afternoon in the three Conversation Rooms.

Relationship-building was fostered in many other ways during the weekend including meal-times, a special time of prayer preceding the Sunday morning worship, and the enjoyment of the facilities and outdoor beauty of Laurelville. Special activities were offered for children and youth and, for the first time this year, for the young adult attendees. Celebration and love were indeed present among us.

—Evie Christner



BAPTISMS CELEBRATED BY BHUTANESE-NEPALI CHRISTIAN CHURCH

On Friday, July 20, 2012, the Bhutanese-Nepali Christian Church held a baptism! Pastor Ser has been teaching his congregation about baptism and Ratna Biswa requested to be baptized. Pastor Ser wanted Conference Minister Donna Mast to be involved in the baptism. He wanted her there to help his congregants understand that this was not only an act of the Bhutanese-Nepali Christian Church, but that it means becoming a part of the larger Christian community and specifically a part of Allegheny Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA. So it was decided that the baptism would take place on the last day of the two weeks of Heilsgeschichte (Salvation History) classes, in which Ratna had participated as a student.

Donna invited those from the Bhutanese-Nepali Christian Church to gather around the baptistery so they could see and hear what was to take place. She spoke briefly about the meaning of baptism and the commitment that Ratna was making. Ratna was asked the questions as found in the *Ministers Manual*, commonly used by pastors in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Then, with Pastor Ser's assistance, Ratna was lowered into the water, representing a dying to self, and raised from the water, representing new life. Prayer was offered in praise to God, committing Ratna to God's service as he faithfully follows Jesus. What a beautiful ending for the class that had been studying the salvation story for the past two weeks. Ratna said, "I am so very happy!" What a beautiful beginning for one seeking to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. —Donna Mast



Thirteen baptized in service at Laurelville

Thirteen new believers were baptized into membership of the Bhutanese-Nepali Church of Pittsburgh on Sunday, August 12. The baptism took place in the cold waters of Jacob Creek below the falls at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.

Ser Daji, pastor, and Donna Mast, conference minister, performed the baptisms. More than 70 people were in attendance, most of them from the congregation. Before the baptism, Donna Mast preached a short sermon highlighting the experience of Philip and the Ethiopian as recorded in Acts.

Following the service, members cooked a Nepali meal of rice and curry in two large pots set up outdoors. After lunch came group games, dances, and solos from various members.

Those baptized were: Hasta Maya Lakandri, Mothi Lal Lakandri, Padam Pradhan, Prabhakar Pradhan, Jyoti Pradhan, Roskika Gajmer, Ram Lamichhane, Purni Lamichhane, Monorath Rimal, Hari Rimal, Bala Shankar, Brinda Shankar, and Uttam Pradham. Three additional persons were scheduled for baptism but could not attend because of job responsibilities.

—J. Lorne Peachey



LEADERSHIP COUNCIL DECIDES NOT TO HOLD FALL FAITH AND LIFE GATHERING (DELEGATE SESSION)

The Leadership Council of Allegheny Mennonite Conference met on September 5, 2012 and agreed to not hold the Fall Faith and Life Gathering which would have been held November 3. In the Organizational Structure under Conference Meetings and Delegates it states: *Normally, a third meeting will take place the first Saturday of November. This meeting can be scheduled, as needed, by the Leadership Council.*

It was decided that it would be too early to assess the finances for 2012-2013 and to report on further reconciliation. Instead the Leadership Council will meet on that day. We would appreciate your prayers. The next Faith and Life Gathering is scheduled for March 2, 2013, location to be announced.

VIDEO CONTEST TO AWARD CASH PRIZES TO STUDENTS AND THEIR CHARITIES

GOSHEN, Ind. – Young people and their chosen charities can win cash awards as part of an Everence-sponsored video contest, based on the theme “Money Talks: The World is Listening.” The contest is open for young people ages 15 to 25.

The idea behind the contest is to encourage young people to share their thoughts, concerns and ideas about the role of money in society.

The three top winners will receive awards, with a matching award that Everence will give to a charity that the winners select. The first-place winner will receive \$1,000, plus Everence will make a \$1,000 grant to the charity of the winner’s choice. The second place winner will receive \$500 and \$500 will go to the chosen charity, and \$250 to third place with an additional \$250 to a charity. Rules and details are available at Everence.com/moneytalks.

Students can begin to develop their videos any time. Submissions will be accepted from Oct. 1 to Nov. 15. A panel will select up to five finalists, and the winners will be chosen by popular vote at www.everence.com/moneytalks. Winners will be announced in early January 2013.

LAURELVILLE INSTALLS NEW PLAYGROUND SET



MOUNT PLEASANT, PA – Laurelville Mennonite Church Center installed a new playground set during June, just in time for the busy summer months at the camp and conference center. The Regional Family YMCA of Laurel Highlands donated the used equipment in advance of some capital improvements taking place on its campus this summer.

Maynard Brubacher, a regular volunteer for both organizations, initiated the collaboration at a local Rotary Club meeting when he learned of the YMCA’s capital improvement plans and Laurelville’s need for new playground equipment. Laurelville executive director John Denlinger is also a Rotarian who is completing his term as president of the Mount Pleasant chapter.

“We are excited about the new playground,” said Denlinger. “One of our goals is to continue to grow our outreach to young families and children. A safe play area contributes significantly to this.”

The playground equipment donation came with a proviso

that Laurelville would fund, supervise and provide the labor for its removal and transport.

Jane Rittenhouse, Laurelville volunteer coordinator, said the operation couldn’t have happened without the generosity of willing volunteers. “Many hands were needed to guide the large pieces as they were lowered into specific locations and holes. Without volunteers, the process would have taken so much longer.”

To recruit sufficient help, Rittenhouse contacted local volunteers, Allegheny Mennonite Conference congregations and members of Scottdale Mennonite Church. Response to her invitation was enthusiastic: in all, more than 35 individuals worked on the renovation. Alan Kauffman brought along an entire contingent of youth from Maple Grove Mennonite Church (Belleville, Pa.).

Denlinger remarked, “We often say it takes a village to raise a child (or to make things happen). This is an unbelievable example of how communities and organizations can work together in life-giving ways.” . –Brian Pfaff

Allegheny Mennonite Conference PO Box 12 Somerset, PA 15501 Phone: 814-443-2007
Fax: 814-445-3418 Office Email: office@alleghenymennoniteconference.org
Conference Minister—Donna Mast--Email:donnam@alleghenymennoniteconference.org
Youth Minister—Joy Cotchen—Email:joyc@alleghenymennoniteconference.org
News and Information Editor--Evie Christner--Email:eviec@alleghenymennoniteconference.org

All Allegheny Mennonite Conference news releases are now being posted online at www.alleghenymennoniteconference.org. Since many in our congregations do not have access to the internet, selected portions of these articles will periodically be compiled in a printable format. If you have questions or concerns please contact the conference office or news editor.