

ALLEGHENY MENNONITE CONFERENCE
Celebration of Congregations and Conference
August 4 – 6, 2017
Minutes of the Worshipful Work

GATHERING SONGS

Sing the Journey # 112 and Hymnal Worship Book # 651, both entitled I OWE THE LORD A MORNING SONG. The first written by John Bell of Iona, Scotland. The second written by Amos Herr of Lancaster, PA.

MODERATOR REPORT by Marv Friesen

Marv welcomed everyone, stating that this is the last Laurelville gathering he will attend because he has resigned from University Mennonite Church and will be moving with his family back to Canada at the end of 2017. He described this gathering like a family reunion: we have much in common, but we still have unique characters. Sharing stories from his childhood, Marv related how the AMC congregations are finding common ground.

Marv listed the 12 points of commonality that the Mennonite Church USA has: a strong sense of community, caring and mutual connection, the centrality of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, being a peace church and living out our faith through service & justice, experiencing God's Spirit in community, a sense of welcoming and belonging – which comes from being received as family, singing our theology by making music together, interpreting scripture together through the lens of Jesus, practicing mutual aid economics – sharing our lives and resources with one another, a radical orientation to Christ and nonconformity to the world, an awareness and connection to the broader world - the global community, God is in the margins – standing in solidarity with those who don't fit in. These points of commonality are also found in our own conference. Marv closed with encouragement to journey forward together, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

YOUTH REPORT by Joy Cotchen

Joy has just completed her 18th year of directing the summer camp program at Laurelville where the theme this year was “Go and Do Likewise” from the Sermon of the Mount. She observed changes for the better in both staff and campers. Next summer, 2018, one more week will be added to the summer program. The old and new cabinet members of the youth chose to weed the Laurelville labyrinth as their work project. She appreciates that the youth have a voice in their conference. Two cabinet members who shared their experiences were Olivia Tennefoss and Hannah Bodes.

AMC NEWS (on line) Report by Naomi Tice

Naomi would like the congregations to send her their news at least 2 times a year. Not very many congregations are using this communication tool. She specifically would like to have news about the national conference in Orlando. Her email address is NaomiT@alleghenymennoniteconference.org

CONFERENCE MINISTER REPORT by Dave Mishler

“We are encouraged by the conference reshaping itself with growing enthusiasm while focusing on Jesus as the center of our faith, a centered set approach to inclusion and belonging, moving away from a bound set understanding of faith which defines the boundaries as the primary point of reference. We also seem to be affirming numerous Anabaptist writers who are espousing the preferred progression of belong - believing - becoming as a better way than believing – behaving – belonging as a way to promote discipleship in the way of Jesus. We are settling in on a relationship with our denominational Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective that fits with the document's stated intention – providing guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture,....guidance for belief and practice (p.8). We do not hold the confession as a tool for punitive discipline but as a basis for mutual counsel as it helps us in discussing Mennonite beliefs and practice with other Christians and people of other faiths. (p.8). We are finding that our centered set approach can help build relationships that further the reign of God in our communities.”

In July 2016 there were 18 congregation in our conference; now there 12 active congregations who want to remain in Mennonite Church USA. The conference leadership team is working to learn if our conference should remain a small conference or should our conference build a new relationship with another conference. One possibility is with Central District Conference; three people from each conference are visiting and processing this possibility.

Pastors in our conference meet regularly for spiritual growth, education, prayer and mutual counsel, participating in the discernment of our conference future. Pastors and people in leadership may need to assert themselves without swinging too far back towards more disciplinary modes of operation. Conference congregations: Dave Swanson was ordained. Michelle Burkholder was licensed. New Life congregation closed where Ron Spory was the pastor. Kaufman, and soon Maple Grove and Martinsburg, will leave Mennonite church USA.”

Dave concludes his report by saying, “I am deeply committed to continuing on the path and the way of Jesus with you. My prayer is that our hearts will be enlightened (Eph 1), that we spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10), and that we make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification)Rom 14). The grace and truth of Christ be with us all.”

ROLL CALL

10 congregations were present represented by 41 delegates and 22 visitors: Crossroads, Grace, Hyattsville, Morgantown, Philippi, Pittsburgh, Scottdale, Springs, Stahl, University. Visitors representing institutions were: Luke Schrock-Hurst: MCC, Marisa Smucker: MMN, Gerald Mast: Bluffton, Les Horning: EMU & EMS, James Rissler, Arman Habegger, and Doug Luginbill: Central District Conference. Terry Shue: Mennonite Church USA.

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE MINISTER REPORT by Doug Luginbill

CDC has 40 congregations in 10 states with 4,000 members. The purpose statement is: “to promote community among congregations, to serve as a resource for pastors and congregations, and to facilitate the reign of God by providing channels through which congregations and pastors may work.” Doug shared stories of several congregations’ activities, inviting our conference to continue exploring joining CDC.

MENNONITE CHURCH USA REPRESENTATIVE REPORT BY TERRY SHUE

The average age of people in congregations is getting older, attendance is getting smaller, medium income of members is getting higher, the number of Mennonites going into ministry is getting smaller but the number of Mennonites who are from non-Mennonite background is getting larger. Mennonite Church USA is the steward of guidelines but not the protector of rules. In the past 6 years, Mennonite Church USA has lost 3 conferences.

MINUTES FROM MARCH 2017 MEETING: read and approved by a raise of hands

FINANCE REPORT BY ERIN LEATHERMAN

Budget approved; see attached

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION ON AMC FUTURE

Dave Mishler and Marv Friesen divided the greater group into small talking groups to discuss whether AMC should stay a conference or join CDC. The following was reported: The hopes were: focus on the center and not the boundary, staying connected, new energy is in process. The concerns were: our we financially sustainable, we are the same delegates for years, let us not dissolve as a conference too soon. Other thoughts were: it's a challenge to be involved because of geographic distance, attendees of congregations don't care about conference, bring in other congregations to AMC rather than AMC joining one, struggling with AMC connections and might leave AMC, okay with staying as AMC or joining CDC.

INTERNATIONAL GUEST HOUSE, WASHINGTON D C

A seminar in the afternoon will feature: how to volunteer there, how to support it in various ways, strategic planning for the house. The house is celebrating 50 years of service, serving over 56,000 guests with 1,000 volunteers. Their mission is based on Matthew 25: 35: hospitality to a stranger.

The Saturday morning session ended at 11:45 for lunch.

Submitted by Gloria Horst Rosenberger, University Mennonite Church