



## An invitation to Allegheny Mennonite Conference from the executive director of Mennonite Church USA

*"There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears."—Philippians 1:6, The Message*

For more than ten years, God has been at work in Mennonite Church USA, leading us toward a greater sense of mission and purpose. It's been my distinct privilege to visit each of our 21 area conferences, including yours in August 2011. I have been inspired to see the signs of God at work, and I empathize with you in the challenges that you face.

I invite you to consider the way that you speak of God in your conference assembly, both in the worship services and business sessions. More specifically, I **invite you to speak of God as the subject of an active verb, particularly as you give reports and testimonies**. I witnessed the dynamic difference this made in Central Plains Mennonite Conference's annual meeting in 2012. By paying specific attention to what God was doing (and leading others to do), people saw God do a work in the delegate session that brought tears to many eyes.

In her research regarding the missional church, Lois Barrett discovered that many Christians—including Mennonites—find it difficult to speak of God as the subject of an active verb. She says that this is true even when people are invited to respond to a direct question such as, "What has God been doing in your life?" We are more likely to say things such as:

- "Our church started a new outreach to homeless people in the neighborhood."
- "I've been attending a Bible study."
- "We had a great worship service last Sunday."
- "I work as a volunteer for the MCC sale. We set a new record last Saturday."

Consider instead the wording of these responses:

- "Last week, God was with me during a very difficult transition at work."
- "When I was 20 years old, Jesus rescued me from a destructive lifestyle. I've been walking with him ever since."
- "At the time I was at a loss for words, but the Holy Spirit gave me the words to say."
- "God surprised us by bringing a group of Hmong immigrants to our church who have helped us develop a new outreach."
- "The Spirit convicted me about the need for a Sabbath, so I took a day off just to relax."

Do you notice the subtle difference between the two sets of responses? The former puts humans in the driver's seat, whereas the latter depicts God as the actor or initiator in a situation. I'm grateful to Lois for sensitizing me to the difference between these two ways of speaking.

Each month this year, I'm giving an example of this kind of testimony in a column in *The Mennonite*. I take my cues from the writers of Scripture, who freely gave credit to God where credit was due. When I read verses like Philippians 1:6 or Romans 8:28, Paul's testimony of God's action leaps off the page.

I'm eager to hear whether or not you take up this challenge in your conference sessions. And if you have a story you'd like for me to share with the whole church, please let me know. Blessings as you meet in God's name.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ervin R. Stutzman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is located in the lower left portion of the page.

Ervin R. Stutzman, executive director, Mennonite Church USA