

## **The Plainy from Allegheny**

By David Mishler, Conference Minister

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Herbert W. Armstrong and The Worldwide Church of God wrote a magazine called “The Plain Truth”. I would want to distance myself a great deal from the theology of Armstrong, but there is something important about speaking the truth, and I am having trouble coming up with a catchy title that rhymes with “Allegheny”. “*The Plainy from Allegheny*” may not survive. So, the first request with this new sort of potential blog, sort of newsletter, is to help me with a title. I expect your best creativity.

Because we are moving with deliberate speed (at least speed that feels like lightning in most church circles) to make a decision about the future of Allegheny Conference, I want to thank the Philippi Mennonite Church delegates for their suggestion to produce a more regular communication piece from the conference office. I agree, especially in our current situation, a call for more and regular communication is well founded. Thus, I will attempt, in addition to minutes and other normal functionary documents created by normal organizations, to begin circulating *The Plainy from Allegheny* (creative title yet to be determined) to further such communication. I start with five news briefs:

### **#1 - Affiliation Task Force**

First, out of our November 4, 2017 Faith and Life Gathering in Hyattsville, an important motion was passed – *“that Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) move forward into more formal conversations and negotiations with Central District Conference (CDC) and to develop a proposal which would go to each conference, to be processed according to the requirements of each conference, **which describes a path that leads to a mutually beneficial affiliation agreement. This proposal shall be developed so that a decision can be made by each conference, ideally going into the CDC Annual Assembly in June 2018, but no later than November 2018.**”*

The Allegheny Leadership Council has taken action to appoint three persons to a new **Affiliation Task Force** – LeAnne Zook (Hyattsville) moderator-elect, Lorne Peachey (Scottdale) former moderator, and Dave Swanson (Pittsburgh) pastor. Central District Conference will have their persons in place in January. This task force will bring to the table what a CDC/AMC affiliation might look like. Questions of structure, timing, staffing, among others, will be on the table. Pray for this group as they come back with recommendations for both conferences to consider. Submit your questions or comments so our task force members can bring the widest perspective possible from our congregations.

### **#2 - Raising the Profile of AMC**

Second, Allegheny is attempting to raise its profile in the denomination by giving voice to our vision of what a conference might look like if it is committed to – 1) *Jesus-centered discipleship*, 2)

*place-based (contextual) ministry, and 3) collaboration as a way of relating (instead of regulation).* We are hoping that articles and ads in The Mennonite and TMail will produce positive chatter and give all Allegheny delegates and members an entrée into conversations with our peers in MC USA. And I am calling upon everyone in Allegheny to engage in such conversations with MC USA friends and neighbors. We will never know our viability and “attraction quotient” unless we test it.

### **#3 - Leadership Council Retreat**

Third, the Leadership Council will be meeting in retreat from January 19-21 to review financial commitments from our 12 congregations and create a spending plan for 2018-19, along with much other agenda. The financial feedback, along with contributions from individual donors, will give rise to a budget and staffing pattern that we can afford. Our March 3, 2018 Faith and Life Gathering, to be held at Stahl Mennonite Church (Johnstown), will pass a budget that will set in motion a path of financial viability - either until we make a decision to affiliate with CDC (decision sometime in 2018) or for the indefinite future (if Allegheny continues as a MC USA conference).

### **#4 - Healthy Boundaries Training**

Pastor Peer met on December 12 at Hoss’ Restaurant in Bedford for renewal, support, and training. 11 of our credentialed ministers received the first of two mandatory “Healthy Boundaries” training modules that all MC USA credentialed ministers will receive at least every three years. This training is part of a denomination-wide effort to address sexual ethics and sexual misconduct with our pastors and leaders who have active licenses or ordination credentials. MC USA recognizes that, like our society, we have a checkered history of misconduct which has been largely unacknowledged. Thus, steps are being taken to attend honestly to our past and give hope to a better future.

### **#5 - Pastor Peer**

The Pastors also gave feedback, from the perspectives of their congregations, to address the questions and agenda which our Leadership Council will consider as the basis for our upcoming Faith and Life Gathering in March. We have much coming at us. In the next issues of this newsletter/blog in early January, I will address the “Covenant Model for Membership” that we have briefly discussed at recent delegate meetings.

I am confident that we can meet the challenges we face with resolve and reliance on God’s Spirit. Together we will seek and move into discernment of God’s leading among us for such a time as this.

*Please respond with your questions, comments, hopes and dreams to this post. Use your email “reply” or “reply all” at present. Perhaps we can move into an interactive blog on our website in the near future.*