

Celebration of Congregations and Conference
Laurelville Mennonite Church Center
August 2-4, 2019

Conference Minister Report

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Completing my third year as your conference minister and receiving a call from the Allegheny delegates to serve a second term with Allegheny Mennonite Conference, I am grateful for the work we all have done together, and I am humbled by your continued confidence in my work with you. We are giving shape to a vision for our future, assisting congregations to find new pastoral leadership, resourcing and providing collaborative settings for our pastors, adjusting budget expenses to be in line with revenue forecasts, taking seriously what has shaped us from our recent past (both joyful and painful), seeking to lament while hopefully engaging our future place in Mennonite Church USA. I give witness to a rich three years of work together.

In this annual report I want to acknowledge work accomplished in numerous congregations who have sought/are seeking pastors:

- **Masontown Mennonite Church** has called **Richard McIntire** to be their associate pastor and he accepted that role as part of a Celebration of Calling on December 23, 2018 when he was licensed for specific pastoral ministry with Masontown. Since then, lead pastor Ron Smith has retired and Richard is now serving as lead pastor.
- **Springs Mennonite Church** called **Paul Versluis** to be their second interim pastor following the significant ministry of Robert and Luann Yutzy, who returned to serve as transitional pastors in the Midwest. A pastor search committee has been working for several months to seek and call a settled pastor, and as of this writing a call has been extended to **John Verburg**, currently an Associate Professor and Chair of Sociology at Talladega College (AL), who has served previously with Eastern Mennonite Missions in Guatemala and several congregations in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Methodist denominations. John is a convinced Anabaptist who has maintained membership with Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, VA. It is anticipated that John will begin as pastor at Springs by September 1.
- **Naomi Tice**, a member of Springs Mennonite Church and currently serving with Mennonite Mission Network in the UK has been licensed, July 14, 2019, for ministry with MMN for her work.

Other important work continues with our pastors at bi-monthly pastor peer gatherings. We also experienced a powerful four-day Bible seminar held at Laurelville in April – “Unsustainable: Why Churches Must Counter Hate and How They Can Do It Now” with Rebecca Barrett-Fox, assistant professor of sociology at Arkansas State University, who lives in the Wasatch Mountains in northeastern Utah. Some 20 pastors and leaders from four conferences – Allegheny, Central District, Indiana-Michigan and Virginia – participated in this timely and exceedingly important study.

My work with the larger church continues as a member of the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC-the elders for MC USA) and MC USA Conference Ministers. I am relating to several congregations who are seeking to find alternative affiliations within MC USA. **West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship** is in the initial stages of transitioning to Allegheny from Franconia Conference. I expect that we will be preparing a formal introduction of their congregation by our next Faith and Life gathering. We will report details of other conversations and decisions as soon as it becomes appropriate to do so. We are working with sister MC USA conference leaders according to established protocols for healthy communication and established processes for transitions.

Over the past year we have made a decision to continue as one of Mennonite Church USA’s 17 conferences. Working to discern our future, with Central District Conference providing invaluable counsel and financial resources (\$8,000 over two years designed to keep us represented at denominational gatherings), we are establishing sustainable spending plans (a balanced budget called for by 2021) and maintaining reserves to best serve our future. How we are able to employ staff, engage with the larger denomination, and provide resources to our congregations are central to our projections and decisions. Thanks to our new conference treasurer, Karin Miller (Springs), we are beginning a new Ministry Resources Team which will be at the forefront of identifying giving partners, recommending ways to communicate effectively with individuals and congregations, and developing materials and programs that will assist in growing contributions.

Finally, **International Guest House** (IGH) continues to offer significant hospitality ministries to guests from around the world. Volunteer hosts and hospitality staff come from across the church with a vision to build bridges with persons from many cultures. IGH is building on their 50-year history, updating important policies and procedures to meet the challenges of current local and national rules. A committed group of local board members, mostly from Hyattsville Mennonite Church offers oversight to this ministry.

Jesus-centered. Collaborative. Committed to place-based ministry. May God inspire us to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:23-25) as we meet together!