

#1 – Save the Date! - Two years in the making, Elaine T. James, PhD, is now scheduled to join pastors and leaders for a Spring Study at Laurelville Retreat Center, **April 25-28, 2022** (Mon. afternoon to Thur. noon). **“Embodiment and Holism,”** a study of the Song of Songs, will focus on a biblical perspective of caring for the body, ecology and creation, desire and sexuality, and the art of attention. Especially in these times, a centering retreat may just be the sanctuary that will help you re-energize with colleagues in the great spaces at Laurelville. Details to come soon.



#2 – First Ever Hybrid Annual Meeting – Allegheny Mennonite Conference held its first ever hybrid “Celebration of Congregations and Conference “ weekend at Laurelville Retreat Center and via Zoom from August 6-8. More than 40 persons came to Laurelville for the weekend and some 40 delegates (in-person and virtual) joined the delegate work on Saturday morning. Worship services on Saturday evening and Sunday morning garnered combined in-person and virtual attendance of about 80 and 200, respectively, with some 110 Zoom connections on Sunday morning.




The Table, a house church located in Harrisonburg, VA, was affirmed as a new member congregation during the delegate sessions. Lively conversations happened in breakout groups regarding the distribution of the balance of proceeds from the sale of the International Guest House property (\$460,000), following the earlier designation of a tithe to several Mennonite-related ministries (\$135,000). Service ministry to Laurelville, guided contemplation at the Sunset Hill Prayer Labyrinth, and a conversation with Everence associate Steve Bustos made up Saturday afternoon activities. To be COVID conscious, Everence provided large individually wrapped ice cream sandwiches and snack bags following an outdoor hymnsing on Friday evening to kick off the weekend. We look forward to seeing many more in person next year!

The next conference gathering will be held November 6, 2021. Place TBD.

#3 – Conference Financial Update – Conference Treasurer, Karin Miller (Springs), reported a strong financial year despite the pandemic. With operating expenses in 2020-21 more than \$14,000 below budget, mostly due to lower travel expenses and meetings not held, and revenue also close to \$14,000 below budget, the forgiveness of the Paycheck Protection Program loan of \$9,000 kept our balance sheet in good standing. These numbers are outside of the revenue received from the proceeds of the sale of the IGH property. For a fuller financial statement, contact the conference office.



 **Mennonite Church USA** **#4 – New Theme for the 2021-23 Biennium - “Be Transformed”** – With a special delegate meeting in May 2022 to deal with the business of several church-wide resolutions postponed out of MennoCon21, there is a call to do our work together in a way that honors the third leg of our Renewed Commitments (<https://www.mennoniteusa.org/resource-portal/resource/renewed-commitments-for-mc-usa/>). “The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God’s love. Through worship, the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God’s beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy and peace of the gospel”.

“Be Transformed” is Mennonite Church USA’s call for individuals and congregations to fully live into our Renewed Commitments to **follow Jesus, witness to God’s peace** and **experience transformation**.

“So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5). “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Isaiah 43).” In the middle of continuing pain and struggle to become a life-giving, diverse body of believers, my hope is that such a focus will lift us up into new and creative expressions of communities living under the reign of God.