

Central Plains Conference Annual Meeting
June 15-18, 2017
Hosted by Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church
Location at Spirit of Peace UCC, Sioux Falls, SD

DELEGATE SESSION: 1, Friday morning

Moderator Margie Mejia-Caraballo called the meeting to order and opened with prayer.

David Boshart, Conference Minister, welcomed members and delegates to the meeting. He also welcomed those attending from the wider church body: Kent Blossom, Everence; Phil Friesen, Galilean Fellows; Meghan Good, speaker for worship; Tony Hartman, AMBS; Rod Hollinger-Janzen, African Inter Mennonite Missions; Jeff Koller, MDS; Jerry Kroeker, Swan Lake Christian Camp; Linda Shelley & Marissa Smucker, Mennonite Mission Network; Terry Shue, Mennonite Church USA; Duncan Smith, The Corinthian Plan/MCUSA; Peter Wigginton, Delicia Bravo Aguilar and Luis Tapia, The Ecuador Partnership; Andrew Wright, MCC.

David Boshart acknowledged the loss of four congregations from CPMC and expressed grief and sadness for that loss. Churches include: Neu Hutterathal from Bridgewater, SD, and Friedensberg Bible Church of Avon, SD. These churches did not regularly participate in the work of the conference, but have terminated their relationship with conference and we are grieved by that loss. Pulaski Mennonite in Southern Iowa and Mercy Church in Sioux Falls have also terminated their relationship with Central Plains Conference. Dave acknowledged the difficulty of receiving this news and how to best seek God's peace during this time. We lament our inability to see God's perfect will for us. The departure of these congregations was recognized with a moment of silence and prayer by Dave.

Table groups were given time to introduce themselves to each other.

The minutes from the 2016 annual conference were reviewed by Secretary Mary Yoder. A motion was made by Nathan Lutjens to accept the minutes as presented and seconded by Nyle Kauffman. Motion passed.

God's Work through Central Plains Mennonite Conference

Dave introduced the listening committee: Shawn Nolt, Fernando Ramos, Shella Franz.

Staff Reports:

Shana Peachey Boshart (Conference Minister for Christian Formation) reviewed the vision statement of Mennonite Church USA and had attendees recite this together. She then reviewed the mission statement of CPMC and that was also repeated together as a body.

She noted that the mission of CPMC is to create settings for our congregations and partners to develop leadership, encourage fellowship, and promote lifelong discipleship. This mission statement articulates our core values. Priorities are all framed by holistic witness to what God is doing in the world and through us to redeem the world.

Shana noted three statements that guide the work of Christian Formation in CPMC:

- 1) Leadership for witness—call and equip pastors and congregational leaders.
- 2) Fellowship as witness—our fellowship together is a witness of God's work among us.
- 3) Discipleship for witness—to grow like Christ through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Tim Detweiler, Conference Minister for Ministerial Leadership, expressed gratitude for persons serving on boards and committees. Tim introduced the conference board members, staff, and committee members. He expressed thanks to support staff Monica Clem, Office Manager, and Ted Widmer, Financial Administrator, and to Ramiro Hernandez, Hispanic Ministry Coordinator. He also introduced chairs of committees and members of each committee and expressed thanks for serving in these roles.

Tim recognized David Breckbill and his work on the Pastoral Leadership Committee. David passed away in November of 2016 and will be greatly missed on this committee and in the conference. Appreciation was expressed for his work and grief acknowledged of this loss among us.

Tim noted the pastoral transitions this past year—beginnings of new pastors: Michael Miller Swartzendruber as co-pastor of Wayland Mennonite; Beth Peachey Miller installed as pastor at Pleasant View Mennonite; Corey Miller installed as pastor at Salem-Zion Mennonite; Jose & Paula Martinez commissioned as associate pastors at Iglesia Cristiana El Balsamo; Aureliano Vazquez installed at Templo Albanza. Interim pastor and transitional pastors were noted in the conference. Tim also noted the deaths of Simon Rada and Peter William Tschetter.

Margie introduced committee chairs and thanked them for their work this past year. She then interviewed chairs of Christian Formation Committee (Lewis Miller), Outreach and Service Committee (Roger Farmer), and Pastoral Leadership Committee (Willis Busenitz).

1) What have been the highlights of your committee's work this past year?

Willis: The work of PLC doesn't change a lot from year to year. The PLC spent time interviewing and credentialing new pastors and organized the annual leaders' retreat.

Lewis: A highlight was last year's annual meeting where they came needing to fill several vacancies on committees and left with all positions filled. Other highlights included the webinars with Meghan Good, results of the Sunday School survey, and the way that Shana Boshart has integrated the website with many useful links and resources.

Roger: Tuesdays with Dave in webinar form and the revision of the conference map. He also highlighted the Ecuador partnership and talked about the adventurous witness of Ramiro Hernandez. They are working on church planting strategy and are continuing the work on the gun violence petition.

2) What positive or negative challenges do you encounter in your work?

Willis: Positive is to see all the new people who come into our conference and congregations and God's goodness in bringing in new people, and hearing their stories is a gift. The negative has been working with pastors who are at variance with the conference's policies and guidelines, and this is a hard and difficult thing to work through. There is also a challenge in encouraging pastors to move forward with credentialing when they are slow to do so.

Lewis: Challenges are to provide fresh resources for persons who use technology and for those who do not—how to meet both of those needs. One of the biggest challenges is to schedule meeting times—whether in person or face-to-face.

Roger: Distance and communication seem to be the biggest challenge. Positive is responding to opportunities as they present themselves; as witness often occurs when we least expect it. The challenge is to respond to opportunities around us and make that a priority.

3) What do you need in order to carry out your work more effectively?

Willis: Better Zoom connections and logistics of distance. Try to do interviews in person, but sometimes these need to be done via Zoom.

Lewis: Financial part—Christian Formation Committee is the smallest piece of the budget. There are times when more resources financially would make their job easier. Would like to find ways to draw in more diversity in projects—either within committee or drawing from congregations or even beyond congregations and denomination.

4) What are your hopes and plans for the coming year?

Willis: To keep doing what we have been called to do and to be able to encourage pastors and congregations to take their call and credentialing seriously—accountability is important.

Lewis: They are planning to work this weekend for planning the retreat in the fall and to work at shaping Youth Escape. Concern for how to keep youth and young adults connected to the church.

5) At the conclusion of your time in this role, what final observations would you like to offer the delegates about God's hope for the mission of Central Plains Mennonite Conference?

(Question posed only to Roger who has been chair of the Outreach and Service Committee for the past six years.) Roger shared that work in the church is often like the growth of dandelions. The roots go deep and the blooms are determined to stick out everywhere...which he felt was illustrative of the work of the church and Outreach and Service Committee. The church is still here because God is involved, our roots go deep, and God's work and purpose will be evident.

Roger stated that clear communication and careful listening are really important. There is an uncertainty if social media is helpful or not, as it is difficult to discern body language through social media. We strive for clear communication with God, each other, and the church. Defined clarity of purpose in that we should perhaps be doing smaller things well, rather than trying to do everything. What we do matters in the eyes of God, to others, and to the world around us.

Financial report:

Colin Hofer, Treasurer, and Ted Widmer, Financial Administrator, presented an overview of the spending blueprint of 2016-2017. A \$20,000 deficit was projected for this past fiscal year; however, thanks to a frugal staff and individual and congregational contributions, conference was able to end the year in the black. With the year-end fundraiser and matching funds contributed by two anonymous donors, the conference was able to end the year with enough funds to retire the conference car—which had 310,000 miles— to local travel only.

Income for 2016-2017 was \$416,653--not including the \$11,900 for the car. Expenses came in \$26,500 less than budgeted, resulting in a net surplus of less than 0.5%.

David Boshart expressed gratitude for the miraculous ending of year we had. Delegates celebrated with party hats and fireworks, as well as with cookies baked by the conference staff. We acknowledge and celebrate God's provisions for the past year. Thanks be to God.

Questions were entertained regarding the fiscal blueprint. No questions were noted. Motion was called for to accept financial report. **Dennis Schrock motioned to accept report. Martha Hernandez seconded. Motion passed.**

Colin noted that in the 2017-2018 fiscal blueprint there is a small increase, but income will be about the same, as a car purchase will not be needed. There is a wage increase for staff and a small cost of living increase. Geographical cost of living salary units as stipulated by MCUSA salary guidelines have not been included. Vote for the blueprint will be Saturday morning. Questions were called for regarding the 2017-2018 blueprint. None noted. Colin expressed appreciation for financial support of conference.

Staff evaluation report:

Sid Burkey, Assistant Moderator, gave a summary of staff evaluations. Members of the staff evaluation committee were: Paula Martin, Elizabeth Troyer-Miller, Chris Eisenbeis, Marcia Yoder-Schrock, Martha Yoder and Barb Tieszen.

Sid expressed appreciation for the work of the staff. A survey was sent to pastors and credentialed leaders. These surveys were used to compile the review of staff. Overall appreciation was expressed for the accessibility of conference leaders, availability to individuals and congregations, and creative work in serving. Sid gave a brief overview of the feedback received for each staff member.

Meeting adjourned by Margie Mejia-Caraballo, Moderator.

Meeting called to order by Margie Mejia-Caraballo, Moderator.
Scott Schreffler led us in an opening prayer.

Delegate discussion and plenary:

A Covenant People responding to God's love.

The purpose of this session is to help participants claim God's unqualified love, submission to God's purposes, desire for transformation into the likeness of Jesus, and awareness of the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Shana Peachey Boshart led a litany of the covenant preamble: "In response to God's unqualified love for us, we covenant to common practices through which we submit ourselves completely to the purposes of God who longs to transform us into the likeness of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit."

David Boshart emphasized that we want this to be familiar in our minds so that we place Jesus at the center of our common life in order to become witnesses of God's reign in the world. Table sharing will focus on God's unqualified love for each person.

Tim Detweiler identified the questions for table groups to keep as their focus:

Share a story when you experienced:

- God's unqualified love for you
- Submission to God's purpose for you
- A transformation in becoming more like Jesus
- How the power of the Holy Spirit is moving in your life

Shana asked table groups to listen with empathy to stories at your table, and to think about the following two questions:

- 1) What deep longings for transformation do you hear?
- 2) How do you sense the spirit transforming us to reflect on God's unqualified love for us?

Table groups took time to reflect on these items. After time of storytelling at table groups, persons from each table briefly shared in response to the above two questions.

Tim then led in a prayer of gratitude and celebration for the shared stories and gave thanks for God's great love for us and his transforming power as we allow the Holy Spirit to move in our midst and our lives.

Margie Mejia-Caraballo , Moderator, adjourned the meeting.

Delegate Session 3, Saturday morning

The meeting was brought to order by Margie Mejia-Caraballo, Moderator. Noi Harder opened the session with prayer.

Moderator Elect, Sid Burkey, reviewed the slate. The discernment committee (Esther Buller, Sid Burkey, Kathleen Harder, Duane Ries, Carolyn Yoder) was recognized for their work in getting the ballot together.

Sid called for delegates to receive the slate by raising of right hand. Accepted.

Sid called for affirmation of names on ballot by vote of acclamation. Passed. Sid then prayed a blessing on those who will be serving and gave thanks for those who have served.

Budget: Treasurer, Colin Hofer, and Financial Administrator, Ted Widmer, presented the budget for 2017-2018.

Called for questions on the budget. None voiced.

Moderator, Margie, entertained a motion to accept the budget blueprint. Colin Hofer moved to accept the blueprint. Seconded by Lewis Miller. Passed.

Denominational Reports

Leadership Development, MC USA:

Terry Shue, Director of Leadership Development for Mennonite Church USA, brought greetings from MC USA and asked delegates to join him in singing the mission statement of MC USA. He spoke of the grief of the loss of congregations and conferences that have left MC USA. This loss is felt in voices that are no longer at the table, and we lament these losses. He noted that MC USA is here to support the work of congregations and conferences.

It was noted that MC USA will meet in Orlando the first of July to discern where God is calling us and our response to:

- 1) Resolution on Israel/Palestine.
- 2) How will we follow Jesus as Anabaptist Christians in the 21st century?

Terry also noted that Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of MC USA, will be retiring next year. Delegates were called to pray for the search committee as they seek God's will for this position.

Terry noted the five agencies under the MC USA umbrella: Mennonite Mission Network, Everence, Menno Media, Mennonite Education Agency, and Mennonite Health Services Alliance. Terry noted that Mission Network and Everence have representation at CPMC and gave a brief overview of the work of each of these agencies. He spoke specifically about the Lilly Endowment Grant that Everence received, which is being used to assist pastors in a variety of ways.

On behalf of MC USA, Terry thanked congregations and persons who have supported MC USA financially, for providing persons to serve on various boards, and for prayers as we continue to be faithful followers of Jesus in these days.

Terry then invited all present to join in a prayer of blessing for David Boshart as he heads to the MC USA convention in Orlando, FL where he will become moderator of MC USA. Terry expressed thanks to CPMC for sharing Dave and his gifts with the broader church.

Ecuador Partnership update

Don Kempf opened this update with Matthew 25:35-36 and stated that he believes that this is the experience of those attending Quito Mennonite church—especially the refugees. The Colombian Mennonite Church, Mennonite Mission Network, and Central Plains are partnering to work with the Ecuador Partnership. Refugees come from Colombia, Venezuela, and from the Middle East to the Quito congregation, which provides a safe place for those who come to worship—where all are welcome and invited to participate. Prayers have been offered for the past several years that a place would be provided for a permanent facility. A property has been found that will meet the needs well. The church is in the process of buying and hopes to be in by July. \$46,000 was committed from Central Plains and this goal was exceeded. There was a fellowship and learning tour to Ecuador in January, which was a rewarding and life-changing experience.

Luis Tapia has served as pastor at Quito Mennonite Church for the past three years. His wife, Jennifer, works with the refugee program as director. He is now living in Goshen, preparing to study at AMBS this fall. Jennifer will join him there.

Luis then brought greeting from Ecuador and then brought a message, speaking in Spanish with Linda Shelly translating. Luis spoke on Acts 20:7-12. Is the message Paul brought one that brings sleepiness and death? No! The message Paul brought is about the Kingdom of God. The good news is how the divine becomes flesh and comes to earth to give life and life in abundance. The message of the Kingdom of God unites word with action, and it is in this unity of word and action that the power of God is revealed. After healing Eutychus, Paul then breaks bread with those to whom he is speaking—a reminder to us that Jesus, the resurrected Savior, is present where the church breaks bread.

Venezuela:

David Boshart gave a summary of the developing network of Mennonite Churches in Venezuela with a slide show. We were called to a time of prayer for this country as they suffer from lack of food and violence in the streets. Despite these trying times, the ministry there is growing and expanding with the church offering hope in a place that is so desperate.

Congolese update:

Rod Hollinger-Janzen gave an update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and thanked CPMC for sending Kate Widmer to visit the Congo and the connections that were made as Kate sat with the women and listened to their stories. Kate shared briefly about her experiences in the Congo. David Boshart then read a letter from the delegates that will be sent to Congolese leaders.

Roger Farmer, chair of the Outreach and Service Committee, offered prayer seeking God's hope and guidance as CPMC relates to international outreach churches.

Meeting adjourned by Margie Mejia-Caraballo, Moderator.

Delegate Session 4, Saturday afternoon

Session opened with prayer by Sid Burkey.

Peace Mug: Joetta Schlabach presented the first mug to Donna Minter. Donna has worked toward peace and justice providing STAR training to persons in Minneapolis and has started to offer restorative justice classes.

Nick Detweiler-Stoddard presented a peace mug to Lois Janzen Preheim. Lois has worked in Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs in the court system. She has also led “Alternative to Violence” workshops in the prison system and other settings—including congregations. She has a passion for seeking Christ’s peace and reconciliation in the world and in the church.

Gun Violence Petition:

Dennis Lehman, of the Peace and Justice Task Group, spoke about the petition regarding gun violence. Dennis read the petition, which protests the legality of owning assault weapons. The Committee has been working for the past year and has put together a packet for each church, containing a letter of introduction and petition for persons to sign. The packet also contains a flyer stating, “love is the Spirit of the church—no weapons permitted.” Congregations are encouraged to put this on their doors.

Delegate discussion and Plenary:

A Covenant People Responding to God’s Love

The focus of the afternoon discussion and plenary was “to identify the spiritual practices that are energizing the congregations and to recognize the difference these are making.”

Shana led the group in reciting the covenant statement: “In response to God’s unqualified love for us, we covenant to common practices through which we submit ourselves completely to the purposes of God who longs to transform us into the likeness of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Dave bridged the story-telling from table groups yesterday to the discussion time intended for today. Delegates were asked to look at the six spiritual practices of the covenant and then talk about how congregations have been working on this during the past year.

Shawn Nolt, Andrea Nussbaum, and Nick Detweiler-Stoddard shared stories relating how their congregations have put these into practice. These practices included studying the Bible together, learning new prayer practices, and prayer and fasting,

Shana introduced the sharing objectives for the table group:

- 1) Which of the covenant practices have you done—either as an individual or as a congregation?
- 2) What difference is it making/has it made?
- 3) How do these practices help you submit to God, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, or to experience the power of the Holy Spirit?

Table groups spent time discussing these objectives and sharing with each other. This was followed by an open mic time to share these stories. Many stories of God’s faithfulness were shared.

Shana then called for feedback:

- 1) How can conference leaders support congregations in pursuit of the six spiritual practices?
- 2) Having discerned God's deepest longings for us as a covenant people, which of the six spiritual practices do you need the most support to pursue?
- 3) How are these resources best formatted and delivered?

Delegates answered these questions at their table groups and recorded responses to be collected by conference leaders.

New Officers:

Margie led a time of recognition and installation of new persons to CPMC offices and offered a prayer of blessings on those who will be serving.

Sid Burkey then took over duties as moderator and called for the listening committee report. Shawn Nolt, Fernando Ramos and Shella Franz gave a report.

Closing:

On behalf of the Conference Board, Secretary Mary Yoder expressed gratitude to all who helped contribute to annual meeting:

- the annual meeting task group and local hosts—Bethany, Hutterthal, Salem, Salem-Zion, and Sermon on the Mount churches.
- Christopher Montgomery, chair of the local committee, for keeping things well orchestrated and running smoothly.
- To the worship leaders and planners.
- Speak Meghan Good for bringing us God's word
- Workshop presenters.
- Behind-the-scenes persons that help things to run smoothly—Monica Clem (office manager); Stan Harder (photographer), and for those providing technology expertise.
- Child care facilitators
- Central Plains Staff and all others who prepared presentations

Sid noted the dates for annual meeting 2018, which will be held in Nebraska June 21-24, 2018. Location TBA.

Sid Burkey adjourned the meeting with prayer.

Year-end report Conference Board Meetings 2017-18

Meeting Dates:

September 16, 2017 in Freeman South Dakota

November 7, 2017 via ZOOM

January 18, 2018 via ZOOM

April 17, 2018 via Zoom

September 16, 2017

Discussion:

Reviewed financial reports, report from listening committee from annual meeting, executive conference minister's report and spent time visioning for future of conference.

No actions were taken at this meeting.

November 7, 2017

Discussion:

Conference Minister's Report reviewed. Contact made with White Chapel Mennonite Church congregation in Glendive, MT. Called to time of prayer for leaders and families of undocumented pastors and brothers and sisters. Financial status of conference was reviewed, and year-end fund appeal brochures were reviewed. Review of background and status on property that CPMC owns in Omaha—Northside church building and lot. Further discussion on property tabled until next meeting.

Actions:

Shawn Nolt made motion to accept financial report as presented. Seconded by Paula Martin. Motion passed.

January 18, 2018

Discussion:

Financial report reviewed. Shana working on Anabaptist Faith Formation Network website. Plans are underway for Youth Escape in July of 2018. Update on work of gift discernment committee. Reviewed theme for Annual Meeting and outlined tentative plans and schedule; noted that Rachel Gerber will be the keynote speaker. Application for conference membership from White Chapel Mennonite Church was noted. Discussed New Ministries Grant Applications and how to allocate funds most effectively. Northside Property in Omaha was discussed with updates given, with recommendation the church building and property be sold.

Actions:

S. Roy Kaufman made a motion to recommend to delegates at annual meeting that we receive White Chapel into membership. Ry Siggelkow seconded this motion. Motion passed by board.

Received New Ministries Grant Application from Ted Lewis of Agape Peace Center. Ted is requesting \$4000. Shawn Nolt made a motion to approve \$4000 to be disbursed now. Motion seconded by Kent Blossom. Passed by board.

April 17, 2018

Discussion:

Discussed 2018-19 Financial Blue Print Spending Plan. Shawn Nolt gave update on gift discernment process with discussion on positions that are yet to be filled. Executive Conference Ministers Report was reviewed with pastoral transitions noted. Noted resignations of Suzette Shreffler as coordinator of Ecuador Partnership and of Shana Peachey Boshart as Conference Minister for Christian Formation. Application from Lao Christian Fellowship to join conference was discussed. Discussion regarding the potential sale of the Northside Property in Omaha and use of funds upon sale of property.

Actions:

Motion made by Kent Blossom to approve slate as presented. Seconded by Paula Martin. Passed by acclamation.