



DOWN THE ROAD: Mennonite Church set to gather in San Jose

Planning is in high gear for San Jose 2007 – a unique opportunity for folks in the Pacific Southwest to enjoy a Mennonite Church USA gathering in our own back yard. As the hosts for this event, the first held in the West for many years, we'll also have opportunities to show this special side of the church to folks from across the country.



There's something for everyone in San Jose: children's and junior youth conventions and an exciting Youth Assembly that draws far higher numbers than the Adult Assembly. Inspiring worship, a great roster of speakers, seminars and workshops, a new "learning tracks" program for various kinds of lay leaders, musical events from giant hymn sings to late-night youth concerts, documentary films, comedy, side trips, an urban leadership event, reunions, displays and giveaways, the fun of the Santa Cruz boardwalk, Bible studies, opportunities for "Servant Projects" to show the face of Christ to those in need in San Jose, and great fellowship for almost a week (July 2-8) – and you don't need to be an official church delegate to enjoy it all.

Plus, if you'd be attending the PSMC Summer Assembly anyway, you'll save one trip: the assembly, in an abbreviated form, will be held the Monday morning the convention begins.

For more, see page 6 and check out the official website at www.sanjose2007.org



Participants at the Winter Assembly dig into the Bible as part of a unique exercise in developing a canon for PSMC.

Ten Scriptures we can't live without!

We're a diverse bunch in the Pacific Southwest, spanning a breathtaking range of cultures, languages, even faith backgrounds. Finding a sense of unity isn't always easy, even though we follow the same Christ.

Can the Word help us?

Pasadena pastor Jennifer Davis Sensenig thinks so, and brought the idea to lively fruition with a unique workshop at the conference's February assembly, when she challenged delegates to come up with a list of "10 Scriptures PSMC Can't Live Without."

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PANORAMA

is a publication of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, which unites and serves congregations across Arizona, California and Nevada.

Please help us share what's going on in your congregation and community! Contributions of news, faith stories and photos are heartily encouraged.

Write to the editor, Doreen Martens, at: panorama@pacificsouthwest.org

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Did you know?

Panorama is now available in PDF format via email. Ordering yours via email saves the conference money, gives you an early peek and allows you to enjoy Panorama with full color photographs. To be on the mailing list (3 times per year), drop a note to panorama@pacificsouthwest.org

A call to transform the world

Small church dares to dream with God

Maranatha Harvest, in the sprawling San Fernando Valley, is a small church, a church composed mainly of Indonesian immigrants, a church that has gone through great stress. But that hasn't kept its members from dreaming big. Really big.

"We want to become a world-class church and transform the world," pastor Sunoko Lin says, describing the mission statement the 60-member congregation came up with after facing a leadership crisis, calling Lin from within their own ranks, and with the help of conference leaders devoting themselves to a process of visioning.

"That's a high call," Lin admitted in a keynote speech to February's Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference assembly, held in the rented hall in Reseda where the church meets. "But we know we serve a God who can create something out of nothing. A God who can bring life. So we decided as a congregation we want to pursue that dream. ... If it's my vision it will fail, but if we agree this is our God's vision, God will equip us and give us the resources we need."

The congregation took as its foundation Luke 4: 18-19, Jesus's own announcement of his mission to proclaim good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and to announce the year of the Lord's favour. But then they got down to brass tacks: What would that mission look like in 2007, in the San Fernando Valley?

They homed in on three main areas of ministry:

1. Diversity. Until 1970, the valley population was about 85% white, but today it is thoroughly multiethnic, raising fears about growing racial barriers.

The church, Lin believes, has a role to play in bringing cultural groups together, to avoid the social fragmentation that can make the urban setting unlivable. So the first goal is to be diverse culturally. "We want to be a multi-racial, multicultural church. And so far God has brought people from different ethnicities to our church ... We hope this is the seed for the church to grow."

The congregation also identified concerns about a generation gap between immigrants and their assimilated, American-born children. The church has hired a pastoral intern to focus on reaching out to the second generation, ensuring the church also remains diverse generationally.

2. Education. Graduation rates in the area are dismal, though education spending is above the state average.

"We want to become a church that becomes a blessing in the field of education," Lin said. The congregation is working on starting an after-school project to help children whose ability to learn is thwarted by their living conditions. Many kids in Reseda grow up in overcrowded homes, sometimes with three families to an apartment, where there is neither the quiet needed to study or access to tools like computers.

"That's the reason many of these students are failing, and we want to become a blessing to our community," Lin said. The church is also encouraging its teens, some of whom are academically gifted, to help others.

3. The marketplace. Inspired by his own background as a corporate financial director, Fuller seminarian



Sunoko Lin

Steven Watts – whose passion is to evangelize boardrooms, and in so doing alleviate poverty – and Robert Linthicum's *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your*

Community, Lin

wants his congregation to think proactively about how to "share God's goodness" with employers and big business.

The Bible, he points out, offers two stories about encounters of rich people with Jesus: the rich young ruler who leaves sadly after being advised to give his wealth to the poor; and Zaccheus, the tax collector inspired by the encounter to live a life where "faith drives his economic agenda." What if the church could go into the marketplace and in effect create more Zaccheuses by sharing the goodness of the gospel with CEOs of the companies who employ so many in the community?

"Imagine the CEO of Blue Shield, the CEO of Pratt & Whitney (two of the large employers in the area) came to know Christ through the ministry of the church. Would they not be happy to offer their boardrooms to be used for a prayer meeting or Bible study?"

To help open doors, Lin's congregation plans to serve lunch to corporate executives at Christmas, as a token of appreciation for staying in the community and providing employment, despite high overhead costs and tax rates.

"We believe that as we show compassion, we will be invited more, and there will be more opportunities to share with them," Lin said.

Are these things doable for such a small congregation? Yes, Lin says, if they also focus on being people of prayer, people of the Word, people empowered by the Holy Spirit. Lin sends out an email prayer bulletin each Tuesday morning, asking congregants to pray for the ministry of the church and ministry in the city. "We believe that without prayer we can accomplish little."

The congregation takes seriously the authority to perform miracles accorded the disciples in Luke 9. The first Sunday of each month is set aside as a time to invite neighbours and friends – anyone feeling hopelessness about financial or marital problems, illness and the like – to come and be prayed for by the congregation.

Lin acknowledges that there will be setbacks, but takes inspiration from Adoniram Judson, the pioneer missionary to Burma who preached for years before he saw his first conversion but left behind 8,000 believers.

"In joy or sorrow, health or pain, our course be onward still," Judson once wrote. "We sow on Burma's barren plain, we reap on Zion's hill." And that is Sunoko Lin's prayer for a small congregation in Reseda.

Delving into the Scriptures together

from page 1

The idea had a practice run recently in the Methods of Biblical Interpretation course she teaches for PSMC leaders in the School for Urban Mission. The fall 2006 students – Emmanuel Ogbonna, Jason Evans, George Makinto, Anthonia Onye and Grace Eluwa – were challenged to clarify the unique features of PSMC and then discern scriptures that both affirmed our strengths and challenged us as a conference.

“The purpose of working on this together,” Davis Sensenig explained, “was to notice our individual biases, favorite texts, and blind spots, and to benefit from the reasoning and understanding of the group. One feature of Anabaptist Bible study is reading as a community. Good leadership by pastors, teachers, and study leaders involves making wise choices about appropriate scripture texts for our ministry settings and collaboration with those we serve.”

The “passionate discourse” that led to a list of 10 texts proved so popular that Makinto, who was on the Winter Assembly planning committee, suggested trying a similar exercise as a conference.

But how do you pick just 10 texts out of the multitude of meaningful passages that inspire us?

Davis Sensenig, acting again as prompter and recorder, invited delegates to list some unique attributes of PSMC. They came up with an interesting list: Anabaptists, peacemakers, multicultural, increasingly urban; old and new Mennonites, disciples of Christ, missional (before missional was cool), progressive, but with a desert perspective, drawn from evangelical, pentecostal and Anabaptist streams; lacking money; regionally dispersed; challenged by differences.

From that, delegates broke into six groups, each of which was given a theme for which to pick 3 or 4 texts. After a period of lively discussion, they presented their choices to the larger group.

To aid in the winnowing process, Davis Sensenig helped the group consider major themes

Jennifer Davis Sensenig leads assembly groups through the process of discerning important scriptures for our time and place.



in the “Jesus story” that ought to be reflected in the choices. She suggested keeping selections to no more than 15 verses; choosing texts that reflect the span of the Bible, texts that will help us orient our life and ministry to Jesus, and texts that address who we are, both strengths and challenges.

In the end, it was too hard to get the list down to 10. So delegates settled on a full baker’s dozen of scriptures running from Genesis through to Revelation – enough to challenge us right through to the next Winter Assembly.

“Yes, we are challenged by being regionally dispersed. We don’t see each other often,” Davis Sensenig said.

“But if you refer to these texts throughout the coming year, remember your brothers and sisters in PSMC and remember the work you did together to agree on ‘10 Scripture Texts PSMC Can’t Live Without.’”

How to use these texts? Some suggestions:

- Meditation before church meetings
- Preaching themes
- Bible studies, adult education series
- Set to music
- Pray with a text for the month
- Evangelism strategy
- Inspiration for your church’s banner in San Jose

A ‘Top 13’ for the Pacific Southwest

February 2007: Jer. 29: 4-11 – Seek the peace of the city

March 2007: Mark 12: 28-34 – Asking questions: Love God, love your neighbor

April 2007: John 13: 6-14 – Jesus washes the disciples’ feet

May 2007: Acts 2 – Pentecost, preaching, the new community

June 2007: 1 Cor. 12 – The church celebrates diverse gifts

July 2007: Gen. 12: 1-3; Luke 4:16-21 – The call of Abraham, echoed in Jesus’ answer to his call

August 2007: Mat. 25: 14-46 – Two parables

September 2007: Mat. 5-7 – “Back to school” with the core of Jesus’ teaching

October 2007: Isaiah 56:6-8 – A house of prayer for all nations (World Communion)

November 2007: Deut. 15: 7-10 – Thanksgiving, jubilee and blessing

December 2007: 1 Cor. 3:11 – Advent: our foundation in Jesus Christ

January 2008: Eph. 2: 11-22; Jesus Christ, our peace, breaks down divisions

February 2008: Rev. 21: 1-5; John 15: 1-17; God abides with us; we abide in God

In a way, creating a Top 10 list of scriptures is an old idea, says Jennifer Davis Sensenig. Anabaptists of the 16th century were committed to studying Scripture together, and they agreed to learn, memorize and recite scriptures they believed were essential for the life of the church. Within 15 years after the movement began, there were already hundreds of martyrs. At a time when the printed Word wasn’t readily available to ordinary folk, the churches recognized that there were some scriptures that needed to be planted in believers’ hearts and minds so they would be able to answer their accusers with Scripture. They believed God’s Word was powerful. The list of agreed texts was circulated broadly throughout the Anabaptist communities of Europe. The modern Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective likewise relies on scriptures as its basis – and includes an article that explains that Mennonites “commit ourselves to persist and delight in reading, studying and meditating on the scriptures.” When we’re dry, we “go to the text expecting to be renewed and revived,” Davis Sensenig said. “When we do battle against the ruling powers of the world, we will find there a nonviolent weapon against evil.” And, she said, “we persist and delight in meditating on the Word of God because every movement of God’s spirit throughout history has been accompanied by a renewal of reading the Bible, in small or large groups, gathered around the scriptures.”

Why we do it

Palm Sunday parade offers congregation a way to visibly witness to peace

For four years now, Pasadena Mennonite Church members, joined in growing numbers by other Christians, have been walking to symbolic centres of political and economic power (city hall and mall) on Palm Sunday in a symbolic re-enactment of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem – to sing, pray, laugh and share their hope for peace in a public way. This year, since Palm Sunday coincided with April Fool's Day, these "fools for Christ" enjoyed a theme of merry hope and faith that drew favourable attention in the local media. Though they've not succeeded in ending the war in Iraq, the marchers have found many other reasons to feel this annual ritual is worth their time and effort. Organizers asked some of them this year to explain "why we do it." Here are some of their thoughtful responses.



We have participated as a family in past years in part because we want our children to know it's important to speak out and take a stand on peace and yet do it in good humor and amidst good fellowship; in part because it reflects an important aspect of our faith, church, and tradition; and in part because it's fun. And the fun doesn't have to stop there; usually we cool off afterward with a smoothie, though there's perhaps less Biblical precedent for this part. We very much enjoy holding up signs for passing motorists and waving as they honk their support. It's also good to be a "spectacle" for the right reasons rather than, say, for wearing a bright salmon-colored sports jacket to church or some desperately needy reason like that. We also enjoy meeting people from other churches who hear God's call to make peace. – *David and Wendy Gist*

I especially like marching down the street and having motorists honk or wave in support. It has made me feel connected to complete strangers and provided a moment of hope that we're not alone in our quest for peace – *Jan Harmon*

I love the parade not because I find it fun as such—though I have had memorable conversations along the way—nor even because all our kids enjoy it. As we were making signs for the parade, (son) Liam told me that he hates Palm Sunday "because of all that walking." Yet imagine: how many events does a five year-old remember from year to year? Birthdays, Christmas, maybe Easter (for the eggs, likely), and that's about it. But Liam remembers Palm Sunday, and that means he'll eventually need to figure out why his parents and many of his favorite people think it's important to join in a parade of fools. And now for a metaphor: In the first of C.S. Lewis's science fiction books, "Out of the Silent Planet,"

the angels who appear on Earth stand at an unexpected angle. The effect is disorienting to earthly witnesses since they reveal the crookedness of the Earth itself: the angels take their orientation from a heavenly field of reference, so they are actually the ones who are straight. Unless we draw attention to the "upside down kingdom" that we have so fitfully glimpsed, we'll never convince ourselves or any of our contemporaries that we humans fell just because we lost sight of the plumb line of truth and love. – *Scott Cameron*

We met at the church across the street from Aunt Thea's house (also known as the-one-who-gives-me-treats-and-spoils-me-rotten) and got to sing some cool songs and hear about the reason we are doing this. I was so proud to be included. Well, we took off with noisemakers and other children and we marched our paws down to the Paseo. People honked horns, waved support, and asked what we were doing. This year I'm searching for a cool "Pugs for Peace" jacket because last year some OTHER dog ended up on the front cover of the Pasadena Star-News. It's a long walk for short legs, but it's worth being involved. – *Xiao Nu the Pug, translated from dogspeak by owner Kimberly Medendorp*



One aspect of this parade that has been particularly powerful for me is walking in the parade with our three children. We talk with our kids some about why we do this, but for me I think what is even more important is doing it with them. I love that they get to see all these other people they know from our church who are walking, too – others who think that Christ's message of peace is a big deal. They see our adult friends who have chosen to march in the parade and see the adults who choose to participate in the public worship, and I can't help but feel that this modeling is hugely significant in our kids' faith formation. For me it is also a battle to stake out the ground of normalcy – what will my kids grow up thinking is normal? Will they think that sending people off to die in wars is normal – an ok way for things to work? Or will they think that protesting violence and death is normal – it's just what followers of Jesus do? To put it another way, this peace parade is one way that I think we as Christians buy into a certain vision of reality, a vision of reality formed by a Messiah who refused to use violence even when his own life was on the line. I feel called to proactively help my children form a vision of reality rather than reactively trying to challenge a vision handed to them by a militaristic, consumeristic empire. I don't try to communicate all this to my kids in quite these words(!), but I believe that walking in the parade is significant in forming them in these ways. And it's not just about what it does for them – it is valuable for me, too, to be with my brothers and sisters in Christ, to communicate to one another that we won't give in and we won't give up, to remind each other that what appears as foolishness to the world is the Way that leads to eternal life, an eternal life that impinges on the present. – *Rob Muthiah*

Back in 1998 we held a public peace witness in front of the Israeli consulate in L.A., protesting the occupation of Palestine. One of the participants was Paulus Widjaja, a PhD student at Fuller Seminary from Indonesia who was attending Pasadena Mennonite at the time. Today Paulus runs a peace center in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world. Through his work at the peace center, he has formed a close relationship with a radical militant Muslim group. He has been so successful in gaining their trust that he trains these radical Muslim soldiers in non-violent conflict resolution. As part of his training, he tells them about the peace witness in L.A. in front of the Israeli consulate (and then about all the work we did around Palestinian self-determination in those days). He says that it blows their minds that American Christians would sympathize with the plight of the Palestinian people. This story helps him build a bridge of trust and expands the horizons of the soldiers; it helps them think twice about who their "enemies" are and what their "enemies" are like. Before he told us about this story, I had no idea that our public peace witness could have such a global and profound reach. – *Associate Pastor Bert Newton*

Why do YOU do it?

How does your congregation live out its witness to the Prince of Peace in your church and community? Drop a line to Panorama (panorama@pacificsouthwest.org) and let us know. Pictures and personal reflections welcome.

Conference news

Conference Mission Team:

This body, which brings together leaders to pray and strategize for mission, is working on two major themes, according to conference minister Jeff Wright: to "equip transformational leadership" and "empower transformational action." In plain terms, that means providing resources for congregations to expand opportunities, particularly for young people, to be engaged in mission; helping congregations reflect on what it means to be the church in the broader world, and expanding opportunities for pastoral training in urban contexts where a few years at seminary often isn't a realistic option.

It also means helping congregations clarify their call and overcome barriers to becoming more engaged and missional. "We want to help congregations see themselves as rooted in a community, that their call is to be engaged in the life of the community they're in," Wright told delegates to the February assembly. "We need to increase our vision for justice and the kind of work we do to bring shalom to the communities we live in."

The mission team also wants to encourage and deepen the global connections PSMC enjoys, for example between ministries in Africa and California churches whose members are African immigrants. "Even conferences can become myopic, denominations become myopic, we can focus only on ourselves," Wright said. "It's as we connect with the wider world that we continue to have our vision sharpened and refined."

Faith Formation Team:

PSMC's new Faith Formation Team is looking to nurture the faith of youth and adults across the Pacific Southwest, without a lot of funding. One idea is to do more sharing of gifts around the conference, specifically by asking congregations with full-time pastors and congregational leaders with specific expertise to release them occasionally for broader service – for example to speak at a retreat, or work with a congregation on social justice issues. If there are ways your congregation, pastor or individuals would be willing to plug in to this work, contact your area conference minister.



Clare Ann Ruth Heffelbower, right, enjoys conversation with delegates at the February assembly. The Fresno area conference minister announced she would step down this spring to direct a new Circles of Support and Accountability ministry to convicts re-entering society. Moderator Leah Ann Alcazar expressed thanks for her years of service to PSMC.

Peace tax hopes

After years' work on the Peace Tax campaign, organizers are seeing some progress on legislation giving taxpayers the option to contribute to a peace fund rather than war, says Steve Ratzlaff, pastor of Mennonite Community Church in Fresno. A longtime war-tax resister, for years Steve and his wife have withheld from their tax returns the significant percentage devoted to war costs. (The government always gets it back in the end.) That's money, he says, that not only kills with bombs, but also with the important things that go unfunded because the money pays for war instead. A proposed bill has gone through many permutations over the years, but now has more co-sponsors than ever, raising hopes that Christians may someday be able to follow their conscience on their tax form. "These days they don't need our bodies as much as they need our money," Ratzlaff told the February assembly. "We need to come to grips with that. ... How can we pray for peace and pay for war?"

See these websites to learn how your taxes are spent:

- www.warresisters.org/piechart.htm (scroll down)
- nationalpriorities.org
- peace.mennolink.org/wartaxes.html

Let's Live the Call!

Listen



Adult Worship

A fantastic lineup of speakers, several hailing from the Pacific Southwest, will highlight morning and evening worship services at San Jose.

Included are (clockwise from upper left): Jennifer Davis Sensenig (Pasadena), pastor, teacher and Anabaptist chaplain at Fuller Seminary; Mary Thiessen Nation (Eastern Mennonite University), a longtime urban worker in L.A. who is "passionate about training ministers and missionaries to embrace a robust, embodied Christian spirituality and holistic responses to crises, conflict and trauma"; Chuwang Pam (Los Angeles Faith Chapel), whose congregation ministers to the homeless and hungry in south-central Los Angeles; Shane Hipps (Trinity Mennonite, Glendale, Ariz.), pastor and author of *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*; Paul Alexander, a Pentecostal pastor who rediscovered his church's forgotten heritage of peacemaking; and Juan Martinez (Fuller Seminary), an expert on Latino Protestants and acculturation.



Learn

Voices from the Valley tour

Immigration policy continues to be a major issue for Mennonites across the country, and nowhere more urgently than in the Pacific Southwest. A year ago, concerns about a bill that would, in effect, have made it illegal for churches to provide humanitarian help to undocumented immigrants led PSMC leaders to prod Mennonite Church USA to action.

At that time, conference minister Jeff Wright suggested the denomination might need to establish a legal defence fund for pastors, who might well find themselves breaking a new law by practising Christian compassion to people who came into their area of ministry.

Since then, the wider church has risen to the challenge of addressing this issue. And in San Jose, there will be a unique opportunity to bring Mennonites from across the country face to face with immigration policy as it affects

the people who plant and harvest much of the food we eat.

On July 1, opening day, PSMC leaders have invited assembly goers to join an field trip to the Reedley-Fresno area, in collaboration with West Coast MCC, where they'll hear first-hand from two important groups: farm workers and landowners.

Arizona conference minister Al Whaley says participants will have a chance to seek answers to questions such as: What prompts people to risk a dangerous crossing of the desert to do this kind of work? Why have Americans been arrested and put on trial for giving water, food and medical aid to people who have come close to dying on the border? How do landowners feel about being expected to act as the government's enforcers – against the very workers they so much need? What role did election year politics play in the immigration debate?

Registration for the Voices from the Valley tour is \$85, including lunch. (See www.sanjose2007.org for details; click on "pre/post-convention events.")

Celebrate

PSMC banners

Pacific Southwest congregations, as part of the host conference, are invited to make banners that show how they "Live the Call." and introduce the wider church to what's happening out here. The banners will be displayed in the worship area at San Jose. The banners should be 3' x 4' and designed to hang vertically. They will be hung from a wire, so should be constructed to make that possible. The wire is already in place, so banners should either have strips that can loop over the wire, or the banners will be hung by hooks. For more information, contact Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower at clare-ann@peacemaking.com or 559-281-5664.

*We're called to worship, we're called to speak truth,
We're called of the Father, Lord over all.
We're called to wage peace and to pray for another,
Filled with the Spirit, come live the call.*

Chorus from the theme song for San Jose 2007,
by Makinto (Los Angeles Faith Chapel)

Meet you in San Jose!

Inspire our kids

Youth Assembly

In addition to the adult convention, there will be assemblies for children, junior high kids and (the biggest of all) high school youth. PSMC set aside a \$7,000 fund this year – to be offset by dedicated fundraising – to help youth from across the conference attend the San Jose Youth Assembly who otherwise can't raise enough money to go. PSMC moderator Leah Ann Alcazar says this assembly presents "a unique opportunity for us because transportation expenses will be minimal" compared with the east-coast sites typically chosen for Mennonite gatherings. But typical cost per high schooler will still add up to about \$600, including lodging, food and registration. The focus is on having as many kids as possible get the chance to attend – and seeing the Pacific Southwest, as host conference, well represented.



Northern California conference minister Clare Ann Ruth Heffelbower, who was instrumental in creating PSMC's new Faith Formation Team, challenged congregations who have more resources than others in terms of finances and staff, "to look at your budgets, and as your youth are raising money for San Jose ... see if you can give an extra \$1,000 or \$2,000 to this pool for youth, especially in Southern California."



Pray



Prayer Team

Sharon Reimer has experienced the power of prayer in her life and in farflung places. She was one of the few non-Africans who joined a team that spent time fervently praying before and during the Mennonite World Conference assembly in Zimbabwe in 2003. The group even went about blessing buildings where it would be held. Many who attended that assembly, held in a time of turmoil in Zimbabwe, believed its joyous success was a miracle in itself.

"I believe that prayer is the foundation of the church, and a church without prayer is just a social club," writes Reimer, who has been part of the prayer team at First Mennonite Reedley for years. Pastor Steve Penner referred her to the prayer organizer for San Jose, and a local prayer team was born at the PSMC gathering in February. "It is never too early to start praying and we can never send up too many prayers," Reimer says. "So I asked for and received volunteers and we are on our way – praying that we free the Holy Spirit to work among us in miraculous, life-changing ways."

If you'd like to be part of the prayer team, write to: psreimer@netzero.net

Take care of business

Pacific Southwest Assembly

To avoid asking delegates to make two big trips within a few weeks, the usual June date of the summer assembly has been adjusted to the Monday morning preceding the denomination-wide event. The abbreviated gathering will be held in one session only, focused on conference business, including affirming a new moderator and board.

When: Monday, July 2, 9 a.m.-noon

Where: San Jose convention building

Christian Churches Together

One big item of business for delegates to the national assembly will be the question of joining Christian Churches Together, a group begun informally in 2001 out of a "deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today." It was formally established recently by leaders of 36 church and national organizations. CCT includes participants from Evangelical/Pentecostal, Orthodox, Catholic, historic Protestant and racial/ethnic churches.

– from a release by June Krehbiel

Volunteer

Opportunities to Serve

• In what's become a regular tradition at Mennonite Church assemblies, 'Servant Projects' will put hundreds of youth and adult volunteers on the streets of San Jose, to share a day's labor and Christian compassion with those in need.

• **Volunteers are needed to staff the daily news sheet at San Jose. If you have some experience as an amateur or professional writer/journalist, photographer, graphic or web designer and could give some time to this, please send a note to [Panorama editor Doreen Martens at \[panorama@pacificsouthwest.org\]\(mailto:panorama@pacificsouthwest.org\)](mailto:Panorama editor Doreen Martens at panorama@pacificsouthwest.org)**

What's the scoop?

People and events

July 2
PSMC Summer
Assembly
San Jose,
9 a.m.-noon

July 2-8
Live the Call
San Jose 2007
Mennonite Church
USA assembly

Oct. 7
World Communion
Sunday

Nov. 4
Peace Sunday

Jocelyn K. Fong, of Trinity Mennonite in Phoenix, is one of two PSMC natives who graduated from Goshen College this spring. The daughter of Ron and Bev Fong, she earned a bachelor's degree in peace, justice and conflict studies.

Bethany Wright, daughter of Jeff and Debbie Wright of Riverside, Calif., earned a bachelor's degree with a major in Bible and religion and a minor in conflict studies. She attends Pasadena Mennonite Church.

Conference minister **Al Whaley**, right, congratulates Pastor **Bryce Miller** at his licensing service at Shalom Mennonite Fellowship in Tucson on Jan. 7.

Despite political instability and ongoing unrest, MCC Lebanon and its 12 partner organizations continue to provide crisis intervention services and plan development projects, says **Ken Seitz**, who served as pastor at **First Mennonite Church in Reedley** and on PSMC's pastoral leadership council before becoming MCC's country rep in Lebanon in 2004.

"In such times of unrest our challenge is keeping on task, but for the most part our partners are moving ahead with their projects," he said in an interview earlier this year. MCC's usual projects focus on strengthening local peace building and conflict resolution programs. Currently, it supports 35 projects, about half begun in response to last summer's conflict, including mobile health clinics, children and youth programs, trauma healing and cluster bomb awareness. "We are running a double-track program. This is quite a challenge for us and our partners," noted Seitz. "Our partners are highly motivated people – they burn the candle at both ends to get projects implemented and completed."

The war killed nearly 1,200 Lebanese, almost 30 percent of them children, and injured 4,000. One-quarter of the population was displaced and the bombing destroyed jobs and infrastructure. Fear of more violence makes it difficult to plan long-term projects.

"In a politically tense or security-tense situation, everyone shifts to short term thinking," Seitz said. "People's moods, energy levels and ability to function are impacted. We are still trying to focus on development but we are finding the whole process has slowed down."

MCC's local staff member Bassam Chamoun lives 75 kilometres south of Beirut, close to many partner organizations, but is expected to drive to Beirut once a week.

"We wonder from day to day if it is safe or possible for Bassam to come up here," said Seitz. "Furthermore, Kathryn and I are not Lebanese – we are loved as people but when does our nationality become an issue for Bassam or for our partners? Are we a burden for the local people? Are they spending too much time worrying about us and our safety?"

Despite these challenges, Seitz said he and Kathryn are optimistic they'll be able to complete their five-year



commitment as country representatives.

"These are times that really test us but MCC is ultimately a people-to-people organization," explained Seitz. "MCC partnerships are special because our partners sense our love, our concern and our desire to connect with people. We identify with the people. We try to support and encourage them. That's what really counts." – *adapted from an MCC release by Gladys Terichow.*

A Mennonite contingent invited by West Coast MCC is part of the **4th Annual Migrant Trail Walk**, a 75-mile journey through the desert toward Tucson that was to begin May 26 and end June 3. The event has been held annually since 2004 as an act of solidarity with migrants and to raise awareness about the dangers migrants face when crossing the border in search of employment to feed their families. Though walking 75 miles under a hot sun isn't easy, the walkers experience a much easier trip than migrants: they're accompanied by support vehicles, unlimited food and water, and medical attention. The walk was to include Sunday morning worship at **Shalom Mennonite Fellowship**.

Growing up in Mumbai, India, **Valentina Satvedi**, the new co-director of **Mennonite Central Committee's Anti-Racism Program**, came of age in a cosmopolitan setting. "I had Hindu neighbors, Sikh neighbors, Zoroastrian neighbors, Muslim neighbors," she recalls. Her Christian faith made her a minority.



Then, as a student at Bethany Theological Seminary in Indiana, she found herself a minority again, this time as a person of color. Today, as part-time director of Urban Theological Formation for the **Center for Anabaptist Leadership** in Pasadena, Satvedi works with congregations whose members are primarily immigrants or people of color. "I've never been away from this dialogue about what it means to be a minority, what it means to be the other," she said. "Race relations, the whole cultural dialogue, has always been part of my journey."

Satvedi, who lives in Castaic, has an M.Div. degree and is an ordained Church of the Brethren minister. She will serve as co-director of the Anti-Racism Program with Harley Eagle while continuing her work at CAL.

She emphasizes that her anti-racism work is grounded in her journey with God. "At the heart of it all is my spirituality," she said. "I approach it confessionally and I think we all need to approach it confessionally."

She sees racism as sin, but is adamant that talking Biblically about it is not as simple as pulling out a few specific texts. We need to look broadly and deeply at Scripture, listening to others and pondering what God is saying through both, she says.

"I would hope we would deal with this racism that is ingrained, that is systemic, from a place of being centered in the Spirit, being centered in Christ," Satvedi said. "My goal is to be centered in the Biblical word and to work from that to address the sins around – and that includes racism." *To learn more, see mcc.org/us/antiracism.*

Renewing PSMC

Assessment task force takes a fresh look at conference activities and structures



Like individuals, institutions, no matter how inspired at the beginning, can get a little settled in their ways over the years, a little habitual, a little less responsive to the needs of the moment. Sometimes they need a little shaking up.

And that's why, more than a decade after its creation, PSMC is taking a fresh look at its whys and hows. Like Mennonite Church USA and many other area conferences, the board has begun a re-evaluation of the purpose and structures of the conference, starting with appointing a special task force that includes Tyler Zabriskie, former moderators Ruth Suter and Duane Oswald, Aviani Moeljono, Myma Schwartz and Ty Buxman.

At the February assembly, Zabriskie recalled renowned missiologist Paul Hiebert pointing out that in the life of any thriving organization there's a creative tension between the forces of institutionalization and the urge for renewal. Like a set of good habits, the tendency to institutionalize provides a solid foundation for creativity. But let it get out of balance, and you get what Hiebert called "hardening of the categories" – the organization is so bound by its traditions and structures that, like a cholesterol-clogged artery, it's starved for life and vitality.

After 12 years as a conference, Zabriskie said, it's time for PSMC to take a look at whether its structures are serving us well. The task force will develop recommendations in four areas: mission, structure, function and accountability.

- Mission: PSMC's purpose, as stated in our long-range plan, is to, "in partnership with Mennonite Church USA, equip its member congregations to be agents of God's transforming work." Are our mission statements clear and current enough to be a good starting point?

- Structure: Could our structures (board, executive, committees, staffing, delegate body) better support the conference mission?

- Function: The task force will evaluate how the conference functions today to help answer the recurring question, what is the value of conference?

- Accountability: The task force will evaluate what processes need to be created to ensure the structure supports the conference's mission and effective functioning. It will suggest accountability mechanisms, revised roles

and responsibilities and "performance metrics."

The task force and board are working on draft proposals that will come back to delegates for feedback at the July 2 assembly – with final recommendations ready to be implemented by the time of the February assembly.

Delegates had a chance to be part of the evaluation process at the February assembly, where they divided into smaller groups to consider how the conference supports and equips in congregations in ways they value, what gaps exist in what's needed; and what changes they'd like to see in structure, function and accountability.

What do congregations value about PSMC?

Among other things; the ordination process and education offered to new leaders through the Center for Anabaptist Leadership; the consultation work of conference ministers and district elders; Church Extension Service loans for church plants; *Panorama*; help during pastoral transitions. And some less tangible things: the unity in Christ that binds the churches together; a sense of belonging and contributing to God's greater work; sharing of stories that empowers and encourages us to work together.

What could the conference be doing better?

Several delegates said they'd like to see more connection-building: sending visiting pastors and lay people to speak in sister churches in the area after an assembly has ended, for example. Delegates could be encouraged to report more to their congregations about what they experienced at assemblies. Several mentioned they would like to see conference ministers and leaders visiting and preaching in the congregations more often.

What could the conference do to support mission-al congregations?

Some creative ideas: A conference grant writer to help congregations find sources of funds for social programs. More equipping and training for congregational leaders. Creating sister-church relationships, particularly between churches of different ethnicities. A low-interest loan program to keep church members in debt from falling prey to predatory loaners. More events and other connections with the conference for youth, many of whom are not very aware of opportunities like the San Jose youth assembly and the Mennonite colleges. More gatherings for pastoral leaders. Greater political witness on issues we find consensus on, particularly at the state level. Pulpit exchanges and other exchanges that would expand the experience and expertise within our congregations.

What changes would churches like to see?

One group suggested more accountability; sometimes decisions are made and there's no follow-through on those at the delegate level – are the things we agreed on actually being carried out? Another suggested that across the Pacific Southwest, we've become too regionally oriented; they'd like to see us become more unified.

Moderator Leah Ann Alcazar invited prayers for the task force's work as they deal with these and other issues and encouraged delegates to talk up the process within their congregations. "Don't leave your thoughts in this building," she urged. "Have these discussions with people in your congregation."

Photo left: Delegates worship at the February assembly of PSMC, which mixed times of song, prayer and scripture study with business.

January's devastating citrus freeze in California threw tens of thousands of agricultural workers out of work, possibly for several months, bringing a co-ordinated call from MCC and Mennonite Disaster Service for assistance "in ways that are loving, efficient and help those not able to get help elsewhere," according to a news release.

Some 60 percent of the workers were ineligible for federal or state aid, leaving them dependent on compassionate agencies simply to eat.

With the help of a \$15,000 grant from MDS's financial office in Pennsylvania, and local volunteers – many of them workers also affected by the freeze – MDS set up five food distribution centers at churches around Fresno. Some 350 families were provided on a regular basis with basic necessities,

including tortillas, potatoes, beans and rice. Through donations to its California Freeze Fund, MCC provided some assistance with rent, utility and medical bills.

Churches involved reported a substantial boost in attendance at worship services, among people grateful to the congregation and to God for the assistance they received at a desperate time.

News you can use: Resources for congregations

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Holy Ground: A Resource on Faith and the Environment is a study guide great for small groups from the editors of Sojourners. Exploring environmental racism, eco-feminism and the population explosion, it offers practical reflections and models for action through articles and study questions. The four-session guide is 68 pages and costs \$5; order online or call 800-714-7474. A downloadable discussion guide called *Christians and the Environment* is also available in PDF format. Go to www.sojo.net and follow the links under Resources.



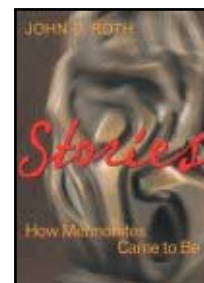
A new peace website for high school youth includes blogs from youth who are thinking about how to live a Christian life of peace and justice, Peace Postings from adults to help youth see how their choices matter (including PSMC pastors Bryce Miller of Tucson and Jennifer Davis Sensenig of Pasadena), registration and draft information, and opportunities to join the writers in online conversation. See <http://peace.mennolink.org> and click on Youth Resources.



Two short videos from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) are now online, featuring U.S. military veterans sharing why they joined the military and later became conscientious objectors. “At Mass, we would pray things like the Magnificat, about the raising up of the poor and the rich getting sent empty away. And I would take the body and blood of Christ into my mouth and then I would go back into the interrogation room and use that exact same mouth to interrogate poor people,” recalls Joshua Casteel, who served as an Army interrogator in Iraq. The videos, “Why we joined” and “How our beliefs about

war changed,” are available at mcc.org/us/co. “The voices of veterans are some of the most effective peace education voices I know, says Titus Peachey, director of the MCC U.S. Peace Education Office, who has spent years offering his testimony of how he chose a path of peace. Young people who consider joining the military might find it tough to trust someone who’s never considered military service an option. “But when they hear from somebody who’s been in combat and who’s had a change of heart, that has an integrity that rings true for young people,” he said. The site features video clips; profiles and stories; FAQs; a peacemaker registration form; and Ask a Vet, a Web page that has email links to military veterans willing to respond to youth’s questions about war, peace and conscientious objection.

In *Stories: How Mennonites Came to Be*, a compact digest of Mennonite history, John D. Roth weaves a complicated set of stories into a fresh and engaging narrative that stretches from the early church to the present and around the world. The book is “an invitation to consider how what happened back then can illuminate the task of following Jesus now,” writes Jonathan Showalter. John D. Roth is a professor of history at Goshen College and director of the Mennonite Historical Library. (Herald Press, \$10.99) Order online at www.mph.org



Herald Press has released *Viviendo las Primicias: Dando a Dios lo Mejor de Nosotros* by Lynn A. Miller (\$7.99). Dios nos llama a vivir las primicias. Esto significa devolver a Dios la mejor parte de los dones que Dios nos ha dado. Dar a Dios las primicias de nuestro tiempo, talento, salud, dinero y relaciones, nos hace íntegros y ayuda a difundir esa integridad de Dios a otras personas. “Lynn Miller ha combinado su don de narración y erudición bíblica para darnos un libro de estudio entre tenido, perspicaz, comprensible.” – Ray y Lillian Bair, autores de *God’s Managers*. Lynn A. Miller es teólogo de mayordomía ara Mennonite Mutual Aid en Elkhart, Indiana. El es el autor de varios libros, incluyendo *Just in Time: Stories of God’s Extravagance* y *The Power of Enough*. Order at www.mph.org

Support for PSMC

Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference gathers California, Arizona and Nevada churches in partnership for leadership, mission and congregational renewal. Giving by congregations and individuals ensures that conference ministers are funded, mission activities flourish, and resources are available for church nurture. Donations may be sent to:
Treasurer, Box CAL, 1539 E. Howard St.,



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