



On the coat-tails of the Spirit: Next-generation churches in the Pacific Southwest

Feeling uncomfortable about how the Mennonite church you thought you knew seems to be changing? Or maybe you're excited by a sense that God is doing a new thing among us. In either case, you're not alone – especially if you're living in the dynamic Pacific Southwest at a time when many new “styles” of church are appearing. The tricky challenges, exciting opportunities and, yes, often uncomfortable identity questions raised by new models for the church were the focus of a lively dialogue at the summer assembly of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, held in Tucson June 20-21.

One clear point emerged: Because PSMC has focused on being “missional” ever since its creation 14 years ago, what it will look like in another 14 years could be quite different. Those years have seen a large growth in new-immigrant communities joining PSMC, among them West Africans, Indonesians, to a lesser extent Latinos, Chinese, Hmong and more recently a Korean group – to the point where 60 percent of the members of PSMC churches were born outside the United States, from nearly 50 countries.



Communion servers at the Tucson assembly included George Makinto, left, who ministers to a small church with a vision to become a multi-ethnic “mosaic” congregation, and Jason Evans, part of an intentional Christian community, San Diego’s Ecclesia Collective.

The development of immigrant churches from varied backgrounds is a welcome movement that will continue, along with the revitalization of more established and traditional congregations. But there are also some other fresh – some might say strange, or energizing – models appearing in our midst, several of them recognized in a new “mission strategy” document the PSMC board shared with delegates.

• **Mosaic congregations:** Immigrant congregations inevitably begin to acculturate, as children growing up here begin to feel more at home with American styles of language and ministry. “Mosaic” congregations, as defined in Tom Sine’s influential recent book, *The New Conspirators*, work at being truly cross-cultural in their expressions of faith.

One of several congregations in PSMC that reflect this “mosaic” trend is First Mennonite Reedley. One of the oldest churches in PSMC, its members

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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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A glimpse of the next-generation church

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made the decision several years ago to bring their Spanish- and English-speaking congregations together as one church with a single staff and budget – a challenging but also rewarding renewal of their mission and purpose.

Meanwhile, El Remanente del Senor, the product of a church division in La Puente, Calif., is a pilot mosaic project attempting to be a multi-ethnic church. The small Hispanic group, which has received some PSMC seed money, has welcomed as pastor George Makinto, a multilingual leader with roots in Liberia and Germany.

“These mosaic churches are really the next generation,” said conference minister Jeff Wright, pointing also to the examples of two churches that started out as Indonesian congregations: GKI Zion in Fullerton (40% non-Indonesian) and Bethesda Community church in El Monte (60% non-Indonesian). “I’d love to be able to say we have a four-point strategy for developing mosaic churches, but we’re just riding the coattails of the Holy Spirit and hanging on,” he said.

“It’s not a pie-in-the-sky strategy, it’s what’s happening on the ground.”

The second big development is the arrival of new models of church that respond to the dreams of a younger generation seeking authenticity and purpose. These young Christians and spiritual seekers don’t so much want to be catered to – as older adults often assume – but to serve the needs of the world, in meaningful ways.

“We need to be launching new models of church to welcome our young adults back into the church, and to provide a live expression of incarnational Anabaptism to the thousands of young adults across the USA who find Anabaptist ways of being the church very relevant in the ‘post-American world’ and a ‘post Christendom



Sandelle and Michelle Johnson and Mark and Thomas Ukah of Christ Life Chapel, a new congregation in Surprise, Ariz., present a song of devotion in hip hop style at the Tucson assembly.

America’ which they uniquely inhabit,” says the PSMC document.

- **‘New monastic’ communities:** Sine describes these as small Christian communities who try to incarnate the gospel in their neighbourhoods by living, praying, organizing and serving together, without forming a traditional “church” at all. The Ecclesia Collective, a group led by Jason Evans in San Diego that’s finding unique ways to minister to marginalized people near their shared home, Hawthorn House, is one example. Such groups challenge us to devise a “new vocabulary” about what it means to be the church and part of a conference, says Wright.

- **Submergent church:** A blend of “emergent” and “subversive,” this term applies to groups that are experimenting with counter-cultural expressions of faith. One that’s been relating to PSMC of late is Icon, in San Diego, which describes itself as “a community of discipleship.”

Wright recalls receiving an email from Icon’s Will Cerraras explaining that, after reading the works of Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, members of his group had come to believe they were Anabaptists and should be relating to a modern expression of Anabaptists. “We think that’s the Mennonite Church,” they said, “so we think we belong to you – is that okay?”

Wright points out that Mennonites began as the radicals of the Reformation, an “emergent” group. But now, we don’t always know what to do with new movements.

“God’s moving in our midst with these different expressions of the church. We’ve got people coming to us saying, ‘You Anabaptists have something to offer. Your message of discipleship and community and peacemaking and justice – it’s important, we want to identify with your voice.’” Wright explains to them that vision and reality can often be quite different. But these groups are saying: “We want to create a new reality that takes our Anabaptist vision totally seriously.”

And that, Wright says, “is what this mission strategy tries to express.”



Pastor Harry Nze leads a special August worship celebration at Christ Life Chapel, begun by transplants from Los Angeles Faith Chapel.

A conversation about the changing church

As heard at the Tucson assembly

On the challenge of forming mosaic churches:



Jeff Wright (conference minister):

It doesn't happen strategically – it happens intentionally. There's a difference. Strategy is about sitting down and saying, here's the flow chart, Step A, Step B. Intentionally means saying: God, we're open to wherever you lead us. We're going to take the roller coaster ride and scream a lot, but we're going to hold on and take the ride you're going to take us on. ...

We'll make mistakes, but we need to learn how to let failures not be hindrances for future

adventures, but rather learning environments so the next time we do a thing, we do it better.



Tyler Zabriskie (conference moderator):

Historically it's often been easier to be multi-ethnic than it is to be multi-class, because in our American setting, class is often a much tougher boundary to reach across and build fellowship.



Shane Hippias (pastor, Trinity Mennonite):

We are a bunch of people coming together from very different backgrounds; Mennonite "ethnic" culture is very different from my culture. The hard part for us [who are neither immigrants nor people of color] is that we often don't see there *are* other cultures coming together.



George Makinto (pastor, El Remanente del Senor):

Some churches are called to be multicultural, and some aren't. ... I believe that if you follow the calling of the Spirit, what God wants to do in your church, and you pray, things will come to your church. Some churches cater to certain people, some have anointing for another kind of ministry... [While holding services outdoors we discovered that] 50 percent of Latinos passing by on the street didn't

speak Spanish. I was shocked. That's another reality of the next generation of young people coming up – and me, a non-Hispanic, trying to speak Spanish to a Hispanic who doesn't speak Spanish! Hispanics in L.A. are multicultural; there's no such thing as a "Latino culture." They often don't understand each other culturally.



Chuwang Pam (pastor, Los Angeles Faith Chapel):

A brother was asking: How do you get the poor to come to church? The poor won't come to you; you have to go to them. That's the ministry we've been doing for the past 12 years [at L.A. Faith]. The poor feel no one cares about them; they feel neglected and depressed; so you have to go to them and sell yourself to them, convince them that they are welcome, and then when they come you also

have to be intentional about ensuring that some of their needs become your needs. [The church has a used-clothing room and bunk beds to meet some short-term needs.] Once you are going to get some of those needs, they will feel comfortable, but if you expect them to just come ...

On issues of identity:



Jason Evans (leader, Ecclesia Collective, San Diego):

There's a growing number of us that are coming into this [Anabaptist-Mennonite] tradition because we identify with that identity. We come with our cultural differences, our different expressions of how to be the church together. But we're choosing *you*, and so our desire is not to tear apart the tradition, but to reach way back into the history of this tradition and celebrate what you already articulated and

identified about what it means to be Anabaptist, what it means to be peacemakers and disciples of Jesus in this culture. Change is hard, but please know that we come to this not wanting you to change altogether; we came to the table because of who you already are.



Melinda Hasegawa (member, First Mennonite Reedley):

I wasn't raised Mennonite. My husband is Japanese; he was raised in the Methodist church. But from the first time we came to First Mennonite, we were home. There was something in the theology, in the love that we felt, that we were home. I think there is a feeling that isn't passed down ethnically. I don't know all those traditional German Mennonite things, but when we hear the stories of people

who have come out of Eastern Europe, escaping persecution, we value those stories, and when we listen to our Central American people who have come here – they were escaping persecution, too. The church and the problems people face in the world are the same.



Zuni Bike Club is part of the Zuni Avenue Peace Center, an initiative of Shalom Mennonite Church in a less prosperous area of Tucson. Young adults in the church's MVS unit – a potential incubator for the next generation of church leaders – help lead innovative activities at this neighborhood gathering place, such as a community garden and a “girls with tools” program.

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Jeff Wright: On the last night at San Jose (at the Mennonite Church USA assembly), a group of West African pastors came up after the last service and said, “Jeff, we get it. We belong. You’ve been telling us for years, but now we get it, we do belong.” That’s the moment when identity got transferred from just a relationship to a bigger picture, a big set of relationships in the bigger church. That’s the moment when people stop saying, “you Mennonites,” and they start talking about “*us* Mennonites – we are doing this.” That’s a long process, it takes years and it takes patience, but it happens.

Tyler Zabriskie: This shifting of our vision of the Kingdom of God and how we express it is quite a deep change for some of us . . . This is a change at the identity level – how do I understand myself as a part of the people of God, how do I understand myself in relation to ethnicity or class or language markers of our identity? It’s quite a profound change that involves us being open to the Spirit of God. I love it when we start telling these kinds of stories – it’s a great testimony to hear people who have a deep experience of this. If you’re feeling uncomfortable about this, that is normal. . . . Discomfort is normal in growing and stretching as a people of God. We want to be honest about the challenges and anxiety this brings up, because that’s how we open up to the Spirit, to discern how we can welcome [change] without losing the core lessons we’ve learned and the value of the cultural environment we came from, and we bring that past into the future.

On the next generation of leaders:

Jeff Wright: Conrad Kanagy’s study of Mennonite Church USA points to a crisis in the denomination around the development of young adults; the under-30 generation. It’s significant to note the high number of people who are in voluntary service within the borders of PSMC; approximately one in five VSers serve in a unit sponsored by PSMC congregations. [Mennonite Voluntary Service units are found in Tucson, Fresno, the Hopi Reservation and San Francisco.] San Francisco have announced that they have just purchased their unit house – what an achievement that was. That points to another kind of missional commitment, to reach out to the young adults of our church and welcome them into framing the next generation of church life, and to be a place where young adults who have just discovered the Anabaptist movement can find a home.

One body in Reedley:

A ‘mosaic church’ in process

First Mennonite Church, Reedley, has taken deliberate steps toward becoming a “mosaic” congregation – unifying a century-old English-speaking congregation with the Spanish-speaking one it planted as a outreach congregation years ago. The two are now one body with a single staff, budget and mission. But as Melinda Hasegawa related at the summer assembly, truly becoming one is a long process involving effort, patience and love. Here’s some of what she shared, lightly edited:

We found the needs of the [Spanish-speaking congregants] were so different. And they were *us*. We needed them. We needed their encouragement, their faithfulness, their inspiration and their joyfulness, and they needed our stability and our facility and our organization. So we decided in the ‘90s that we would work towards becoming one congregation.

We’re still in the process of doing that. We have two worshipping bodies, English and Spanish. We have joint Sunday School, shared coffee hour and then worship. Four or five times a year, we have a joint service. That’s a challenge because we have a real desire to be together, but there are a number in the Spanish congregation that don’t speak English and there are many in the English congregation who don’t speak Spanish. We’ve acquired headphones so they could do translation. . . .

We’ve had to get looser about some things [for example on the once-rigid rules about using the church kitchen.] Your life changes when you invite people to be in your church. We have a whole different population, and they’re not there just on Sundays.

When we first got into this we thought we were going to have Mexican families; but our church is from Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela – we have a wide variety of Hispanics, and they’re not the same [culturally] so they struggle also. . . .

Our Hispanic pastor, Juan Montes, has a group of leaders he’s disciplined with Bible training and leadership development. He encourages people to go to the coffee hour so we have a chance to say hello. We have a group of people who are interested in learning to speak Spanish, also some who want to lean English, so occasionally we’ll have an evening of speaking only Spanish or English. At baby showers everyone comes; English and Spanish-speakers are together in the baby nursery. . . .

We try to be aware of anything we’re not saying, anything that might make people feel they aren’t part of us, just as you would when someone new comes into your family.

Interestingly for me, the older participants were the most open – the ones in their 80s and 90s. Everyone says, ‘Oh, get the kids involved, they’re the ones who will break barriers.’ That’s not really the way it works. Our older ones were open and loving. They knew the Mennonite way and they lived it and showed us – they were encouraging us to work that way.

It has been a struggle [organizationally]. We’re extremely organized, we have these committees that always have to be staffed, and we always have to meet at regular intervals. Well, these people aren’t interested in committees; they’re out there praying, worshiping, meeting their neighbours, having meetings in their homes, they’re serving food, they’re ministering. So we’re battling right now with our structure: How much structure do we maintain and what do we change?

So it’s been a wonderful challenge. It used to be our mission focus, and that’s one of the things we struggle with – now that we’re becoming one, is that enough mission? They have things they want to do and we have things we want to do with them and through them. It’s very exciting.

What drains your church's energy?

The cure begins with careful discernment of God's call

Spiritual discernment "is the process of taking a long, loving look at the real," says Theresa Blythe, and that applies to congregations as much as it does to individuals.

Blythe, who spoke on the topic at the June assembly of PSMC in Tucson, has extensive cross-denominational experience in spiritual direction and currently serves as the head of a Redemptorist school for spiritual directors in Arizona. She is the author of *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times*.

Discernment takes deep listening, a lot of prayer, and the willingness to ask open-ended questions and feel out a call from God, she said.

Contrary to a popular misconception, spiritual discernment isn't "just so much navel-gazing," she said. It involves "sifting and sorting through facts, feelings, intuition, scripture, gut instinct, even our dreams, looking for insight into where God may be leading us. When we take the time to notice where God is present in our life and savour that presence, we find that presence always beckons us into a world of deep need.

"here's the rub for a lot of people: The world's needs are enormous, but we are small. Our energy is finite.

"My fear is that many individuals in churches are doing so many things to alleviate this enormous need that they never stop to ask: Is this what God is calling us to do?"

Blythe drew on discernment stories from the lives of Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King Jr. and Menno Simons to make her point. Simons, faced with the call to reform and lead a disintegrating Anabaptist movement, spent a great deal of time in prayer weighing the issues, before boldly handing God a choice, "saying basically, if you want me to do this, make me so on fire and committed to it that I'll burn up inside if I don't take it on—or make it go away."

"Menno Simons didn't become the namesake of this church just because those people asked him to take on the task," Blythe said. "He did so by spending time in discernment, surrounded by prayer, following a call."

Blythe advocates that both individuals and churches consider the classic prayer of Ignatius Loyola, the Prayer of Examen, which calls us to thoughtfully examine each day's activities and attitudes to ponder which are most life-giving and which are most energy-draining.

"Let me ask you this: Is your church tired? depressed? lacking in energy? I know mine is. If that's the case, I challenge you as church leaders to gather for committed prayer and discernment, take a significant amount of silence together, and then ask these three questions in this order: What activities generate real life and energy in this congregation? What activities drain life and energy from this congregation? And acknowledging the above, what is our call from God here?"



"My fear is that many individuals in churches are doing so many things to alleviate enormous need that they never stop to ask: Is this what God is calling us to do?"

Theresa Blythe

Reorganization of PSMC proceeds

A system of "district elders" offering churches and pastors support and oversight through local clusters is now well under way across the Pacific Southwest, a major part of the reorganization of conference structure begun in 2007.

While there have been some bumps along the way, all but a few churches have chosen to be part of these clusters, which were pioneered in Southern California. One major change since the June assembly has been the departure of Tom Leard Longenecker, who took a pastorate in Pennsylvania. Ron Faus, of Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Ariz., has stepped into that role.

Delegates at the Tucson assembly approved an action plan for 2009 involving how the conference will move on its three major priorities: equipping pastors and leaders, facilitating church-to-church communication, and strategizing with congregations for missional vitality. The plan includes such initiatives as expanding the School for Urban Mission's outreach beyond Southern California; extending the pastoral coaching network (orientations were held in Phoenix and Los Angeles in late summer); establishing a pulpit exchange (the first was slated for Nov. 1) and sister-church opportunities; sending a weekly



news email, and helping churches find resources to aid members with immigration issues.

Considerable time was devoted to considering the process for evaluating the organizational changes, including the move to a single part-time conference minister (from three part-time), supported by the elders team. Small groups spent time discussing what questions should be asked and answered in this process. A committee has been set up to evaluate the structural effectiveness of the conference before and after the changes, focusing on the conference priorities.

Steps are also being taken to clarify the conference's relationship with Shalom Ministries, parent organization to the Center for Anabaptist Leadership.

Also in Tucson, Jeff Wright was commissioned and blessed as conference-wide pastor, and delegates affirmed three board members: Tyler Zabriskie, continuing as moderator; Naomi Krause (San Francisco) as secretary; and Ben Shetler continuing as treasurer.

Conference minister Jeff Wright with some of the people who make PSMC tick: Nathan Slater (elder, alternative communities); Jeannette Buller Slater (coaching); Jason Evans (submergent churches), Mukarabe Makinto (AIDS and immigrants), Vivian Schwartz (bookkeeper); Shawna Yoder (former administrator); Rebekka Stutzman (youth), Joel Shenk (School for Urban Mission); Tyler Zabriskie (moderator).

As the Spirit moves: God's at work in the churches of the Southwest and beyond



PSMC joyfully accepted two new congregations at the Tucson assembly in June. From left, Sue Park Hur of Church for Others in Pasadena; conference minister Jeff Wright; Hyun Hur; and Angela and Harry Nze of Christ Life Chapel in Surprise.

Palmdale Faith Church, a new congregation being organized in association with PSMC, has asked for prayer as it begins meeting. A pacifist voice in the middle of the defense industry in Palmdale, Calif. – 60 miles from the nearest Mennonite church – this fledgling group has a primary mission of ministering to the mentally ill by providing housing and employment. “Primarily we seek to provide supportive apartments to an area that has none,” explains moderator Eric Berg. “We really appreciate how Mennonites in our conference have responded so generously to us.”

The church has asked for prayer over the process to attain non-profit (c503) status as part of PSMC.

For more than 25 years, **Mennonite Men** has been giving scholarships to women and men from the Pacific Southwest toward furthering education and training for Mennonite Church-related ministries. It started in about 1984, when Mennonite Men purchased a house in Elkhart, Ind., to be available for persons from the old Pacific District Conference to live in while attending the Mennonite seminary. A discount is still available toward housing for PSMC members who attend AMBS, one of our preferred Mennonite biblical seminaries. Applications for assistance can also be made for AMBS, Fuller and CAL, as well as other Anabaptist colleges, seminaries and universities.

Among the recent recipients was **Joel Shenk**, who works part time as PSMC conference administrator while attending Fuller Seminary.

In a letter to the organization, Shenk wrote: “I’d like to thank Mennonite Men for the scholarship they have made available for me to apply toward my studies at Fuller Theological Seminary where I am perusing a Master of Divinity degree. I am truly grateful for your decision to support me financially as I work toward this goal.

“Throughout high school and college, pastors, mentors, and friends of mine have always encouraged me to consider entering into ministry. I saw this as God leading and

directing me through the community of faith, and so I always remained open to the ministry roles God gave me. When the opportunity arose two and a half years ago to move out to Pasadena and work for Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference and attend Fuller, I saw this as another door God had opened for me and another step on my journey of discipleship.

“Thus far, the balance between study and ministry has been a wonderful learning experience. I value the fact that I can gain real-life ministry experience while at the same time acquiring the education to deepen my ministry in the future.

“In so many ways – from the opportunity to work for the conference, to the relationships I’ve formed, to this scholarship – the PSMC has made it possible for me to follow God’s calling. It is a blessing I won’t soon forget.”

Another recent recipient is **Sue Park Hur** of Temple City, who received a scholarship from to attend the School for Urban Mission at the Center for Anabaptist Leadership. Sue and her husband are leading a brand new Korean-language Mennonite congregation that was accepted into membership of PSMC at the June assembly.

Are you seeking financial help to prepare Mennonite-related ministry? Applications for assistance can be made for AMBS, Fuller, and CAL, as well as Anabaptist colleges, seminaries, and universities. Forms are available at CAL Offices, the conference website, or Al Whaley. Forms require the signatures of a home church pastor and a conference pastor or elder, and should be sent to:

Al Whaley
1612 W. Northern Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85021
E-mail: menn1ofphx@aol.com.

How did you spend your “economic stimulus” check? A member’s thoughtful suggestion that the government windfall might better be used as a “Kingdom Stimulus” package prompted **Pasadena Mennonite Church** to set up a special fund for members who wanted to contribute that money to something other than personal consumption. After a lively discussion on how to use it, the congregation settled on splitting it between two charities, one local and one global. The \$2,300 collected will go to Harambe Center, an organization that works on developing young leaders in economically deprived northwest Pasadena through tutoring and mentoring; and to Mennonite Central Committee’s work in Darfur. The congregation urged other PSMC churches to think about doing something similar.

On June 22, **Trinity Mennonite Church** in Glendale, Ariz., held a commissioning service for **Kristen Ventola** before she left for a three-year assignment in Khartoum with Mennonite Central Committee, serving as a

peace and advocacy program officer for the Sudan Council of Churches. Ventola is a recent social work graduate from Arizona State University and has previously worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams and No More Deaths.



Joel Shenk, new director of the School for Urban Mission and recipient of a scholarship from Mennonite Men.



Reaching out to Koreans

Anabaptist perspective undergirds fledgling church plant

Church for Others, a new church plant focussed on Southern California's Korean community, began meeting in early summer in the Temple City home of Hyun and Sue Hur.

With a name inspired by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a focus on those who aren't yet "churched," it's the fruit of a fascinating journey of faith for Hyun, who was born in Korea, and Sue, a Korean-American.

Hyun Hur originally came to the United States to attend Fuller Theological Seminary in nearby Pasadena. There he was mentored by Mennonite professor Wilbert Shenk, who helped introduce this long-time Baptist to Anabaptist theology.

On returning to Korea after his studies, Hur found himself ministering to immigrant labourers in his homeland, people who have little protection under Korean law. Three Indonesians who became Christians in Korea were trained under his care and returned to their homeland to minister there.

At the same time, Anabaptist beliefs and ideals were on his mind. In the Korean Baptist seminary, he says, there is a school of thought that traces Baptist roots to the early Anabaptists, including their emphasis on peacemaking. Hur explains that in South Korea, which has lived in a constant state of hostility with North Korea for half a century, peace and how to make it stick "is a very hot issue right now – and Anabaptism can be an alternative answer to that question."

A group of young adults he met this spring, for instance, have started their own church in Korea consciously based on Anabaptist values, though they're not officially Mennonite.

He has returned to the States in hopes of repeating his ministry to immigrants – but this time, it's to Koreans living in California, and under the umbrella of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.

Hur acknowledges that some Koreans here for a time as international workers or students will return eventually, but he hopes they'll help bring the message back to Korea.

"We can help them, we can share the gospel of Jesus, and when they become Christians I want them to have Mennonite values of community, discipleship and peacemaking," he explains.

The fledgling congregation began with a small Korean Anabaptist study group at Fuller, and students who became interested in Anabaptist ideas while studying English under Sue's tutelage.

Hur's wife of 11 years grew up in the United States and says she wasn't even fluent in Korean when they met, so returning to California has been a homecoming for her.

"They're a good team because Hyun can understand what it's like coming from the first-generation immigrant experience, and Sue can understand what it's like for the children, the one-and-a-half and second generations," says Mennonite friend and former fellow student Matt Hamsher.

It was Matt who bumped into Hur on the street after they came back, introduced him to Pasadena Mennonite Church and PSMC, and encouraged him to take courses at the School for Urban Mission, PSMC's main training ground for leaders entering the conference without Mennonite educational experience.

The rest is, well, typical PSMC history. Let's welcome a new group to the fold.



Hyun Hur, right, with friend and former fellow Fuller student Matt Hamsher.

A ringing act of kindness in Tucson

Boys and girls from PSMC's two newest congregations, ChristLife Chapel in Surprise, Ariz., and Church for Others in Temple City, Calif., enjoyed a fun and meaningful outing during the Tucson assembly in June at Ben's Bells, a local charity that produces beautiful handmade ceramic wind chimes using a community process that ensures at least 10 people have worked on each one.

They're not made for sale. Several times a year, hundreds of Ben's Bells are hung randomly in public places around the Tucson community and beyond. The only way to get a Ben's Bell is to find one or be "Belled" – nominated to be honored for acts of kindness.

Nearly 10,000 have been made and released since Jeannette and Dean Packard began making and distributing them as a form of therapy – and a gesture of thanks for the kindness of their community – after the sudden death of their toddler, Ben, on Good Friday 2002. Each randomly placed bell comes with a reminder to pass on the kind act.

The point is the healing power of kindness, says the Ben's Bells website. "We want people to remember how much power they have each day to make the world a better place simply by being kind."

The kids spent their time at the Ben's Bells center, four blocks away, painting beads that form part of the wind chimes.



Shawna Yoder with part of the group that participated at Ben's Bells during the PSMC assembly in Tucson.

What's the scoop?

People and events



Did you know?

The next **Mennonite Church USA** assembly will take place June 30-July 5, 2009, in Columbus, Ohio. The theme, "Breathe and be filled," based on John 20: 21-22, is meant to remind us that before we can recognize where God is at work in the world and join that work, we must first breathe in and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Congregations are now receiving information. Check out the video at www.MennoniteUSA.org/convention, where you can also register beginning Dec. 1.

Family Mennonite Church, Los Angeles, hosted an **immigration workshop** Sept. 27 led by West Coast Mennonite Central Committee and **Mukarabe Makinto** of Shalom Ministries. Many immigrants suffer because they don't understand the complex laws or their rights under the law.

"It is said that what we don't know can hurt us, and we also know that knowledge is power," points out Makinto, who works with immigration issues as they affect Pacific Southwest Mennonites. It was in that spirit that the two agencies teamed up to offer some understanding of immigration law and useful tools to help congregations and their members know and exercise their rights and protect other newcomers to the United States.

The event included a brief introduction to MCC and its immigration program and team – including an immigration case worker, legal adviser and coordinator. Workshops included an introduction to immigration law, covering eligibility and how families can obtain legal status, and one on immigrant rights, including how families can protect themselves during a raid and be ready with the necessary documents.



Bethany Wright Kuhns (above, top row right) has begun a two-year term as a leader for the **Service Adventure** program, living in community and helping lead a group of young adults in a unit house in Philippi, W. Va., along with her husband, Marcos. Wright Kuhns is a 2007 graduate of Goshen College, a member of Pasadena Mennonite Church and daughter of conference minister Jeff Wright. Many regular attendees at PSMC assemblies will remember her as one of the cheerful faces behind the registration desk.

In Service Adventure, a program of Mennonite Mission Network, young adults aged 17-20 live in a household community while doing 10 months of service – in medical clinics, tutoring children, working with senior citizens, repairing old housing and meeting other needs. Mennonite Mission Network is the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA. More information about Service Adventure is available online at Service.MennoniteMission.net.



A Sunday school dance group from **GKI Zion**, in Fullerton, Calif., performed a Timor welcoming dance called Cerana at a celebration of the 63rd anniversary of Indonesian Independence at the Indonesian consulate in Los Angeles. They were among groups performing more than 40 kinds of dance from all over Indonesia, part of a rich cultural tradition. The group included Ina Henukh, Courtney Hunter, Anna Henukh, Nona Robertha Tanamal and Kristine Hunter.



The deadline is coming up for the 10th annual **MCC Washington Office essay contest**, which gives Mennonite high school students an opportunity to reflect and write on how government action affects their lives, their communities and their world. The contest focuses on the intersection of public policy with Anabaptist faith. Students can choose one of the following topics: U.S. energy policy, the global food crisis and gun laws. Resources are available at mccwash@mcc.org. Essays will be judged on clarity of writing style, creativity that illustrates imaginative and thoughtful positions, and content that demonstrates the issue.

Submissions from PSMC students must be postmarked by Dec. 15 and sent to West Coast MCC, 1010 G St., Reedley, CA 93654.

Winners will be announced by Feb. 27, 2009. Prizes are as follows: one grand prize of \$500 chosen from all entries; four prizes of \$100 given to one student from each of the four MCC regions in the US.

For more information, guidelines and a list of resources, contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office at 920 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20003. Call (202) 544-6564 or e-mail mccwash@mcc.org.

The MCC Washington Office is a Mennonite presence on Capitol Hill that provides and encourages witness to the way of Christ on matters of U.S. public policy.

Steve Ratzlaff, pastor of Community Mennonite Church in Fresno, recently toured several midwestern states speaking at bookstores, churches and colleges on his new book, **7 Steps to End War & Save the Planet**. Ratzlaff's book describes the radical changes needed to save this planet from the coming environmental cataclysm. As a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, Ratzlaff took an alternative service assignment as a youth worker on the streets of Kansas City. In the mid-

'70s, he served as a teacher in rural Bolivia, where he learned first-hand about the impact of U.S. government and multinational corporate actions on the people in South America, which ignited his passion for justice. In the 1980s he served as co-chair of the Seattle Pledge of Resistance, a nationwide effort to keep U.S. troops out of Nicaragua. He has been a war-tax resister for 35 years, and chairs the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund board, working to pass legislation in Congress to give conscientious objectors the right not to have to pay for war. He has also served with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and in Fresno is active in pushing for affordable housing. You can learn more about his book at the website, 7stepstoendwar.com/.

Shane Higgs, pastor at Trinity Mennonite in Glendale, Ariz., was invited to speak on the topic "Digital Discipleship: Forming Faith in an Electronic Culture" for the **12th Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series** at Hesston College, Nov. 7-9. Higgs, a former advertising executive, is author of *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospels and Church*. The conference also featured unique input from Beachy Amish church leaders, plus workshops on themes such as media addictions and parenting in an electronic age. Higgs was also lecturer for the Melva Kauffman Lecture Series, on the topic: "Seeing the Sleight-of-Hand: Unveiling the Hidden."

Betsy Houser, of Sunnyslope Mennonite Church in Phoenix, is participating in a **Goshen College Study-Service Term** in Peru this fall, along with 20 other students. The group is studying language, culture and history of the country for the first weeks while living with families in Lima; during the second half of their three-month stay, they will spread out across the country to live with families and volunteer at service assignments. Goshen's SST program is one of the nation's most unique international education programs. Houser spent the summer before this term at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp in Colorado, under Goshen's **Camping Inquiry Program** – a leadership internship program that allows students to serve while earning a \$1,500 scholarship and a \$500 summer stipend.



Houser in Peruvian garb for a cultural program.

Steve Penner, pastor of **First Mennonite Church, Reedley**, gave the benediction for Bethel College's graduation ceremonies in May, where his son, **Jordan Penner**, graduated magna cum laude with degrees in history and Spanish. Jordan is participating in Mennonite Central Committee's SALT program in Alta Verapaz province, Guatemala.

Since the early 1990s, thousands of migrants have traveled across the desert from Sasabe, Sonora, Mexico, to Tucson. An estimated 4,000 have lost their lives crossing this stretch since 1994.

From May 28 through June 3, 11 members of a Mennonite Central Committee delegation participated in

Migrant Trail: We Walk for Life, a 75-mile walk from Sasabe to Tucson. The fifth annual walk aimed to call attention to the human rights crisis on the border.

Shalom Mennonite Fellowship of Tucson provided lodging for a three-day orientation for participants given by MCC. Then the MCC delegation, including Jodi Read of West Coast MCC and Dina Gonzalez Pina of the West Coast board, joined 65 walkers from a variety of religious and human rights organizations.

"We were told that there could be around 2,000 people in the desert at any given time, but they were only whispers to us; we only came across a handful. Several came (to the group) when they had no strength left, and received water and food," said Esther Harder of Mountain Lake, Minn. Migrant men who approached the group spoke of leaving behind two women who were too frail to keep going. Members of the We Walk for Life group searched for them, but did not see them.

Participants carried white crosses with the names of people who died trying to make the crossing – an effort to stand in solidarity with migrants and bear witness to their sufferings. The event ended in a celebration, a brief press conference and a footwashing ceremony. Participants were encouraged to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform and to keep praying.

West Coast MCC (mcc.org/westcoast) offers specific ideas for blessing immigrants in your community. Visit the MCC Washington Office website, mcc.org/us/Washington, for details about current immigration bills.

— Cathryn Clinton, MCC

The Admissions Office of **Eastern Mennonite University**, in Harrisonburg, Va., invites students in the process of choosing a college to come and visit: Special dates are Nov. 21, March 12 and March 28. Call EMU at (800) 368-2665 or see www.emu.edu.

First Mennonite Reedley enjoyed a unique fundraiser to help its youth go to Columbus, Ohio, for the Mennonite Church USA youth convention next summer. Young leader Nick Boldt organized a vintage car show in the church parking lot. The well-attended event featured some beautiful vehicles on display, including a 1955 Ford Crown Victoria, 1930 Ford dumptruck, 1976 Austin Healey, and a 1974 original Norton motorcycle, plus many more. Nick, now a senior at Reedley High School, brought his 1948 John Deere Model M tractor, the same tractor he took to pick up his diploma from grade school. There was a talent show and the homemade ice cream contest was a big hit. Participants dropped donations into baskets placed in front of each ice cream flavor. Strawberry shortcake ice cream made by Laura Penner, a junior at RHS, won the most votes, and all agreed the real winners were the creative kids and their families who supported them in this great event.



Denny Mason, Blossom Trail Photography

Nov. 8
HYPE 08
(Hip Young People
Excited for Jesus)
PSMC youth event,
Pasadena

Jan. 25
**Mennonite World
Fellowship Sunday**

Feb. 6-7
**PSMC Winter
Assembly**

April 24-25
**First Generation
Immigrant Church
Symposium**
Los Angeles

June 19-20
**PSMC Summer
Assembly**

July 14-19
**Mennonite Church
USA assembly &
Youth Convention**
Columbus, Ohio

News you can use: Resources for congregations

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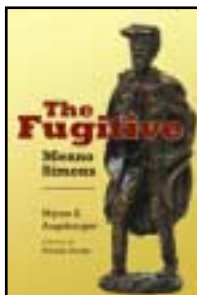
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Web site: www.pacificsouthwest.org

It's 1544. Menno Simons, a leader in the new — and persecuted — free church movement, is on the run from authorities in the Netherlands. With a price on his head, he stops to catch his breath on a darkened farm. He prays, "Lord, what do I do now?"

We get to find out in Myron Augsburger's new historical novel from Herald Press, *The Fugitive: Menno Simons* (\$14.99, Herald Press) which recalls the journey of this spiritual leader in the free church movement from Catholic priest to radical reformer to hunted fugitive.

Most of us who call ourselves "Mennonite" know little about this influential churchman and theologian who lent his name to our branch of the Christian church — though he still inspires people like XXXX, who described Menno's call to ministry in her reflections on spiritual discernment at the June assembly in Tucson. Augsburger's book, part-novel, part-history, takes the few details he know about his life and pieces together a thought-provoking narrative on his actions and ideas, and along the way gives us a valuable look at the roots of Anabaptism. Available from www.heraldpress.com.



How can we be a healthy church with an urgent mission? For established congregations asking that question again, *Springs of Living Water: Christ-centered Church Renewal* offers systematic help.

Pennsylvania pastor David S. Young's book, \$16.99 from Herald Press, approaches the need for renewal with a spiritual thrust and an active servant-leader style. It offers guidance for cultivating spiritual life, training leaders and focusing efforts in ministries that express the church's identity and call. Rather than the pastor working solo, a renewal team is trained that gets the entire congregation involved. The team works with the church to look at its strengths and discover new life. Rather than using a diagnostic model of church renewal — find out what is wrong and fix it — the process uses an affirmative model: Find out what is right and build upon it.

This book is written from Young's experience pastoring in the local church, teaching in seminaries, leading cluster work, writing two books in the field, and keeping one foot



planted in a church working on renewal. Young has learned, developed, lived, taught and tested this model over and over with outcomes greater than he ever imagined.

The Family Song, a children's story by Jane Hooper Peifer with illustrations by Ingrid Hess, is a delightfully whimsical story about the friendly Stranowsky family that centers on the song their warbles mealtimes, bedtime, and just about anytime. The song reminds them that God is always with us, especially in life's unpredictable moments. The family's awareness of God's presence opens them to welcome a variety of characters to their table. But when things go haywire one afternoon, *The Family Song* carries them through on God's love. The book comes with a CD of the book read by the author and a performance of *The Family Song*. \$18.99 from Herald Press.

Hungry for Justice (\$9.95) is a six-week guide for praying daily, building community, and changing the world, by the editors of *Sojourners* magazine. Based on Jim Wallis' 1981 classic, *The Call to Conversion*, this six-week justice devotional provides the reader a daily excerpt from the book, a scripture on the same theme, a provocative question, and a prayer.

Every seventh day is arranged for use with a small group, including a story-based group organizing model, worship suggestion, stimulating discussion questions, and action suggestions. Every Christian conversion comes with a conversion to Jesus' passion for justice. Available online at store.soj.net (click on "economic justice").



Faith Markers resources help congregations nurture faith growth by marking faith events in the lives of children and youth. The Faith Markers kit includes an introduction and overview chart with suggested faith milestones; complete worship resources for seven Faith Markers celebrations (printed and on CD), sample Faith Markers gifts, and recommendations of related Faith Markers resources.



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.,



Pacific Southwest
Mennonite Conference