

Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Winter Assembly

Los Angeles, California

3-4 February 2006

Participants included PSMC Board members and assembly delegates, MCUSA Executive Board members and staff, and Mennonite Mission Network Board members and staff.

Pastors Appreciation Dinner, 3 February 2006, LAX Sheraton Hotel

1. Jeff Wright welcomed PSMC delegates and board members of MCUSA and Mennonite Mission Network. He introduced Joel Shenk, PSMC Administrator, Rebecca Franco, CAL/PSMC Office Assistant, and George and Mukarabe Makinto.
2. Ron Byler, Associate Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, gave a keynote address on Paul's encouragement and call to pastors and the church in the Letter to the Philippians.

Joint MCUSA Executive Board, MMN and PSMC Joint Session, 3 February 2006, LAX Sheraton Hotel

1. Gathering Music – Makinto led the gathering.
2. Gathering Liturgy and Prayer – Jim Schrag, Stanley Green and Jeff Wright opened the session with prayer.
3. Hymns – Makinto led the assembly in singing “Jesus calls us here to meet him” and “Lord Jesus, you shall be my song.”
4. Welcome – PSMC Moderator Leah Ann Alcazar, MCUSA Moderator Roy Williams, and MMN Board Chairperson Lee Schumacher welcomed participants.
5. Approval of the Minutes – Leah Ann Alcazar and Tyler Zabriskie introduced the minutes of the June 2005 Annual Delegate Session.
Action: The minutes of the PSMC Annual Delegate Session of June 17-18, 2005 were approved.
6. Offering – Makinto played “Great is Thy Faithfulness” on the flute.
7. Prayers of the People of God – Tesfa Dallew and Duane Oswald introduced the prayers by reminiscing about the early days of PSMC, when a contentious discussion in Reedley seemed close to dividing the conference, but the Spirit of God brought the conference through.
8. Introduction of the Keynote Speaker – Jeff Wright introduced Jim Brenneman, President-elect of Goshen College, as a “missionary from PSMC to the wider church.”
9. Keynote Address – Jim spoke on “Celebrating Our Partnership in the Mennonite Church USA,” sharing examples of partnership from Philippians
10. Hymn – Makinto led the assembly in singing “Amazing Grace.”
11. Celebrating the Lord's Supper – Jeff Wright invited participants to the Lord's Table.
12. Response to the Message – Terry Shue, Pastor of Kidron Church and Board member of Goshen College, gave thanks to the conference for sending Jim Brenneman to Goshen College.
13. Announcements – Joel Shenk announced that Saturday's meeting would begin at 8:30 a.m. at Los Angeles Faith Chapel, 3818 West Imperial Highway.

14. Sending Prayer – Matt Hamscher, Southern California District Elder, and _____, gave the sending prayer.
15. Sending Song – Makinto led the gathering in singing “O, Sing for Joy to God Our Strength.”

PSMC Winter Assembly Saturday Session, 4 February, Los Angeles Faith Chapel

_____ delegates were present, as well as some Mennonite Church visitors James Krabel, Gary Freed, Marty _____ and Keith Harder from MCUSA Executive Leadership, and several students from a Fuller Seminary class on Mennonite Church history and polity.

1. Gathering Worship – LA Faith Chapel worship band began the meeting with songs of praise to God.
2. Introductions – Jeff Wright introduced the visitors to the meeting.
3. Opening Prayer – Bernard _____ opened the meeting with prayer.
4. Treasurers Report – Myrna Schwartz and Leah Ann Alcazar presented the Statement of Net Revenues – Budget vs. Actual – for the six-month period ended December 31, 2005. Contributions from invoices are lagging slightly, but some increase is expected in the next month. Conference Ministers expenses are where they should be. The Conference Mission Team is slightly under budget. The conference is in the red about \$5,500 now, which is about normal at this time in the year.

Action: The assembly approved the December 31, 2005 Statement of Net Revenues.

5. Prayer – Steve Good and _____ led in prayer, and Jeff Wright introduced the keynote speaker Shane Hipps.
6. Keynote Address – Shane Hipps shared the challenge of persuading young people to care about denominations. Because of post-modernity, the Mennonite faith is the most Biblically faithful and culturally relevant faith today. “Post” refers to being after or coming out of. “Modernity” was a cultural juggernaut that rolled across Western civilization and flattened everything in its path. Modernity heralded the virtue of authority and hierarchy, celebrated the individual, and was chiefly concerned with getting knowledge. Mennonites, to the contrary, believe you can’t know God unless you are in the community. Mennonites have been skeptical of knowledge and education. Mennonites’ faith stands for justice in this life, rather than in the afterlife. Because of our current cultural situation, we carry an incredibly contagious faith. We need leaders who will carry this expression of faith. This is why I care about a denominational structure. No one in my generation cares about denominations for their own sake, or sees why we should be involved in these structures, or give money to them. In Philippians, Paul writes a thank you note for financial contributions. Paul is concerned that our love be shaped by knowledge. Our culture needs extremely muscular discernment. But the knowledge we need is not getting the right answers. We can’t do that any more. The knowledge we glean in a white congregation may not work in a congregation of color. We need the knowledge of asking the right questions and of knowing how to ask those questions. Developing carriers of contagious faith is the most important reason for denominations to exist. May we invest in our leaders the way Peter Wiebe invested

- in Jim Brenneman and Jim invested in me.
7. Progress Update on Leadership Development – Jeff Wright, Clare Ann Ruth-Hefflebower and Al Whaley shared about progress on the Long Range Plan.
 - a. Clare-Ann shared that the goals include leadership development, board development, faith formation and strengthening our relationships.
 - b. Steve Good spoke about broadening how we understand retreats beyond camps and into the urban environment. Some of the energy of the Retreat Ministries Board has been diverted in the last few months as we reviewed an opportunity to purchase land adjacent to Camp Keola.
 - c. Al Whaley spoke about preparations and recruitment for the San Jose Conference. We are looking for creative ideas on how to recruit people of color and young people and to develop scholarship resources to help them attend.
 - d. Tom Longenecker shared that, in the past, authority was based on relationships where we knew each other. Today, these relationships require more intentional communication.
 - e. Joel Sherk spoke about Volunteer Service. There are five Volunteer Service programs based in San Francisco, Fresno, Hopi Reservation and Tucson, and Phoenix.
 8. Hymns of Worship – Trinity Chinese Church choir sang in English and Mandarin.
 9. Prayer – Rich Sisco from Arizona led in a prayer of thanksgiving.
 10. Panel on Peacemaking – Jeff Wright introduced a panel to discuss how we live as a church committed to peace in a world where religious conflict threatens to tear us apart. Aviana Moreno moderated a fascinating panel discussion.
 - a. Chuwang Pam shared about tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Christians were educated by missionaries, but did not learn about the need to be involved in politics. Because the Muslim community controlled the government and economy, a two-tiered social system developed with Muslims in positions of power. Christians later mobilized and asked for Christians to enter politics. In September of 2003, Muslims launched a *jihad*, killing Christians and burning churches. Muslims in Nigeria were taught to be the head, so that they see anything that disempowers them as disempowering Islam.
 - b. John Korechi shared his reflections, full of witty aphorisms, on witnessing to Muslims. “Some believe,” he said, “man is really not that bad, and God is really not that mad.” “An answer will not help the person who has lost the question.” “Our people believe in family planting, not family planning.” John said that we need to deal with our prejudices about Islam in a real way, not a superficial way. We have to always be Christocentric. The gospel is all we have, and all we need. Because the Word became flesh, we must be incarnational in our approaches. How much time do we prepare to become a faithful witness to Islam? Paul adjusted to the condition of every group of people in order to win them to Christ. “One is born into the world not to do everything, but to do something.” “A brother offended is harder to take than a strong city.” He encouraged delegates to answer Muslims with gentleness and respect. “Be like a fish, laying eggs under the surface, rather than like a chicken, who advertises loudly when she lays an egg. In other words, don’t make Muslims mad. Enter into a debate with Muslims with respect. Until we see them through the eyes of Jesus, we will always hate them.”

- c. Jason Evans, who is planting a congregation in San Diego among Somali Bantu people called Eklesia Collective. They face enormous challenges just to fill out paperwork to get on welfare or into school. Part of being Bantu is being Muslim and having their identity in being in a community. We did not want to separate them from their family and community by converting them as individuals. We started a group called Friends of Issa, where we seek to learn about Jesus together. Becoming a Christian is about a new way of life, not just about making a verbal statement. The verbal statement can be inflammatory. So we seek to teach them a new way of living, which can be done very quietly. It is in the book of Acts and our Christian history that we have been witnesses in situations where Christians were not in power politically.
 - d. _____ responded to the panel members comments and shared his experience in Indonesia where Christians were tolerant at the beginning, but found that Muslims then demanded to be in the top positions.
11. Progress Update on Increasing Our Missional Capacity
- a. Al Whaley shared about having a LEADS conference in Arizona to increase leadership capacity.
 - b. Clare Ann shared about articulating a model for forming house churches, and forming Anabaptist study groups.
 - c. Jeff Wright spoke about raising up grassroots church planters, such as Eklesia Collective in San Diego and two groups in Riverside County. Community Bible Church is being started by Felix Solomon, and Frank Philips, a Baptist preacher, is starting Restoration Ministries in Victorville. “Without clarifying identity, there is no mission,” said Jeff. “Without mission, identity is pretty purposeless.” Family Mennonite Church will soon try out a new 10-hour course on being Mennonite, which is available to other congregations.
 - d. Al responded to a question about what could happen at a regional level to increase missional capacity, perhaps by drawing on networks or the expertise of pastors as well as Conference Ministers. One network is the District Elders in Southern California. In Phoenix, a pastoral coach named Jeanette Buller has provided mentoring in Pastoral Triads for mutual coaching. In Northern California, the geographical distance prevents pastors from getting together more than once a year.
 - e. _____ lamented that he had forgotten that we have the Long Range Plan, and expressed a desire for this to be a regular part of our discussions.
 - f. Tyler Zabriskie asked if there is an assumption build into the Long Range Plan that the conference will nurture and rely on volunteers to carry out ministry wherever possible.
 - g. Irene Mendoza reminded participants that the work of District Elders can be very time consuming and should have appropriate support.
 - h. Jason Evans asked that we take seriously the resources the conference has to offer to young congregations and leaders. “Your positions as staff need to be connecting people with experience and wisdom to support and guide others.”
12. Offering – Femy _____ prayed for the offering, and the Trinity Chinese Church Choir sang several songs.
13. Lunch
14. Worship – The _____ band led in songs of praise.

15. Prayer by Pastor _____, Iglesia _____.
16. Announcement of the Next Assembly – PSMC board member Karl Kaufman encouraged participants to attend the next PSMC Assembly June 16-17, 2006 in Phoenix.
17. Pastoral Leadership Committee Report
 - a. Will Friesen, chair of the PLC, reported that an incident of clergy sexual misconduct occurred, was investigated and sanctions for disciplinary action were taken.
 - b. Will invited those candidates for licensing that were present, Grace Eluwa and Alex Romero, to come forward for prayer and laying on of hands by the members of the Pastoral Leadership Committee.
 - c. Al Whaley introduced Bryce Miller, recently made pastor of Shalom (Tucson) Mennonite Fellowship.
18. Progress Update on Furthering God's Shalom – Jeff introduced three leaders who speak from experience about furthering God's Shalom, the third goal in the Long Range Plan.
 - a. Leroy Willems shared about the ministry of Goldensun Peace Ministries with developmentally disabled, and the role of the volunteers who live in the homes. These volunteers have formed strong personal relationships with the developmentally disabled residents. Parents of these women struggle to release them to live in our home, yet these parents have found encouragement in finding that their daughters are cared for in our home. Goldensun will open a second home next week.
 - b. Burt Newton shared about the Peace Center, a virtual center that organizes seminars, public witness, film series, and a Palm Sunday Peace Parade. The parade is in the streets because Palm Sunday originally occurred in the streets. This year, we will march in Pasadena to Paseo Colorado, a mall that symbolizes the economic life of Pasadena. This is a ceremony of public worship, rather than a protest, and we pray for peace and justice.
 - c. Sheri Hoestetler described the sights and smells around 16th Street Mission Subway Station Plaza, where many Central American immigrants have settled. Mission Community Council seeks to make the Mission neighborhood more livable. It includes 45 nonprofits, religious organizations and businesses. The council saved a 40-bed shelter from closing. Much of this work can be attributed to Emily Claussen, an MVS volunteer who has worked for two years with the council. She has helped the organization grow, increase their funding and rent an office. She recently offered training in effective lobbying with City Hall, and is being considered as a candidate for executive director of the Council. Emily is one of four MVS volunteers working who have become "carriers of contagious post-modern faith." MVS volunteers often move from eager, anxious young people who are easily overwhelmed to empowered people with a sense of vision and purpose. Developing young leaders is a central goal of First Mennonite Church, so we have launched a capital campaign to purchase a building for this ministry. Our goal is a growing young leaders with a passion for sharing Christ.
 - d. Statement on Immigration –Al Whaley shared that immigration is a pressing issue of importance that, if a proposed national law is passed criminalizing aid to illegal immigrants, could mean some of us will be jailed. If we are to err, we want to err

- on the side of mercy and love. Catholics in Arizona are deeply involved in this issue, and we are beginning to partner with them.
- e. Duane Oswald reported that, in response to some prodding from the PSMC board, the MCUSA Executive Board instructed MCUSA staff to develop a 60-90 day action plan to implement the resolution on immigration passed in Atlanta.
 - f. Clare Ann Ruth-Hefflebower explained that the Gift Discernment Committee seeks balance, and requested feedback from the delegates on what they would like from the conference to support ministries of peace.
 - g. Jeff Wright shared about a variety of small-scale, grassroots experiments in global mission, seeking an increase in mission workers.
 - h. Jennifer Davis Sensenig from Pasadena Mennonite Church prayed for God's shalom.
19. Appreciation for Los Angeles Faith Chapel – Leah Ann Alcazar introduced, and the delegates approved, a resolution that the Winter Assembly delegates express their appreciation for the warm welcome, delicious food and gracious hospitality of Los Angeles Faith Chapel.
20. Closing prayer – Jeff closed the meeting with a reflection that we are all immigrants, because we came from somewhere else, and a prayer for all immigrant people.
21. Closing Song – The Los Angeles Faith Chapel worship band closed the meeting by singing “Unify Us Holy Spirit,” written by Makinto.

Minutes by Tyler Zabriskie

Attachments:

1. Approved Statement of Net Revenues – Budget vs. Actual – for the six-month period ended December 31, 2005.