

# **Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Summer Assembly**

**Hosted by Trinity Mennonite Church,**

**4334 West Vista Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85301**

**June 18 & 19, 2010**

## **Assembly Notes: June 18, 2010**

Registration opened at 6 pm.

**Theme:** “ Doors That Open to Mission: Hospitality”

**Opening:** The assembly opened at 7 PM with welcome by Pastors Hal Shrader & Ron Faus. Moderator Tyler Zabriskie gave an overview of the assembly plans.

**Worship:** Music & Singing with the Trinity Worship Team.

**Scripture Focus & Keynote Address:** Steve Ratzlaff read Luke 10 (instructions for disciples going out to spread the good news) and introduced Keynote Speaker Paula Killough (who is standing in for Stanley Green). She invited us to journey with Jesus through Luke (to Jerusalem). This chapter of scripture is a handbook for Christian living/for disciples to the cross and beyond. These instructions leave one very vulnerable, but help open the door for mission. A Mennonite Mission Network DVD/Window to Mission was viewed: “Are you wounded enough to start where it hurts?”

**“Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love”** – Tyler reviewed a set of principles for dealing with differences. We want to hold ourselves accountable to this statement to make things safe enough for us to be open/vulnerable with one another when sharing in assembly presentations or discussions. It’s important that everyone feel safe in our setting. “Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Tyler encouraged us to keep in thought to: accept that conflict is part of life, affirm hope, commit disagreements to prayer.

## **Sharing & Reports:**

1. **Conference Minister Stan Friesen** referred to some empty chairs on the “stage” that represented missing participants from our assembly due to concerns over the current controversy (illegal immigration). The chairs stand for those staying away due to feeling vulnerable as well as those staying away to be in solidarity with them. We are not all of one

mind in the best way to respond as a group to the current political action being implemented in Arizona, but we want to keep in mind that many are missing from this gathering.

2. **Barry Heib** shared the experience of the Shalom Mennonite Church in Tucson on how our actions will have an impact 7 generations into the future. A big danger is that we Christians will do nothing. We are called to do something, but we are not of one mind. AZ churches feel like they are at the focal point of the issue because of the geography. What consensus can we achieve? What options do we have? Shalom came up with a list of 12 different suggestions. For example, wear a red ribbon as a means of showing openness to discussions and having dialogues as well as congregational meetings, etc., to find out who we are, what we think, etc., and find out what other people are thinking. SB 1070 is not our mission. Our mission is to be a faithful disciple church. This is a very serious situation and none of us have the complete picture.

3. **Rachel Swartzendruber-Miller**, MCUSA Convention Planner for Phoenix 2013, said that AZ SB1070 has brought the issue of how we treat illegal immigrants to the fore-front. It has been in the background for a long time, but now must be dealt with. It was suggested that the convention venue be changed, but lots of preparation has been done and it could be costly in many ways: ½ million dollars could be lost; relationships may be lost; our dream is of being a church without racism and the church as a place of healing and hope. What is the best way to stand beside our Latino brothers and sisters? Is it best to boycott AZ or stand beside those who live right here and support their efforts to be faithful in this setting? We do not know the right answer. We need to hear all of the voices and spend a lot of time in prayer for the leadership that they make a thoughtful decision. April 1 is the deadline to discern. A leaders' forum in September will consider all information and a decision will be made in January by the MCUSA board. This is difficult and painful for all, but especially our Latino brothers & sisters.

4. **Denominational Conference Minister Lee Lever** shared perspectives he's seen in the larger church. The CLC will be processing all the information collected in September. In the midst of thinking about the Phoenix convention in 2013, Lee encouraged all to remember the MCUSA convention in Pittsburgh, PA, in 2011 and plan to attend even in the midst of thinking about the Phoenix convention in 2013.

5. **Conference Minister Stan Friesen** asked that we all take seriously the board's call for written requests, concerns, and questions regarding the immigration situation. The church has a very distinct vantage point. Everyone's input is needed.

**Prayer:** Pastor Femi Fatunmbi offered prayer for those who could not come (fear or conscience) as well as those who came especially to stand with the local churches here in AZ and leaders who will make policy decisions.

**6. Pastors' Retreat:** Conference Minister Stan Friesen reviewed tough topics discussed at the Pastors' retreat and learning how to "Agree and Disagree in Love." He said that although we read the same Bible, we don't understand it the same way. Although we answer to the same Lord, we come to our understanding from different places. There is a retreat planned this fall (Oct 8-10) for pastors to know and share with one another. We are a conference of over 40 congregations with different languages and many stories. Our pastors need time to share and begin to know each other better. Pastors need a time to pray together. He said, "Many things may separate us, but can we sense that we serve the same Lord?"

**7. Board Update:** Moderator Tyler shared some of the discussion from today's board meeting. Are there some things that we as an assembly can say? What is the best way to say it? He asked that anyone with suggestions jot them down in writing and give them to members of the board. There is time planned tomorrow to process this together. A written statement from Pastor Juan Montes was distributed and the assembly was asked to review it and see if we might use in whole or in part before we leave tomorrow.

Tyler Introduced visitors from outside PSMC representing the Corinthian Plan (Christa Smith), MMN (Lee Lever & Tim Hold), MPN (Barb Ewy/MPN Resource Person), West Coast MCC (Pauline Aguilar, Miriam Cardenas and Mukarabe Makinto), Hesston College (Tim Lichti), Bethel College (Krisen Larson-Jansey) and Duncan Smith.

**Announcements & Closing:** Conference Administrator Joel Shenk gave announcements and details for Saturday's breakfast and sessions, and the assembly was closed for the evening.

## **Saturday Morning - June 19, 2010**

### **1: Worship:**

**Opening:** Worship Music led by Ben and Dierdre Shetler.

**Sharing:** Pastor Ron Faus introduced Peter Wiebe who told about Trinity's partnership with Palo Verde Middle School. News of needy families at a local school came through a Jewish neighbor. First, sleeping bags were provided for homeless children at the school. After connecting with school staff, Trinity learned of many more needs. Some could be met by

referrals to various agencies and programs, but nothing was in place in the case of home repair. It was so severe; MDS was contacted in case it could be declared a disaster need. With cooperation and coverage from MDS, Trinity began an “open door” ministry. Many homes were repaired and murals were painted at the school. Students wanted to do something for Trinity in response, so the church asked people in the neighborhood if they would like to have their windows washed for this project. Over 100 middle school student volunteers showed up at their school and walked together to Trinity Mennonite.

**Scripture focus:** Pastor Steve Ratzlaff read Luke 10: 1-11.

**Keynote Address:** Paula Killough, continuing with the theme “The Door of Hospitality” addressing food in particular, as eating is a big part of hospitality. She noted that Jesus is always the recipient of hospitality. She shared a DVD clip from MMN Toba Christians: teach faith traditions in the Argentine Chaca. She shared the story of voluntary service unit who shares a weekly meal is with the community. It is a place where people can come to share their gifts. Hospitality opens doors and breaks down walls. Focus on relationships even though they are extremely different. Build trust. Befriend the scriptures together: we need to study the Bible with people who read the Bible differently. Befriend the enemy within us. Relationships are the bridge. Receive hospitality and peace through Jesus and we will be reconciled. Eat, heal, and announce the gospel of peace.

**Song of Response:** Roger Richer led “Strangers No More.”

## **2. Work/Business Session:**

**“Agree and Disagree in Love”:** Moderator Tyler introduced the agenda and reviewed “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love” (James 5: 16 regarding vulnerability and hospitality). Confess your sins and pray for each other. Confessing faults can be a meaningful ministry. After leading a prayer, the agenda was reviewed.

**Minutes:** Secretary Naomi Krause presented the minutes of the Winter Assembly (2-05-10) held in Pasadena, followed by a discussion. **Action: *The minutes were approved with the addition to 12.d: “a call from the delegates for greater representation from ethnic groups on the board” to 12.d.*** It was noted that there is an excellent review in the current Panorama.

**Budget:** Ben reviewed current financial status and presented the proposed budget. Pasadena church has donated office space, utilities, and Internet access. He reviewed some of the budget changes and reasons for changes. He clarified that Administrative Staff is a part-time

position and what the duties are. **Action: delegates approve the proposed budget.** Thanks expressed and clap offering received for work on the budget.

**Update:** Tyler reviewed last three year's progress on new organizational model: half time Conference Minister (CM) and implementation of the Elder program. Prefer full time CM, but what would it cost and how long will it take us to be able to afford it? When asked for input, delegates responded: 1) Move forward and do not be afraid. Talk to the congregations and they will respond. Ben estimated that \$500 more from each congregation (considering 40) might be enough. 2) There were questions about the effectiveness. Delegates were told about a training held yesterday and Lead Elder Jeanette Slater would bring a more detailed report in the afternoon. Delegates (and others) were encouraged to share written feedback with the board.

**\*\* Break**

**Elections:** Asst. Moderator Brian Fry and Gift Discernment Chair Steve Penner presented the GDC report. He commented the GDC is challenged by the requirements (By Laws require board officers/ reps be called from specific geographic areas. There are new congregations in Nevada and possibility of Hawaii?) Steve placed the names in nomination to be confirmed and put into service. **Assembly Action: Slate approved.**

**Recognize and celebrate leaders:** Treasurer Ben Shetler thanked Book Keeper/Vivian Schwartz for her faithful service. She will continue in this position. Her work is very much appreciated.

Stan Friesen thanked Outgoing Conference Administrator **Joel Shenk** for orienting Stan to PSMC. Joel has been the voice of PSMC when people call and first line of communication for all. He has been a real gift and an invaluable member of the PSMC team. Deepest thanks for enabling Stan's ministry and keeping PSMC records and office together, especially during office relocation. Stan also thanked Pastor Ron Faus for starting the "Eldering experiment" and continuing to work with the program as it develops.

Tyler thanked outgoing Board Rep. **Denver Locke** for his service on the board: a quiet, but wise member on the board whose insights have been helpful.

**Recognizing and commissioning newly licensed/ordained leaders:** Brian Fry thanked outgoing Moderator Tyler for his calm leadership during the past few years of continual upheaval, change, and distress. He said that God has led us through Tyler, who brought right,

courageous, and wise leadership to the conference. Tyler received a plaque to commemorate his time of service with PSMC.

**PLC Report:** Pastor Femi announced the Ordinations of Nehemiah Chigoji (First Mennonite Church, Upland) and Cheryl Paulovich (Chaplaincy, Glencroft), Transfer of Ordination of Paul Meyer. Cheryl shared her faith journey and how her background and experiences helped prepare her for ministry as chaplain.

**Announcements:** Aveani Moeljono introduced the MCC reps (and specialists in immigration issues) Mukarabe Makinto, Pauline Aguilar, and Miriam Cardenas, who were not able to stay for the afternoon sessions. Tyler suggested checking out the Mennonite Publishing Network (MPN) book table with Barb Elwy. Board Rep. Aveani led singing and offered prayers for the noon meal and offering.

**\*\* Lunch break**

**Reconvene:** Aveani Moeljono led the singing of “Guide My Feet.” Brian reviewed the agenda for the afternoon sessions.

**Sharing:** Pastor Hyun Hur shared his experience and journey to Anabaptist thinking and practice. He reviewed the Korean context for Christianity, following Jesus, and Korean Anabaptist gatherings. Please pray for them. They need our prayers, support, and encouragement.

**“Agree and Disagree in Love”:** Board Rep. Denver reminded us to always be “in love” with one another and referred to the “Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love” statement, reflecting on Eph.4: 3. We don’t always know the answer or what is “right”, but whatever side we find ourselves on, we need to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

**Elder Report:** Lead Elder Jeanette Slater reported progress on the Elder project and reviewed a document that defines the “job” of the Elder to: 1) be a listening ear to pastor (support and encourage the pastor; 2) visit the congregation at least once a year representing the conference. Elder is not a position of authority, but of service. 3) Walk with the pastors/congregations representing the conference. The work that’s been started is not finished, but has been working well in half of our congregations. Now the challenge is to find out how to connect with the other half. We need to recognize new elders willing to serve in this way. Tyler noted that this is an “experiment” and that we are open to suggestions. Goal is not administrative oversight, but means of supporting our pastors and making connections to

conference. Next step is to have Elders report back to Lead Elder at least quarterly. There needs to be accountability and training. **Questions:** how has this been working with ethnic groups? Is the concept, the structure, or the right people, the problem? **Suggestions:** Change the name “Elder”; Get the group of elders all together.

**Lee Lever** brought greetings from the MCUSA board. He shared that all conferences are dealing with the same “hot button” issues. PSMC is a lively, active conference.

**Break/welcomed back with music.**

**Sharing:** Pastor Al Whaley reported on a new youth ministry at First Mennonite, Phoenix. Youth were invited “into our cars and onto the church campus”. Participant Francisco Castro said he is pursuing MLI (Ministers Leadership Information) and is looking forward to becoming an Anabaptist pastor. He feels free to talk about Jesus to anyone, but wants a license to work for Jesus and represent our denomination.

**CMT Report:** Pastor Steve Penner presented the Conference Mission Team (CMT) report. This is an “open” committee. It has met several times this past year. Meetings are held near ongoing mission projects, so far, mostly in Southern California. Purpose is to find out what is going on in the conference. Main topics:

1. The Conference Mission Team (CMT) written report (pg 16 of the delegate booklet) says they have dealt with immigration concerns at every meeting. This is a reality for our part of the country and our conference. They have tried to hold their meetings where missions are in place to learn what is going on all over the conference and in certain settings. They have widened their agenda to consider more than just the churches in PSMC, but also Nigeria. They are trying to discern just how to respond to these far away needs and are relating to various agencies. The CMT wants to be God’s people within the PSMC.

2. The team has been very concerned about the terrible crisis in Nigeria. Pastor Pam (LA Faith Chapel) is well connected in the area and his wife Pastor Grace have shared about the situation there with the CMT. The international press sees this as a “community clash”, but they see it as a religious crisis. Joss Christians cry out to all Christians everywhere due to this. MCC cannot step out of their vision to help the churches only as they are a humanitarian organization. They need funds, prayer. Christians have a long history of non-violence and so the Muslims feel confident attacking again and again. Grace emphasized the situation is very

volatile, but “Our God is more than able.” She hopes PSMC can come up with a way to help do more than just pray.

**Political Situation/Immigration:** Tyler presented copies of the comments collected earlier regarding immigration. He reviewed major suggestions for actions and wording of statements. He pointed out the handout from Barry’s church that suggest 12 things we can do. Before breaking up into discussion groups, he set three main topics: 1) How we might educate our congregations and ourselves about the issues? 2) How might we do political action within our denomination and government? 3) How might we craft a simple statement, (identify basic issues which we might be able to agree on)?

After the discussion period each group’s spokesperson gave a brief review for the assembly. A task group was assigned to focus on basic issues on which we might be able to agree on. The congregations could review within PSMC and perhaps send on to MC USA. This is a problem everywhere, not just AZ. We need to find some way to counteract the fear; stand in solidarity with those in need (not worry about their documentation); this is a human rights issue (can’t go to police for any reason). The task group will craft a statement and send it to the board and then out to the churches. We need to educate ourselves: this is a biblical mandate.

Brian asked that we consider how we might give input to leadership meeting to do conference planning in September. Feel free to approach him privately.

**Outgoing Moderator Tyler passed the gavel to Moderator Elect Brian** as a symbol of wisdom.

Minutes submitted by Melinda Hasegawa