

Pacific Southwest Conference Assembly
First Mennonite Church, Phoenix
March 4-6, 2016

“Together We Serve, Together We Grow”

Acts 6:1-7

Friday evening session:

We began with singing! Pastor Al Whaley welcomed us to his church, and Moderator Pastor Femi Fatumbi welcomed guests Dennis LeFever and Rhoda Blough representing Everence, and our keynote speaker Alex Awad. Kathi Oswald introduced the PSMC Board, and read the roster of PSMC congregations. The Listening Committee for this assembly was introduced: Barbara Ewy, Pastor Romero, and Carolyn Yost.

Clare Ann Ruth Heffelbower, Conference Minister, initiated a time of remembrances and candle-lighting for Pastor Hal Shrader and Pastor Jules Massamba. These two pastors, our friends, were “like trees planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1), and we miss them. We prayed H 805.

Our conference assembly theme scripture - Acts 6:1-7 - was read in Spanish by Pastor Romero, in French by Pastor Helen, and in English by Kathi Oswald.

Tina, as PSMC Secretary, presented the minutes from last year’s assembly in Fresno, hosted by Mennonite Community Church, June 19-21, 2015. Joe Roos moved to approve the minutes, and Nida Kimel seconded. The minutes passed by voice vote.

Clare Ann spoke on the state and direction of our conference: “Where are we now? Where are we going?” (see attached handout of this title), and reported on youth experiences at Camp Keola.

David Gray, Mission Minister, described the youth mission/learning trip planned for this summer, partnering with DOOR Hollywood, CA.

Treasurer/Advancement Minister Joe Roos introduced the proposed budget for 2016, beginning with a narrative report that set our financial reality in the context of the last ten years.

Clare Ann presented the report from the Gift Discernment Committee.

Arlen Godshall spoke for Mennonite Men. Note: There is an opening for a PSMC representative to Mennonite Men. Arlen named their three purposes:

1. to help men develop fellowship groups
2. to support resources for men
3. the Join Hands grant program to support new, young churches

An offering for PSMC was received, after which we were dismissed for a time of fellowship.

Saturday morning session:

Wholicare led us in beginning our day with beautiful worship music.

Brian Fry and Tina Schlabach gave a second reading of our theme scripture, Acts 6:1-7.

Kathi Oswald introduced our keynote speaker, Rev. Alex Awad.

Rev. Alex Awad shared with us that in this scripture text there is a challenge to unity in the church. There is complaining! And it has good news for us - that the early church had fights too, even though it was full of the Holy Spirit! So if we have quarrels in our churches it means that we have humans in our churches, just like in the early church! The other part of the good news is the fact that the church tackled the problem! They came together, talked about the problem, prayed about it, and solved the problem! When we face quarrels in our churches, we can come together, reason together, pray together, and God will give us the wisdom to solve the problem.

In this dynamic of conflict resolution in the church we remember The Sneetches, by Dr. Seuss! (Alex helped us tell this story again, together). Some churches have “stars” that segregate - in many ways. But we do not need to lose our differences; rather, we need to stop building walls of separation between us.

In this Acts text the Greek Jews felt they were being neglected in the distribution of food. The early church was feeding the people in a big way! It was a large operation! As the converts increased, “cracks” appeared in the system. The problem began as a technical one. But very soon, the technical problem turned into a racist, national/linguistic problem. Injustice creeps into our churches today as well, and has throughout church history. Thank God for the complaining! We must listen to the complaints in our midst, to listen to what is actually going on. Nelson Mandela led his people in their complaining until the end of the apartheid system. Gandhi listened to his people’s complaining and he led them until the freedom of India from the British. MLK listened to the complaining of this people until he led them through the civil rights movement. The Soviet Union fell because of popular complaining. Some are still complaining without yet experiencing justice.

In seeking solutions: the disciples wanted fairness and justice. Their method was to involve all in a democratic way, getting the whole church involved. The names of the 7 deacons chosen - note that some of them were Hebraic; others were Greek. They included both Greeks and Jews in the solution to the problem as the new deacons. God blessed their ministries. Don’t let the complaints be unnoticed! Don’t let conflict be unnoticed! Tackle them. Find solutions. With the Spirit of God, we can tackle every problem!

What are our challenges to unity today? Organizational challenges? We need teams that represent all sides of the divide. Theological challenges? Pray that each side can see the grace of God working on the other side of the divide. In Palestine, we began “Christ at the Checkpoint.” We invited many guests to come witness our checkpoints - we invited Christian Zionists, Messianic Jews, Dispensationalists, the opposition!

1. Let us recognize our common faith in Jesus Christ - our common ground that unites us.
2. We are different in our perspectives.
3. We need to rediscover the grace of God in each other, in spite of our differences.

Let us look each other in the eyes, and say “I totally disagree with you. But I love you, in Christ.” If we can come to that point, we can restore harmony.

This can work in any situation!

Do the Mennonites have a message for the world? In the text, they couldn’t be stopped by their problems, because they wanted to go on giving their message to the world. We can’t get distracted by going through Sneetch machines, losing all of our resources! God has entrusted us Mennonites with a great message: peace, community, reconciliation. Fix our problems, go to the world with this great message that God has entrusted to us!

Followup discussion around tables: Participants engaged around the question:

- How do we see ourselves as PSMC and the Mennonite Church in this scripture text?

After a break, **Pastor and Moderator Femi Fatunmbi reported on his trip to Nigeria with Stanley Green, CEO of Mennonite Mission Network.** Stanley Green on behalf of MMN launched a community clean water project, as well as initiating a water purification plant, as well as other significant visits, such as to several Menno Simons Peace Schools, for both Christian and Muslim students. Femi wants to send MCC school kits to these schools, and will work on this project.

Jeremy Kempf, from Trinity, led us in singing together.

Pastor Helen from Wholicare shared the immigrant journey of the Congolese to Los Angeles. The Congo is the 7th largest country in Africa, and is very rich in mineral resources. The capitol is Kinshasa. Mbutu took over as dictator for decades. The dictatorship has been a factor for Congolese leaving their country. In 1977 Mbutu was ousted, then Joseph Kabela became the leader. Rwanda's genocide in 1994 brought displaced people to the Congo. There has been so much turmoil, with many refugees and violence. The world has been silent about the terrible violence going on within the Congo. Neighboring countries have begun looting the wealth of the Congo. Many people leave because of human rights violations as well as because of economic poverty. Christians need to pray for the healing of the Congo, and for leaders to heal the country. God opened the door for Pastor Massamba, in God's timing, to receive a visa to come to work at Wholicare. We need to pray for the Congo. There is no peace without justice. We need justice in the Congo! This includes praying for our enemies. Tina Schlabach closed this sharing by praying for displaced persons all over the world.

Ben Shetler brought the Gift Discernment Committee Report for delegate approval. Carol Rose moved to approve the roster of nominations. The motion carried by voice vote.

David Gray brought his report as Mission Minister. Highlights:

- we are beginning a thrift store to fund an Anabaptist Resource Center, to spread the understanding of Anabaptism along the West Coast.
- we have the start-up money, we have the four containers of product, and just recently we found a location - for both the thrift store and the beginning Resource Center.
- top priorities for Anabaptist Resource Center space: a board room area, a small office, and a large meeting space.
- this fall we will hold a conference on the Holy Spirit!
- emerging exploration of a Latino church plant in Fresno
- we are partnering to sponsor with MCUSA a church planting summit in New Orleans
- missional explorations are bubbling up! We want to network together as congregations in our missional callings!

We are using mission funds for the Doctrine of Discovery project.

Pastor Sheri from First Mennonite, San Francisco, and Sublime Mabilia from Wholicare presented on the Doctrine of Discovery:

- Sheri: This is a doctrine issued from the Pope in the 1400's that laid the theological and legal justification for colonization. It gave the right to invade, search out, capture, and subdue anyone who was not Christian, can reduce their persons to perpetual slavery. These doctrines - theological and legal - have been encoded into law, and now form the basis of law that takes land rights away from indigenous peoples in the U.S. and throughout the world. Colonization is happening even right now!
- Sublime Mabilia from Wholicare - after his training at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and time in Africa spent with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, was shocked and heart-broken to see so many negative results of the Doctrine of Discovery: one is enslavement. 2% of the Congolese are Pygmies. They have been considered sub-human. Eating a pygmy flesh considered to give magical powers; militia have killed Pygmies for their flesh. And in the east of Congo - rape became a weapon of war, a way to uproot entire communities from their land.

Sublime proposed that June 26 be a Sunday of prayer for the Congo in all of our congregations, for indigenous and voiceless people in the Congo.

We enjoyed a delicious Mexican meal over the lunch hour. Workshops were held: conversation with the Minister of Mission, Everage for Pastors, and Anti-racism for "good white folks!"

Saturday Afternoon Session:

Pastor Pastor Romero brought the Pastoral Leadership Report.

Clare Ann introduced bylaw changes:

- 1) to begin with a Moderator-Elect position. At the end of his/her two year term, the Moderator Elect becomes Moderator without further Board action.
- 2) The Conference Minister shall be Chief Executive Officer of PSMC.

Carol Rose asked if we want to introduce staff being the CEO into our bylaws when the financial future of our staffing is so unclear. She proposed adding language that would allow the CEO title to revert to the conference moderator in the absence of paid staff. Clare Ann responded that this is an idea worthy of consideration, and the bylaws can be changed again as needed.

Juan Montes moved to approve the bylaws changes. Ben Shetler seconded. The motion passed by voice vote.

Joe Roos returned for more discussion regarding the proposed conference budget. He asked for questions/ comments. None were indicated.

PSMC Vision and Structure - Meg Duff, PSMC Board Member, reporting:

Three years ago, a vision plan was approved by delegates to use our reserves to fund more staff. This has resulted in our Minister of Mission position, and a lot of new and good work. We are again asking the question to move into our future, having strategic visioning conversations with our congregations:

- Who are we as a community?
- What is God calling us to... in our congregations? as a conference? in the world?

70+ people representing 18 churches participated.

Themes that emerged in the conversations:

- Fellowship across cultural groups and appreciating theological differences
- Nurturing Anabaptist Christianity and networking with mission callings
- Financial Support - churches supporting PSMC, and PSMC supporting congregations
- Shared Leadership - we want to do leadership well and to open leadership opportunities in a grassroots way instead of "conference-led."

Some realities to keep in mind as we move into table group discussions:

- we are a smaller conference than we think
- we're spending down our financial reserves
- congregational giving has decreased
- less loyalty to denominations and conferences
- we have an opportunity to reinvent PSMC for 21st century
- transitioning from strategic planning to re-visioning

Table Talk Questions:

- What does Spirit-filled, hopeful healing community look like for us?
- If PSMC could do only one thing well in the next 3 years, what would it be?
- How could your church most benefit from the PSMC community?
- What gifts does your church have to offer the PSMC community?

Large-Group Reporting Back - one "take away idea" from each table:

- 1) participation / empowerment / programs: workshops that appeal to young professionals that intersect both the work life and spiritual life
- 2) encouragement - of each other and to preach the gospel of peace
- 3) fellowship - connecting churches - preaching the gospel of Jesus
- 4) fellowship - coming from the bottom up
- 5) reaching out to new communities that are leaving the Mennonites but passionate about the Anabaptist way of following Jesus

Kathi Oswald shared that next steps will be:

- to create a task force for shaping future direction
- clarifying relationship to PSMC with inactive congregations
- sending a questionnaire to congregations to gather more feedback

Joe Roos presented the proposed budget for action, and asked for a motion to approve.

Ben Shetler moved, Don Llnscheid seconded.

The delegates approved the budget by holding up hands. Passed unanimously, no opposition, no abstentions.

Joe then presented a second budget item for action: transferring \$50,000 from the church plant /mission grants restricted fund, which currently has \$91,500 in it - to use for the security deposit needed to sign the rental lease for the thrift store. Each year part of this deposit will be returned, and will be put back into the church plant/mission grants fund.

- Brian Fry asked if we could put the security deposit money into an escrow account, that would earn interest for us to recover as the money is returned.
- David Gray responded that real estate in Pasadena is so high that we are not in a position to do lots of negotiating.
- Sheri Hostetler responded encouraging us to move forward, so as not to lose the lease in a quickly moving real estate market.

Sheri Hostetler moved to transfer the funds for the security deposit, and Pastor Femi seconded.

Delegates voted by raised hands. The motion passed unanimously.

Kathi asked for a motion to accept the new mission and vision statements for PSMC.

Ken Krehbiel moved to accept the statements. Ben Shetler seconded.

The motion passed unanimously.

Clare Ann asked the assembly for feedback on the time of year to hold our one annual assembly.

Most people indicated that they prefer a spring assembly.

Pastor Romero led in prayer, and we received a second offering for PSMC.

Jeremy Kempf and Ben Shetler from Trinity led us in time of singing.

Kathi recognized Doreen Martens for her work over many years on writing and putting together *PANORAMA*. Doreen responded that she's grateful for this experience - she's been doing *PANORAMA* for the last 17 years! She expressed how much she will miss these PSMC assemblies and our multi-cultural setting, and for the encouragement in writing the articles on what our conference is doing.

Clare Ann, with Pastor Helen and Pastor Romero, led a time of prayer for each other as congregations in Arizona, Southern CA, and Northern CA.

We finished the afternoon with sharing communion around the Lord's Table together, officiated by Conference Minister Clare Ann, Pastor Romero, Pastor Helen, and Pastor Al Whaley.

We closed with singing "Together We Serve," led by Jeremy Kempf.

Saturday evening session at Trinity Mennonite Church - We enjoyed a delicious Middle Eastern meal. Scott Peterson and Jeremy Kempf led in sung prayers for our conference journey. At 7:00 p.m. Rev. Alex Awad gave an hour presentation on what Palestinian Christians are experiencing in Palestine, and explaining the entrenched Middle East conflict from a Palestinian perspective. His presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Sunday morning worship service and closing conference session at First Mennonite:

Clare Ann read our conference theme scripture for the weekend, once more: Acts 6:1-7, followed by Denominational Minister for Leadership Development, Pastor Terry Shue, preaching.

Terry led us in a sung chanting of Mennonite Church USA's vision statement - Vision, Healing, and Hope.

In reflecting on the Acts 6:1-7 text, Terry asked, connecting to the discernment of the apostles:

- What is there in my life that I would never let go of, in order to live out my calling?
- What is there in my life that I would be willing to let go of, in order to live out my deepest calling?

We must establish priorities, to carry out our callings.

The early church described in Acts 2 was actually living through a dangerous time. It was hard to learn how to share together, and they were threatened with being torn apart by ethnic tensions. But the early church could remember Pentecost! And the early church was GROWING, in and through the difficulties. Periodically, the early church must have had to gather and ask themselves, "Who are we, and why do we exist?" Why would we be any different?

The Hellenists were those who had moved away into the diaspora. They moved closer to the Greek/Roman world. The Hebrews were the traditional Jews.

The racism in this text is still going on inside our own church that we love.

What really happened here went far beyond feeding the Hellenistic widows. It was a game changer in how the early church regarded power.

- there is more abuse in denying power than in accepting it and using it well.
- the apostles empowered others with the resources to fix the problem. This led to the reorganizing: from the apostles doing it all, to a new structure with the authority to do what needed to be done. They moved the church from "what was," to what was needed to go forward, with wisdom and humility.

The church is God's design to be God's agent in the world to bring healing and hope!

Terry closed with the Cherokee legend of two wolves fighting within us - compassion vs. fear. Which wolf will we feed? Be aware of which wolf we are feeding in our own lives.

Listening Committee Report - Barbara Ewy and Pastor Romero:

- we hope that all congregations can become represented at conference assemblies.
- lots of great fellowship happened
- during table times, we heard:
- God is calling us to nurture everyone
- God is very much at work in our congregations, and in reaching out to the displaced and suffering
- there is openness to God's leading us into new leadership structures
- the challenge of diversity may help us flourish and expand
- we are each other's window to the world
- we are grateful to First Mennonite and Trinity Mennonite for their warm hospitality to us all during this assembly!

Sharing of Prayer Concerns and Joys:

- filled with gratitude for so many reports from our congregations connected to our parts of the world. At PSMC assembly, my faith is enlarged becoming a world faith, not just a personal faith. I was filled by the diversity of our churches in this conference!
- thanking First Mennonite for wonderful hosting!

Clare Ann closed in prayer.

Offerings were taken for PSMC and First Mennonite, and we closed with singing.

APPROVED 2/11/2017

“Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?”
Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference
March 4, 2016

Where Are We Now?

New Identity and Mission Statements

Who are we?

The Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference is a community of Mennonite congregations across California, Arizona, and Nevada. We are a diverse body, gathering for worship in many languages and coming from all corners of the globe. We are Anabaptist Christians who embrace various expressions of worship and theological points of view – charismatic, evangelical, liturgical, progressive, and pentecostal, among others.

What are we called to do?

Following Jesus, our mission is to create Spirit-filled healing community across boundaries, sharing God’s love, justice, and peace with each other and with our local and global neighbors.

How are we living out our mission? A few examples:

- Supporting each other in times of crisis – Trinity and Wholicare
- Working together to develop Thrift Store and Resource Center
- PSMC Youth Mission Event in June
- Camp Keola
- Connecting in various ways – Pastor-Spouse Retreat, Video Prayer Meetings for pastors
- Many ministries of individual congregations

Other current realities

- We are a smaller conference than we think
 - We currently have 36 congregations that we consider members of PSMC
 - At last summer’s Assembly in June, only 17 congregations were represented
 - In the past year, 1/3 of our congregations had little or no contact with PSMC
- We are rapidly spending down our reserves. In all but two of the last ten years, expenses have exceeded income.
- Congregational giving has decreased significantly. In 2015
 - 11 congregations made no financial contribution to PSMC
 - 12 congregations gave less than \$500
 - 13 congregations provided nearly all of the financial support for PSMC
- Some congregations participate in PSMC but make no financial contribution. Others make a financial contribution but have no other involvement.
- We probably have about 20 congregations that would be considered active members of PSMC

Where Are We Going?

Today's World Is Different

- People and congregations in general feel a lot less connected to denominations and conferences. It's not just us. Across the board there's a decline in loyalty to traditional church bodies.
- A decline in giving goes along with the decline in loyalty.
- Encouraging people and congregations to give more does not bring the desired result. People need to be excited about the mission of an organization and feel connected to it to be motivated to give.
- People today connect in ways other than through traditional conferences—networks, affinity groups and so on.

Opportunity! We have an opportunity to reinvent PSMC in a way that is relevant for the 21st century.

Moving Ahead

- A task force will be appointed to help us envision and discern a future direction for PSMC and what structures will be needed.
- Since this may involve changes in staffing, the task force will need to be far enough along in its work to notify staff in six months of any anticipated changes.
- Our Board will work with the recommendations of the task force and then bring a proposal to the delegates for approval at next year's Assembly
- As we work on determining future direction, we will continue to move ahead with the positive and energizing activities that are underway:
 - working toward opening the Thrift Store and an Anabaptist Center
 - continuing to strengthen relationships between congregations, pastors, and others in PSMC
 - encouraging and supporting each other as we work "to create healing community across boundaries, sharing God's love, justice, and peace with each other and with our local and global neighbors."

What Can You Do?

- Participate in opportunities that will be presented in the coming months to help develop a vision and new direction for PSMC
- Pray for the task force, the Board and Staff of PSMC during this time of uncertainty, transition, and new directions.
- Come to next year's Assembly and be part of the process of moving into the future.

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing...I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
Isaiah 43:18-19*