

Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Assembly
Minutes
June 19-21, 2015
Mennonite Community Church - Fresno, CA

Friday, June 19 - Evening Session:

1. Mennonite Community Church and First Mennonite Church PIM Reedley led us in singing and worship.
2. Pastor and Conference Moderator Femi Fatunmbi and Pastor of host church Mennonite Community Church Gordon Smith gave a welcome to the assembly. Guests were welcomed and introduced: Sandy Miller, Director of Church Relations, Mennonite Mission Network; Rhoda Blough from Everence; Phil Stangland from Everence. Femi introduced Carol Rose and Tina Schlabach as new co-pastors at Shalom Mennonite Fellowship, Tucson, AZ.
3. Pastor Abel Dauji, from Nigeria, was introduced and invited to speak about the situation that the church in Nigeria is living. Pastor Dauji thanked the assembly for prayers for the church in the midst of attacks going on in Nigeria. *"We are surviving on the wings of your prayers."* In the 19 northern states of Nigeria Christians are being persecuted and many churches have been destroyed. Pastor Dauji ministers in central Nigeria, close to Abuja. He shared stories of what Christians in Nigeria are going through, and how they are working for peace despite terrible traumas. He pled with us - for our prayers, and for financial help to pay for new roofs for churches which have been destroyed by attacks. Contributions for the Mennonite church in Nigeria can be channeled through PSMC.
4. Kathi **called the roll of all PSMC churches** – and we welcomed two guests from College Community Mennonite Brethren Church in Fresno.
5. We sang SJ 6, "Jesu tawa pano," in several languages.
6. Kathi and Duane Oswald presented I Corinthians 12:12-31 in readers' theater.
7. Pastor Femi and Pastor Gordon led us in prayer for the assembly while we heard the sound of a ram's horn being blown.
8. Joe Roos, Minister of Advancement for PSMC Board, presented the minutes from the last two assemblies: June 20-21, 2014, and winter assembly, Feb., 2015. It was moved and seconded to accept both sets of minutes as presented.
9. Kathi presented Nita Kimmel from Trinity Mennonite (Phoenix), Kaz Enomoto from Mennonite Community Church (Fresno), and Pastor Helen Mfliwakanda from Wholicare Community (Pasadena) as our listening committee for this assembly.
10. Pastor Femi gave **the moderators report**, and thanked PSMC staff, PSMC board, and PSMC committees for their work.
11. MCC and First Mennonite PIM Reedley led us in singing.
12. Joe Roos presented **the Treasurer's Report** and introduced key aspects of **the proposed PSMC budget** for 2015-2016: conference minister salary, youth minister considerations, budget deficit impact, Full Circle Thrift Store.
13. Melinda Hasagawa, Chair, gave an introduction to the **Gift Discernment Committee** work.
14. An offering was taken for PSMC conference expenses and the remainder to Mustard Seed Giving Project (for launching Full Circle Thrift).
15. The session ended with singing, prayer, and announcements.

Saturday, June 20 - Morning Session:

Mennonite Community Church hosted a delicious breakfast. David Gray, PSMC Minister of Mission, hosted a session of prayer for all of our PSMC congregations.

16. Wholicare Church led us in wonderful singing to start our day together.
17. Kathi and Duane Oswald presented I Corinthians 13:1-13, in Readers Theater.
18. Pastor Femi welcomed us all, and introduced Martin Navarro from Everence.
19. Pastor Romero gave the report from the **Pastoral Leadership Committee**. The pastors retreat will be held October 2-4, 2015, with the theme of sharing personal journeys of faith, and the shaping of our lives and ministries.
20. David Gray presented the report from the **Conference Mission Team**. An Anabaptist Resource Center is being envisioned for the Los Angeles area, to resource all of our west coast churches. To raise money for this, PSMC is launching Full Circle Thrift Store. About \$16,000 is yet needed for the goal set to launch the store. Churches have been giving donations - container storage units are filling! The CMT has grants available to support missional work going on in congregations, and wants to partner. Primera Iglesia Menonita de Reedley has longed to plant a new church in Fresno, in partnership with Mennonite Community Church. A coordinating team has been put into place as this new church plant emerges.

21. Kou Lee, pastor being licensed for leadership in the **Hmong Community Church**, Fresno, shared the story of this congregation. The Hmong people originally came from China; they were pushed west and south to Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Some Hmong are still in China. The majority lived in Laos, until the Vietnam War, when war trauma dispersed many as refugees to the U.S. and to other countries. The first generation of Hmong were farmers, and Fresno was attractive to the Hmong so that they could farm. The second generation of Hmong were attracted to work in business, in other states. The third generation received more education and were able to enter professional fields. The Hmong people operate in clans, known by last name. The Hmong often struggle between clans. Each clan has a "head," which leads the clan and makes the final decisions.

The Hmong people received the gospel first in China, in the 1850's through the Methodists. Christian Missionary Alliance and the Catholic Church influenced the Hmong in Laos. Pastor James Wenger reached out to the Hmong people in Fresno. Hmong Pastor Shoua was trained in 1988 at Hesston College, and came to pastor in Fresno in 1990.

Kou Lee shared some of his own personal story: He journeyed from Laos to Thailand, a very dangerous escape journey. In the refugee camps, people were disappearing. His family knew they had to leave, for their safety. His clan gathered and made a plan to escape. He remembers the older members of his family carrying him and his siblings out of the camp as they escaped. They were pursued by soldiers, and prayed for God's help. Suddenly a storm came upon them, and helped disguise their way so they could escape. Eventually, they joined family members already in Fresno. Many U.S. congregations sponsored Hmong families, such as Mennonite Community Church became involved.

Many Hmong believe in Shamanism - a negotiation with the ancestors and the spiritual world. Christianity is the one religion which has shown transforming power - through Jesus Christ - to the Hmong people.

22. Gene Kimmel, Board member, brought introduction to **PSMC policy changes** and needed by-law changes. The committee hopes to bring these proposed changes to the PSMC February 2016 assembly. The Board is proposing moving to a leadership model akin to the MCUSA model: the Board moderator would have a two year term, working with a Moderator-Elect, who would then move into the Moderator position - the hope is to give more continuity to Board leadership. The Board is also proposing moving to a once a year, 3-day winter conference assembly instead of two assemblies a year.

23. Clare Ann Ruth Heffelbower, Conference Minister, presented the **Conference Minister Report**. She highlighted the multi-faceted work of the conference minister. Her priority is directly supporting congregations and pastors. The PSMC elder system has historically not worked very well for our conference. Instead, a different model of congregational and pastor support is being envisioned. More information to follow about that. The Board is cutting down on the number of meetings by sometimes using the internet ZOOM platform instead of traveling to meet in person. The Board will next meet at Camp Keola for board retreat in September, with the hope also of strengthening California Retreat Ministries' relationship with PSMC. Clare Ann's prayer: that we in PSMC model how people diverse in many ways can love one another and help each other live out the mission God calls us to.

Clare Ann invited us to move into a time of sharing communion together, led by Clare Ann, Pastor Gordon, Pastor Helen, and Pastor Femi.

Announcements before lunch: Table conversations offered: with Clare Ann, with David Gray, Rhoda Blough (women and finances), and David Augsburg (Romans 14 on loving people amid significant differences).

Saturday, June 20 - Afternoon Session

24. Gathering music
25. I Cor 12:1-11 was read by Kathi and Duane Oswald.
26. Sharing by Pastor Femi, Pastor Juan Montes, and Kathi Oswald about **Come and See tour**. Kairos Palestine document by Palestinian Christians asked MCUSA to send people to come and see, then return to tell. Clare Ann interviewed them. Femi's big impression was driving through the land. The trauma of the suffering of Christians and other Palestinians was very disturbing. Hope comes from those who are pro peace, not just pro Israel or Palestine. Prayer for Femi as he returns home. Kathi said seeing the land brought the Bible alive in a new way. Juan's highlight was being mistaken as a Palestinian by their driver and feeling the exclusion. The wall was striking, but had hopeful graffiti. Visit to Military Court Watch, a group that works at preventing abuses. Many children arrested from home in the night for throwing rocks. Interrogated, tried and imprisoned with adults immediately. Everyone pleads guilty because the alternative is being held until trial when you will almost certainly be imprisoned. Palestinians aren't permitted to visit their children, so kids are traumatized. Poverty because 60% of the population are unemployed young men, water rationed, everything is hard. In the land of God you see terrible injustice. Hope seen in people working together for peace and justice. Nonviolent resistance is taught. People demonstrate nonviolence. Programs for people from both sides who have lost loved ones preparing them for forgiveness
27. Kathi introduced the **Israel/Palestine resolution for Kansas City MCUSA Convention**.
28. Tina Schlabach introduced **table time** with movement - bouncing exercise. She invited table groups to pray together for conflicts around the world.
29. Joe introduced **the proposed PSMC 2015-2016 budget** for the second time, discussing adjusting income vs expenses. Don Linscheid described the **youth minister search process**, and how the search committee's view of the best approach has changed. The recommendation is to have a conference-wide event which a paid coordinator will handle, and to have the conference minister do the resourcing of congregations as she travels through the conference. Thrift store continues to be an expense, which should end in a year or two. Questions were voiced about the youth event idea, and whether Camp Keola should be the event, or whether it should be another sort of event. There was much discussion about youth ministry.

30. David Augsburger moved the proposed budget be accepted. The motion was seconded, and approved unanimously.
31. Melinda Hasagawa presented the **gift discernment committee nominations.** Pastor Carol Rose moved to accept. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.
32. Joe Roos presented **the advancement plan**, in his new role as 1/4 time Minister of Advancement.
33. Tina invited **sharing around tables** about what's happening in our congregations: Things we are excited about and challenges.
34. An **offering** was taken for PSMC.
35. Clare Ann gave the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) report, introducing MCUSA resolutions on "Forbearance in the Midst of Differences" and "MCUSA Membership Guidelines." Tina invited table discussion of the resolutions. Sharing from our tables clarified that our conference pastors and constituents continue to hold a variety of convictions around the issues of LGBTQ clergy and same sex marriage.
36. We closed the afternoon with singing "Jesus help us live in peace" and a prayer for our meal to follow this session.

Saturday, June 20 - Evening: Multicultural Music Celebration

We enjoyed wonderful worship music sung and performed by young adults from Wholicare Community Church and Primera Iglesia Menonita. Thank you!

Sunday, June 21 - Morning Worship at Mennonite Community Church

Our worship included Clare Ann preaching on 1 Cor. 12 and 13, unity in diversity - showing three different quilts visualizing diversity: "crazy quilt," a second "tightly ordered" quilt, and the PSMC quilt Clare Ann has hanging in her office, which is brightly colored diverse fabrics which make a beautiful pattern together.

The Listening Committee gave their feedback:

- A. Stories of persecution of Christians in Nigeria, Congo, Palestine and the Hmong were shared, but we also heard things to give us hope. We prayed for these countries. There were stories of forgiveness of positive changes in the lives of those touched. Still yet some felt removed from the stories and realized there are many other stories that need to be told.
- B. The names of all the churches in PSMC were called out, revealing that more churches were absent from Assembly than were present. We desire to see more of our brothers and sisters here with us. While there are many differences among us we have many challenges that are the same. May God be praised!
- C. We went to sessions on "Full Circle Thrift and its vision," "Women & Money," "Welcoming diversity," and conversation with Conference Minister. The reports were positive for these sessions. One found "Women and Finances" particularly educational.
- D. We heard that PSMC is about relationships. There were plenty of discussions and interaction by attendees. The sharing and prayer directed discussions helped us share things that were on our minds and hearts.
- E. The CLC report was at the end of the day. We wish we could have had more time to review and discuss. Someone mentioned that individual congregations should talk about the issue of same sex orientation. Someone else said, "It should not be swept under the rug again." Some disagreements on same sex orientation were revealed. However, group prayer is desired to be a moment of

seeking guidance rather than an opportunity to express one's opinion on issue we don't necessarily agree. The treatment of the resolution to MC USA was obscure. How the PSMC delegate(s) to KS 2015 delivers the voice of PSMC remains uncertain.

- F. The Hispanic church plant vision in Fresno was encouraging.
- G. The voting privileges, i.e., the distinction between delegates and non-delegates, were not clearly defined, thus giving the host church a tremendous voting power. It leaves a question of whether we can properly deal with controversial issues.
- H. We enjoyed our fellowship meals and conversations. Gratitude toward the host church and its working crew were expressed by several participants.
- I. Multicultural Music Celebration was invigorating.
- J. A question was raised with regards to the role of the Conference Youth Minister. A suggestion was made to use the monetary resources for PSMC youth to participate in summer camp at Camp Keola and it was received by some favorably.
- K. We trust the youth camp at Keola was an enriching experience and wish that more youth could have been present. The Sunday worship was meaningful for those who stayed but there were so many who had to depart before Sunday morning.

Respectfully submitted by,
Tina Schlabach
PSMC Board Secretary
July 6, 2015