

Atlantic Coast Conference report to Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA October 2013

God Sightings:

- Pastors completing assignments: Much love and appreciation was expressed for Pastor Jane Peifer's service with the Blossom Hill Mennonite congregation over the past 14 years. Harry and Beth Jarrett also received words of appreciation for their service over the last six years with the Neffsville Mennonite Church. There are numerous other pastors thriving and doing well across ACC.
- Nancy and Clair Sauder shared report of a recent weekend visit with Pastor Dale Detweiler and the Birch Grove Mennonite Church near Port Allegany, Pa. Dale continues to sense that God has brought him to this small congregation in northwest Pennsylvania for a purpose. Lives are being touched by God in ways that didn't seem possible not that long ago. Nancy's recent word was that Dale and the congregation seems an excellent fit.
- Reports are that Pastor James Wengerd is a good fit with the Holly Grove Mennonite Church in Westover, Maryland. It's a blessing to see leaders thrive in the place where God calls them to serve.
- At least two ACC churches have been working with the 12 Scripture Passages initiative of Mennonite Church USA. Jim Amstutz, pastor of the Akron Mennonite Church, Akron Pa. stated that when a particular text is chosen as the preaching text for a Sunday, the pastors invite an individual to share a short story why they chose that text as one of their favorites. Jim stated these short stories are always interesting.

Joys and Challenges

- ACC finished the fiscal year ending June 30 with a \$4,200 positive balance. However, expenses were kept in check due to reduced ministry staff for the conference. It is unclear whether additional conference ministry staff time can be added to fill the void of losing ½ FTE conference ministry staff time as of January 1, 2012.
- The conference coordinator position has been open since early August. A search committee is actively reviewing applications for a revamped conference coordinator role in the conference.
- Several ACC member churches continue to discern whether they will stay part of ACC and Mennonite Church USA since delegates affirmed the transfer of the Frazer Mennonite Church from Lancaster Conference to ACC during the April 2013 delegate session. Delegates approved Frazer Mennonite becoming associate members of ACC as of April 2013 with a final vote approving full membership planned for the October 2014 fall annual assembly celebration.
- Over the next year the ACC Executive Committee plans to facilitate discernment among congregational leaders and delegates regarding their questions and affirmations of how ACC churches live out God's faithfulness in word and deed across our conference system.
- A credentialed leaders retreat was held in mid-September for all ACC pastors and chaplains. Thirty-two pastors and chaplains were together for a retreat led by Linford and Mary Etta King. Linford is currently serving as intentional interim pastor with the Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pa.
- An annual youth retreat was held mid-September for ACC youth groups. The number of persons attending was down over half what it was two years ago. Youth leaders are assessing the cause of the significant drop in numbers. Some observations are that many of our congregations have less youth in attendance plus school sports and other activities are competing more and more with church youth activities.

Who are we?

Atlantic Coast Conference is an association of 36 congregations located in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New York and Massachusetts. Spoken languages in worship services include English, Spanish and Amharic. Two of the congregations regular sing in an additional language of Swahili.

Warren Tyson, executive conference minister

William Ragui, interim moderator

Mennonite Church USA
Constituency Leaders Council meetings
October 14-16, 2013
Amigo Centre, Sturgis, Michigan



The Constituency Leaders Council meeting (CLC) met for its first meeting of the biennium. Meetings were led by the Patty Shelly, moderator-elect of Mennonite Church USA, and Warren Tyson, vice chair (also conference minister for Atlantic Coast and Eastern District Conferences). Larry Diener, Southeast Conference, gave leadership to the music throughout the meetings.

Worship throughout the meeting was focused on various sections of Luke 24 which is the scripture for the Kansas City Convention in 2015. Lois Johns Kaufmann, executive conference minister for Central District Conference, led the opening worship focused on Luke 24 verse 5: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Tuesday morning's worship was led by David Maldonado, pastor and moderator-elect of Iglesia Menonita Hispana. He focused on Luke 24 verse 25: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

Wednesday morning's worship was led by Nathan Luitjens, Central Plains Mennonite Conference. He focused on Luke 24 verses 31 and 32: "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

On Monday, we helped Shelley Buller, executive assistant for Mennonite Church USA, celebrate her birthday. Shelley takes care of all the details for each of our CLC meetings and is greatly appreciated by all.

Several area conferences and constituency groups shared what God is doing in their settings:

- Pacific Southwest Conference – Dick Davis, executive conference minister, shared regarding the exciting things happening in his conference. They are using some reserve funds to do additional ministry, which is very exciting and is bringing new energy into the conference.
- Pacific Northwest Conference – Katherine Jameson Pitts, executive conference minister, reported on their work of incorporating the seven denominational priorities into their area conference priorities.
- South Central Conference – Linda Yutzy, moderator, shared about their emphasis on congregations. They will be one of the hosting area conferences for the 2015 Convention in Kansas City. Lupe Aguilar, pastor in south Texas, shared about the work and ministry in his region as they work with many undocumented families.
- African American Mennonite Association (AAMA) – Nicole Francisco, AAMA representative, shared a slideshow regarding the work of many of the AAMA churches across Mennonite Church USA. She also talked about the LARK program for assisting African American students at Eastern Mennonite University. Nicole was a recipient of the LARK program herself while at EMU.
- Mennonite Women USA – Ruth Guengerich, co-director, provided a brochure for all table groups about Mennonite Women USA. Sister Care, one of the important programs of Mennonite Women, is now an international program.
- Franconia Conference – Ertell Whigham, executive conference minister, reported they are working at defining "who is Franconia Mennonite Conference?" They are praying with local business persons and exploring where God is at work in and through Franconia Conference congregations and individuals.

The Phoenix 2013 Convention was reviewed, with a focus on how well it worked to have a specific theme. Two possible themes were suggested for the Kansas City Convention in 2015. Table groups explore the themes and provided feedback.

CLC participants spent time reviewing the updated Purposeful Plan which includes new goals for the 2013-2015 biennium. Table groups gave feedback on the new and updated goals.

Iris de León-Hartshorn, director for transformative peacemaking for Mennonite Church USA, led the group through a conversation about the immigration statement. Delegates at the 2013 Phoenix Convention asked that the current Mennonite Church USA immigration statement be updated. A committee, led by Tina Schlabaugh, worked on an update, which was shared with the CLC for their feedback.

On Monday evening the area conference moderators met for networking and sharing. At the same time, the area conference executives met with denominational ministers Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann.

Ervin Stutzman, executive director for Mennonite Church USA and Chuck Neufeld, conference minister for Illinois Conference, shared about the work of the John Howard Yoder discernment committee. Ervin and Chuck are members of the discernment committee. CLC provided feedback for the committee.

Mauricio Chenlo, director of church planting for Mennonite Church USA, led a conversation on church planting. He invited Herm Weaver of Mountain States Conference and Clarence Rempel of Western District to share from their settings. Table groups spent time talking about church planning from their particular setting. They also responded to the question about a possible church planting summit.

Larry Miller, president of Everence, gave an update on giving across the church. He provided helpful facts and figures and reported that congregational giving is declining at about a 3% rate. We have also seen a significant increase in non-profit organizations, which results in more competition for dollars from donors. Larry also shared information on area conference giving from the past five years.

On Tuesday afternoon the group divided into subgroups to discuss specific topics. During the first block, participants selected among the following topics:

- Group 1 – How can we promote healthy sexuality across our church? What would be the best approach to teaching healthy sexuality at a conference assembly or churchwide convention?
- Group 2 – How are you dealing with the challenges of same-sex marriage issues in your conference? What help do you want from the broader church in this regard?
- Group 3 – How does the discussion about John Howard Yoder's abuse touch your conference? What help do you need to deal with issues of sexual abuse in your homes and churches?

During the second block of time the topics included:

- Group 1 – What is the role of area conferences in implementing our hopes and dreams as reflected in our statement on immigration?
- Group 2 – How are we increasing our capacity for Biblical/Communal Discernment in our area conferences? What have been your successes? Barriers?
- Group 3 –How do we best cultivate unity in the midst of diverse congregational cultures and settings, given the polarities of our day?

The meetings ended with worship, communion and singing.

The spring CLC meetings will be held at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas on March 20-22, 2014.

Marty Lehman
Associate Executive Director of Churchwide Operations
Mennonite Church USA