



## 2019 Annual Assembly Report

The annual conference assembly was hosted by Pleasant View Mennonite Church near Hydro, Oklahoma, July 19-20, with about 110 persons in attendance. Nearly half that number attended a session earlier on Friday, dubbed Vision 3.0. That was descriptive of the fact that two previous sessions had been held during the past two years, when

conference and congregational leaders spent several hours together reimagining what the conference might look like if it were to make changes that seem more in keeping with the realities of what it means to be followers of Jesus in the face of monumental changes in social, environmental and ecclesial structures that affect who we are and want to become.

The Vision 3.0 session was facilitated by Greg Meissen, a member of the staff of the Kansas Leadership Center, with major input from Moderator Tim Sweigart. An opening exercise that reappeared periodically during the day was the naming of one word that signified participants' feelings and expectations about the work of the day. At intervals, a few persons at a time named their word and explained why they chose that.

A scripture theme for the day was taken from the gospel of Luke, in which Jesus' hearers were admonished to take care to put new wine in new wineskins. If old wineskins were used, they would burst and the contents would be lost. The application to our current situation did not need a lot of elaboration.

A projection of Core Anabaptist Values on the screen provided an important text for the day's discussion, with agreement that they continue to be formative in describing the people we believe we are and want to continue to be:

- >We worship and follow the resurrected Jesus as Lord of heaven and earth
- >We proclaim transformation by spiritual birth and the work of the Holy Spirit
- >We teach discipleship as following Jesus in all of life
- >We embrace the church as a community of mutual care (mutual aid) and biblical interpretation
- >We pursue justice for the oppressed and serve with mercy those in distress
- >We submit to the will of God (*Gelassenheit*) even if it means personal loss
- >We pursue peacemaking even to loving enemies and forgiving oppressors
- >We share the good news of Jesus Christ and invite others to become his disciples

An outline of the objectives for the work of the day included the following:

- \*All about the future—let's not get stuck in the past
- \*It's about getting consensus—we won't be "voting"
- \*Let's stay focused and in our "lane" on making progress that has congregations and communities at the core with the conference also benefiting
- \*It's about moving to action on doable things (low hanging fruit), not about solving huge global issues (such as world hunger)
- \*Let's be curious and open
- \*All about the "HOW"—pathway to a different way of working together that includes lots more people.

Individual and table group work was geared toward finding ways to strengthen local congregations, the surrounding community, and the collectivity we call our area conference. Acting on the theme for the following annual assembly, "Better Together", was affirmed as the mandate to explore all the possible ways we can give substance to the concept. Some of the questions that were shared in plenary session:

- How do we make it easier for people to be inspired to do the work of the Lord?

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- How do we learn to love and appreciate those we disagree with?
- How can we avoid building walls of division and polarization?
- How do we have an impact without the main focus being on what we are against?
- How can a congregation develop a focus on a mission that all, or at least most, will accept and work at?
- We are not bad people if we end a program that is no longer working.
- How do I deal with losing things? When I make a change, I lose things that have been important to me.

The meeting concluded with agreement that we need to find new and better ways of being connected (pastors to pastors, congregations to congregations); sharing a variety of resources; making more and better use of technology; creating the most effective organizational structure and leadership succession; and naming and sustaining our core values. To that end, a number of persons volunteered to become part of an action team that would take the ideas generated today and do further processing, bringing their ideas and possible action steps for additional group discernment and implementation. Those serving on this team include Jeff Blackburn, AnDe-na Collins, Bill Garza, Clayton Gladdish, Kenzie Intemann, Jerry Pankratz, Josh Patterson, Phil Rosenberger, Ken Smith, Mitch Stutzman, and Grace Tijerina. As reported at the conclusion of the delegate session the following day, this group plans to meet next in south Texas in conjunction with the annual meeting of the south Texas churches the first weekend in November. They plan to spend time between now and then using available technology to share information and ideas that can help move the process forward.

The annual assembly began and ended with worship services, Friday evening to Saturday late afternoon, with messages delivered by three of our own pastors. On Friday evening, Rod Schmucker, pastor of Hope for the Broken congregation in Los Fresnos, Texas, spoke spiritedly about Leadership Highs and Lows, using Biblical examples but then inviting participants to share in small clusters their experiences of high and low points in their own leadership and ministry.

On Saturday morning, Jeff Blackburn, pastor of Greensburg Mennonite Church, dealt with the conference theme of Better Together, making sure that Christ is the center of our togetherness. He shared his view of past hindrances to being as effective as we could be in our common mission: frequent change of conference leadership, uncertainty of our vision, lack of denominational clarity on scriptural behavior, and allowing everyone to determine what is right in their own eyes. A final analogy was the observation that a living organism can handle only so much diversity, or it will split and die. His closing admonition was that South Central Conference should “stay in its lane” and keep its eyes on Jesus.

On Saturday afternoon, Jim Ostlund, campus pastor of Journey@McPherson Mennonite Church, spoke on A Heart for the Community, citing multiple examples of the ways that his relatively new congregation has been formed from the beginning by close ties to community leaders who together collaborate in meeting a variety of community needs. For him and his congregation, it has required knowing and copying God’s heart for people, building intentionally on human relationships, and maintaining a curious mind that has motivated them to get to know persons and organizations “in the marketplace” in their unique context.

Moderator Tim Sweigart opened the delegate session with a personal sharing of his own pilgrimage, growing up as a distinct minority white person in a black city, schools and church. He took time to provide some summaries of the discussion and decisions arising from Friday’s Vision 3.0 retreat, recognizing the persons who have agreed to give leadership to the next level of planning for possible organizational and structural changes and possible new ministry directions for the conference. Although his “normal” term would have ended with this assembly, he has agreed to remain for one more year, during which time a leadership succession plan will need to be put into place.

Persons representing Mennonite Church USA, churchwide agencies and other organizations were given time to speak on behalf of their groups. A possible new organizational structure was presented, arising out of the work during the past year by a Strategic Planning Committee. The new Visioning Team identified earlier will work with this proposal as part of their future planning.

SCC Treasurer Jim Diller presented a budget proposal, along with a financial report for the current year. He noted that for the past two years, delegates have been given, and have approved, budgets with sizable deficits, drawing on past years’ retained earnings primarily to support a church planting effort in Kansas City. This year’s proposal comes with the Executive Committee’s acquiescence, also showing a deficit of about \$20,000, with the hope that with new initiatives in sharpening up our mission and vision, congregations and individuals will rise to the challenge of closing this gap. Delegates approved the proposal with this understanding.

## Pastor/Congregation News

- > Kurt Horst ended his ministry as lead pastor at Whitestone Mennonite Church on June 30, after nine years.
- > Steve Schmidt became interim lead pastor at Whitestone on July 1.
- > Jesse Engle began his assignment as Pastor of Worship, Outreach, and Administration at Hesston Mennonite Church on August 11.
- > Gabriel (Gabe) Pennington ended his assignment as associate pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Hydro, OK, on July 28.
- > Jack Norris began as pastor of Inman (KS) Mennonite Church on September 10.
- > Kevin Santiago began as pastor of Peace Mennonite Community Church, Aurora, CO, on August 25.
- > Abraham Ulises Arena, pastor of Good News Mennonite Church in McAllen, TX, was elected moderator of Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church)—a national body of Hispanic members.
- > Todd Lehman, former campus pastor at Hesston College, a member of the SCC Ministerial Commission and a member of Hesston Mennonite Church, was elected to the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board at the Menno-Con19 biennial delegate assembly on July 5.
- > Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Hydro, Oklahoma, has taken action to disaffiliate with Mennonite Church USA, but remains a member of South Central Conference. Jeff Selzer continues as lead pastor.
- > Kay Schroeder has been named Pastor of Congregational Life at Hesston Mennonite Church, effective in December. She will conclude her ministry as a member of the pastoral team at First Mennonite Church in Newton in November.



## IMMIGRATION DETAINEE CARE KITS

When people who have been placed in immigration detention centers are released, they often have nothing more than the clothes on their backs. Kits containing clothing and hygiene products can help to rebuild their dignity as they go through this transition.

## DO YOU KNOW?

By Joyce Zuercher; Conference Resource Advocate

Immigration issues only continue, as our South Texas sisters and brothers know very well, involving themselves personally with trying to bring aid and comfort. Another book has come to my attention, this time a work of historical fiction, chosen for the 2019-20 William Allen White reading list for Kansas middle schoolers. Both the city and school librarians agreed with me that this is also worth-while for adults, as a stark reminder of how little we have learned in a world that continues to be in crisis.

*Refugee*, by Alan Gratz, tells three parallel stories of refugee families—a Jewish family in the late 1930's, a family in the Cuban crisis of the early 1960's, and Syrians in the middle of this decade. Although the characters are fictional, the circumstances in which they find themselves are historical. And we continue. In 2019, to find ourselves confronted with refugees from the unrest in South and Central America and an unwelcoming federal administration.

We must pay attention to Jesus' familiar parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, when he says to the "sheep"—I was a stranger, and you took me in, naked and you clothed me..." MCC is the arm of our church to help us respond to the needs, and they have programs that are responding. Let's support them however we can.

Learn more about MCC Immigration Programs in the U.S at <https://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/immigration>.

MCC's resources include prayers for the displaced in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, information about how to advocate for asylum seekers and support the American Dream and Promise Act. You'll also find a list of items needed for Immigration detainee care kits and details about past Borderlands Learning Tours. On the website you can send support for MCC U.S. immigration law trainings and help provide services to immigrants in the U.S.



# Executive Committee Activity

The Executive Committee has met monthly except in July, giving attention to the following agenda:

- > Discernment regarding the naming of a moderator-elect
- > Updates from the Strategic Planning Committee regarding some possible organization changes
- > Planning details for the Vision 3.0 gathering prior to the annual assembly (see separate article), and for the assembly itself (with subsequent review of these events afterwards)
- > A refined budget preparation policy in anticipation of delegate action on a budget for next year, and the review of the proposed budget
- > Plans for a pastor/leader/spouse retreat on October 4-5 with a focus on leadership training and development, and the enhancement of inter-congregational relationship building
- > Increased collaboration with the leadership of the south Texas group of churches (UCIM)
- > Conversations with the Regional Conference Ministers as a group, including a review of their pattern of being trained in coaching techniques led by Howard Keim
- > Approval of a bylaw change to eliminate Mennonite Women as a representative group on the Executive Committee [given their decision to disband], and the addition of a representative from UCIM
- > Discussion of what the conference expects to give to and receive from member congregations
- > Acknowledged the resignation of Jeff Selzer as Regional Conference Minister effective August 12, and Lupe Aguilar effective October 31.
- > Approved the application to the Schowalter Foundation for a grant in support of expanded church planting under the leadership of Omot and Hanna Aganya, church planters/pastors in Kansas City.
- > Expanded awareness of the variety of Anabaptist groups that have affiliation arrangements available.

The Executive Committee meets next on September 16.

## Calendar

### September

17 Pastor Peer  
Pleasant Valley  
Harper, KS

### October

4-5 Pastor/Leader/  
Spouse Retreat  
Cross Wind  
Conf. Center  
Hesston, KS

17-18 CLC  
Phoenix, AZ

21-23 Transitional  
Pastor Training  
Mennoscah

### November

2 UCIM Annual  
Meeting

19 Pastor Peer  
Location TBD



### SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE PASTOR/LEADER/SPOUSE RETREAT

October 4-5, 2019

Cross Wind Conference Center  
Hesston, KS

Friday evening we will spend time with God and networking. Saturday we will have an interactive workshop using Kansas Leadership Center leadership principles that bring together our Anabaptist value for discernment and tools for making progress on the challenges we face as a conference. This will be an excellent opportunity both to practice using KLC principles as well as introduce leaders who have not had the opportunity to attend a training of the concepts taught at KLC. Join for both days or just come for the Saturday Workshop.

Register online by Sept. 25th at [www.tinyurl.com/PLSretreat2019](http://www.tinyurl.com/PLSretreat2019)

### Friday October 4th

4-5:30 PM Registration

5:30 PM Supper

7:00 PM Worship/Inner reflections/  
restoration

8:30 PM Games & Puzzles

### Saturday October 5th

8:00 AM Breakfast

9:00 AM Interactive Workshop I

12:15 PM Lunch

1:00 PM Interactive Workshop II

2:30 PM Luke 5 Gathering and  
Discernment

Registration fee \$40/person

The mission of South Central Conference is to produce healthy missional congregations by resourcing, connecting and empowering them to be Christ in the world.