

Some Random Reflections and Challenges

By Marion Bontrager, Regional Conference Minister (retired)

Editor's note: After serving South Central Conference, Mennonite Church USA, and Hesston College for many years, Marion Bontrager was invited to share some reflections from his lifetime of service in the church.

"I Love Thy Kingdom Lord" is a hymn I loved to sing in my home church. The Church is the Body of Christ. How we treat the church is how we treat Jesus Christ. I fear too many Protestant and even Anabaptist churches increasingly separate the church from Christ. The church becomes a mere spiritual service station or audience rather than a missionary disciple community. Community may exist in smaller groups in large churches.

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-Marion Bontrager



Marion Bontrager

You can't do church and Sunday School/Christian Education the way church was done even 15 years ago. One definition of insanity: "Do church the way we have always done church and expect different results." We expect overseas missionaries to study the culture they enter and then communicate the gospel in that culture. That is why local congregations need to have outside resourcing because it is hard to see our culture or "the water we swim in."

About 16 years ago I was asked to be SCC Moderator-elect when I had not been involved for several decades. The conference had lost a number of churches and the vote to merge with Western District Conference failed. We lost a number of dual conference churches but not so many members. Earlier South Central lost all but one of the Missouri churches. Then two churches in eastern Oklahoma left.

The word was out that South Central Conference was disintegrating. A number of us including Dave Gerber, Bill Zuercher and me, dedicated ourselves to lead forward. The Conference Minister had been terminated. The Conference had struggled with finances for some time. How to organize in a more efficient way appropriate for our size? So I also became one of the part time Regional Conference Ministers who were paid by the hour. That approach enabled persons to be matched with congregations and the churches had a choice whether to accept the person nominated. Consequently the conference developed re-

sources for church planting and multi-sites.

Moderators had to assume a significant amount of administrative duties. The change in moderators every two years also lacked the consistency that a Conference Minister brought.

Relationships

"Relationships trump everything" is a phrase one congregation uses. The Mennonite Church and conferences have functioned on relationships. When relationships are not strong even minor issues can lead to churches and conferences breaking up. Strong relationships can help hold South Central Conference together despite some diversity.

Celebrate

The first task of a leader is to create a positive environment. Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate -- "Outdo one another in showing honor" says the Apostle Paul. Celebrate the God things. Churches need to be growth- and celebration-oriented rather than problem-oriented. Look for what is alive and healthy and nurture it rather than focusing too much on problems. If every pastor, elder and lay leader affirmed someone every week what a difference that would make! Leadership is more about relationships than office. Pastors and staff ought to be constantly looking for persons and all kind of things to celebrate every week.

Evangelism and Discipling

Writers tell us that evangelism will happen where church people live, work and play. I envision congregations teaming with each other and conference to initiate multi-sites and church plants. Churches need to have discipling programs to help new believers grow.

Future of Conference

May the Holy Spirit move and empower persons in the churches and conference to evangelize and nurture people in becoming dynamic, faithful churches for our days and into the future.

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Leadership

President: Carolyn Rychener
Vice President/President-elect: Kimberly Kropf
Secretary: Ariana Kauffman
Treasurer: Myrna Cherry



Growing in Jesus Christ through discipleship, shared fellowship, worship, and service.

SCC Mennonite Women

By Carolyn Rychener, President

Woman to Woman Grant

You might be wondering what your women's group could do for a special project in the next few months. We would love for you to select the Woman to Woman grant fund for that project! All funds are used to help women in their role as a church/community leader or who are experiencing unusual family expenses. We have been able to share over \$2,100 with women in various situations since last June. Please help us continue this mission! You can find information about the grant on the SCC web site, sccmenno.org/mennonite-women. Donations can be sent to treasurer, Myrna Cherry, PO Box 239, Hesston, Kansas 67062 or to the SCC offices.

More Program Ideas

Meeting Times

First Thursday of each month – piece and quilt for MCC
Second Tuesday each month, 10:00a-4:00p; we also plan several Sunday evening activities for the entire congregation, such as doing MCC kits.
Special project each month; make quilts for new babies in church
We fix food for our church workers

What brings you life and joy?

Meeting together
Completing projects
Prayer
Books that are a common denominator
Working with youth
Care packages for college youth
Packages for newly married couples
Quilts for new babies
Health and school kits (MCC)

Devotion resources

Spark: Nurturing Your God-Given Creativity by April Yamasaki

Faith Travels by Marlene Kropf

These books can be ordered from the Mennonite Women web site:

mennonitewomenusa.org/publications/guides/. If you have other suggestions, please share those with us.



SCC Mennonite Women Officers

Urgent: Volunteers needed!

There are currently 2 positions open on the Comforter Blitz committee. SCC is a part of this committee that includes women from 4-5 Anabaptist conferences in Kansas. What a wonderful way to make new friends!

The committee meets 3 times/year and the term is generally 3 years. The October meeting has already passed; there is a January meeting, the Blitz and a follow-up meeting. You do not need to be a quilter – organizing and worker-bee skills are the best for this committee! Please consider this mission that women of Anabaptist churches in Kansas have organized. Call Carolyn Rychener (620-327- 4557) to volunteer.

With no discernment committee, a discussion will need to be held in July to determine the future of how positions are filled for conference committees.

Our officers (pictured above) are Carolyn Rychener (front right), president; Kimberly Kropf (front left), vice president/president-elect; Ariana Kauffman (back right), secretary; Myrna Cherry (back left), treasurer. Thanks to those of you who are serving on the other committees: Women's Fall Retreat, and Friends of MCC/Quilters' blitz.

Pastor/Congregation News

>Gordon Scoville will join the pastoral team at Hesston Mennonite Church as interim pastor in early February. A search committee has been formed to plan for a longer-term replacement, succeeding John C. Murray who ended his ministry at HMC last September after 17 years.

>Mike Hiebert was installed as pastor of Inman Mennonite Church on December 11. He most recently served as pastor of the Buhler Mennonite Brethren Church, and prior to that, pastor of Goessel Mennonite Church.

>Jim Ostlund, pastor of the McPherson campus of Journey Mennonite Church, has returned from his sabbatical leave.

>Grace Tijerina has been licensed to serve as a church planter in Corpus Christi, Texas. She is also moderator of the south Texas district of churches known as UCIM. Grace graduated from Hesston College last May, and led the VBS on the Road team during the summer.

>Amy Nissley Stauffer, pastor of Hesston Mennonite Church, has accepted the chair position for the Conference Ministerial Commission. This is the group that is responsible for the credentialing of new pastors, or those moving from licensure to ordination. In addition, they deal with all matters related to pastoral ministry. She succeeds Kurt Horst in this role.

>A work crew from the north is planning to travel to Brownsville, Texas the week of January 8 to help lay blocks for the new building of Rey de Gloria, led by Pastor Lupe Aguilar.

>Pleasant View Mennonite Church near Hydro, Oklahoma, has begun a major building project that will provide a new sanctuary, after which the old building will be removed. A more recent addition to the old structure will remain as part of the new.

DO YOU KNOW?

By Joyce Zuercher; Conference Resource Advocate

We are in the season of Advent and Christmas, and on the heels of Christmas comes the new year—2017! To many, New Year's Day means—RESOLUTIONS!

Now, there are a number of schools of thought about resolutions. Some of us wouldn't think of embracing a new year without a set number of carefully thought-out goals and plans; others are satisfied with a goal or two, and still others refuse to have anything to do with resolutions. They always get broken, anyway!

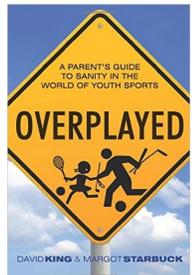
But, no matter what your attitude toward resolutions, with the busy holidays behind us and a whole new year ahead, it may be a good time to plan something new, perhaps fulfilling a dream or changing some facet of life for the better.

Perhaps you are thinking that you could use some help with your financial affairs. Everence offers many resources, no matter what your stage of life or situation. *All the Days of My Life* is a new curriculum developed for groups in all life stages, and there are many other study guides and workshop materials from which to choose. Watch for announcements from your local Everence representatives about seminars and workshops offered.

Have you noticed a nudge to do some Christian service? Mennonite Mission Network has long- or short-term, domestic or foreign, service opportunities for all ages, with SOOP reconfigured for ages 25+ to include families. The latest listing includes opportunities in Nepal, Hong Kong, Baltimore, and Puerto Rico, among a dozen others.

Feeling personal spiritual or family life needs? MennoMedia has a selection of books to meet a broad spectrum of needs. Many books offered have study guides that implement their use for groups. A current favorite seems to be *Overplayed, a Parent's Guide to the World of Youth Sports*, by David King and Margot Starbuck, which deals with "the peril and promise of children's sports". Or if you are simply ready to read a good story, *Christian's Hope*, the third of Ervin Stutzman's *Return to Northkill* series is available, plus other selections of fiction and biography.

With or without resolutions, many blessings in the new year!



Regional Conference Minister Roles

Since about 2005, South Central Conference has moved from having a full-time conference minister, to a pattern of multiple part-time regional conference ministers (RCM). This occurred in the early stages of the creation of Mennonite Church USA from the merger of the former General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church. During that process, a number of congregations chose to leave the conference and not join MC USA, and an additional number that were dually affiliated with both the former church bodies chose to remain only with Western District Conference.

Given this downsizing, some operating economies were required, which resulted in the RCM structure and staffing pattern. Marion Bontrager, long-time Bible instructor at Hesston College, was one of the first and longest-serving RCMs. He has terminated his assignment effective December 11. The conference has been fortunate to add to the RCM staff Clarence Rempel, based in Newton, Kansas. Clarence was most recently the Executive Conference Minister for Western District Conference, from which he retired in the summer of 2015. Prior to that, he was Associate Conference Minister, and for many years lead pastor of First Mennonite Church in Newton. Two other recent additions are Jeff Selzer, lead pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite Church near Hydro, Oklahoma, and Lupe Aguilar, pastor of Rey de Gloria Mennonite Church in Brownsville, Texas. James Wenger continues in his role as RCM, based in Hesston, and Kurt Horst serves on a limited basis.

The current RCM assignments are as follows:

*James Wenger – Spring Valley, Pleasant Valley, Crystal Springs, Calico Rock, Bethel, Kansas City Church Plant

*Clarence Rempel – Hesston Mennonite, Whitestone, Journey Mennonite, Inman

*Jeff Selzer – Herold, Metro, New Hope Fellowship

*Lupe Aguilar – Cordero, New Life, Good News, Prince of Peace, Calvary, Alice, Fountain of Living Water, Corpus Christi Ch. Plant

*Kurt Horst – Argentine, Rey de Gloria

This group of RCMs has begun a pattern of monthly meetings to share experiences and best practices. James Wenger was designated as the RCM leader; he and Lupe Aguilar will serve on the SCC Executive Committee.

Two congregations formerly served by Marion Bontrager, Mt. Pisgah and Greensburg, have not yet been reassigned.

A related development is the creation of a mentoring relationship for first-time pastors who are still new in their assignments. Howard Keim, former president of Hesston College, will lead this program of group and individual coaching and relationship-building. Such an arrangement typically lasts not longer than the first year of new pastors' ministry.

Executive Committee Activity

The Executive Committee has met three times since the last issue of the Messenger. Significant agenda material for discussion and some actions include the following:

- >Agreed to organize another VBS on the Road for Summer 2017 after a successful first venture in 2016, identifying persons to serve on a planning committee.
- >Named Amy Nissley Stauffer as chair of the Ministerial Commission and identified other potential commission members.
- >Appointed Gary Wolfer, Tim Sweigart and Lupe Aguilar to represent SCC at the October MC USA Constituency Leaders Council meeting in Hesston.
- >Finalized plans for the Pastor/Leader/Spouse retreat.
- >Confirmed plans for Grace Tijerina to locate in Corpus Christi, Texas as a church planter.
- >Agreed to move the date of the annual assembly from June to July in response to some concerns about conflicts with the June timing. As a result, the 2017 assembly will meet July 21-23, hosted by Hesston Mennonite Church. The 2018 assembly will meet on July 20-22, with Journey@Yoder as host. Discussed possible program focus for 2017 and changes in format.
- >Heard periodic encouraging reports of the church planting effort in Kansas City, with Omot and Hannah Aganya.
- >Developed new RCM assignments following the resignation of Marion Bontrager and the employment of Clarence Rempel.
- >Dealt with issues identified in a planning and visioning retreat in early October.
- >Identified possible participants in a renewed grant from the Kansas Leadership Center.
- >Made final plans for a special activity in latter January for pastors and families near Dallas, Texas, called "Break the Vase", being supported in part by a grant through Everence.
- >Adopted a new travel policy.
- >Heard a report from Dwight Regier, Youth Network team leader serving both South Central and Western District Conferences.
- >Heard a report from the annual meeting of MC USA and MC Canada conference ministers, attended by Marion Bontrager and James Wenger.
- >Received an introduction to a proposed church growth initiative called ReVive.
- >Received a report from the organizing meeting of the RCMs
- >Agreed to renew the commitment to be a sponsor of the Hesston College Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series, which enable all SCC pastors to attend without charge. The 2017 AVDS event is scheduled for February 17-19 at Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church.

2017 Calendar

January

17 Pastor Peer
Journey@South Hutch

30– Feb. 2 Break the Vase
Pastor Appreciation
Event
Lakeview Camp
Waxahachie, TX.

February

17-19 Anabaptist Vision
and Discipleship Series
Hesston, KS

March

6-8 Comforter Blitz
Journey@Yoder

21 Pastor Peer
Pleasant View
Hydro, OK

July

21-23 SCC Annual Meeting
Hesston Mennonite
Hesston, KS

MEDA Recognizes Young Women Leaders

Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) honored recipients of its 10 Young Women Changing the World awards at its convention in San Antonio, TX, October 27-30.

One of the recipients, Audra Miller, is a member of Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston. She served for two years with Mennonite Voluntary Service as project associate for Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing in San Francisco. This was organized to provide decent housing for formerly homeless persons. As an accomplished photographer and artist, she initiated a large-scale public portrait series featuring these residents. Audra continues to live and work in San Francisco following the conclusion of her MVS term.



Audra Miller

Kansas Leadership Center Grant Renewed

SCC has received a new grant along with Western District Conference which gives 14 scholarship slots for Kansas Leadership Center training programs in 2017. Requests for using these scholarships are currently being accepted! Scholarships can be used for any level of the Kansas Leadership Center training but may only be used by Kansas Residents. Contact the conference office at scc@sccmenno.org if you are interested in this amazing free training. For more information about the Kansas Leadership Center programs visit kansasleadershipcenter.org or talk to someone who has attended a KLC training. Scholarship covers all enrollment costs. Individuals will be responsible for buying the program materials as well as providing their own lodging (if needed) and travel.

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