

MESSENGER



South Central Conference

DISCOVERY 20.21

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Howard and Cathy Wagler to Lead SCC

Howard and Cathy (Headings) Wagler have been chosen to serve as Network Directors of South Central Conference (SCC).

This new leadership position in the conference, Network Director, was created on July 25, 2020 by delegate approval of a new structure. Howard and Cathy's role as Network Directors will be to resource, encourage, and network SCC congregations and pastors; encouraging them to identify and accomplish their vision and purpose. They will also be the connectors between SCC and broader church organizations. In addition to these relational components, Howard is serving as the chair of the Discovery 20.21 process for the coming year. Howard and Cathy officially begin this 60% combined time role on September 1, 2020 and will enter into a one-year transitional covenant with SCC with the possibility of continuing to serve the conference following this year.

Howard and Cathy are no strangers to SCC. Howard was Lead Pastor at Journey Mennonite Church for 27 years and during that time both he and Cathy have been involved in various roles at the conference level. Most recently Howard has been chair of the Church Growth and Visioning Committee and a member of the Executive Committee.

Howard and Cathy live near South Hutchinson, Kansas and are members of Journey Mennonite Church. Howard grew up in southern Indiana and attended Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) in Harrisonburg, VA where he met Cathy, a native of Ohio. After getting married the Waglers settled in Indiana until Howard felt called to enter the Pastoral Ministries Program at Hesston College in 1990. They moved their family to Kansas and while Howard received his degree in Pastoral Ministries, Cathy received an associate degree in Business Administration. In 1992 Howard was called to be Lead Pastor of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church (SHMC), now known as Journey Mennonite Church (JMC).

Howard and Cathy have trained with Forge Missionary Residency and Kansas Leadership Center and continue to coach leadership teams in identifying areas where they can lead their congregations to be more healthy and missionally focused. Cathy has always had a desire to help people understand the Bible in ways that connect Jesus' words with our lives today. She also enjoys reading, quilting, knitting and entertaining people in their home. Howard enjoys music, biking, motorcycling and running, as well as tinkering with antique tractors. Howard and Cathy have three grown children and six grandchildren who are scattered in Kansas, Virginia and New Hampshire and they love to spend time with them whenever possible.

As the Executive Committee was processing and finalizing the proposed new structure it became clear that having leadership in place for the coming year would be necessary for any conference movement toward the new structure, mission, and vision to take place. The Executive Committee laid out a process for finding the right leader to fill the Network Director role (if approved by delegates in July) forming a search committee made up of stakeholders in the conference which included Tim Sweigart - Executive Committee, James Wenger- Regional Conference Minister, Rod Schmucker- Pastor/ Executive Committee, and Ulises Arenas- Pastor. The Search Committee brought Howard and Cathy to the executive committee as their recommended candidates. Following this recommendation they were interviewed and unanimously recommended by the Regional Conference Ministers, Ministerial Commission, and Executive Committee.

Howard and Cathy can be reached by email at waglers@sccmenno.org.



Pastor/Cong. News

- > David Norris, pastor of Spring Valley Mennonite Church near Canton, KS, has begun a sabbatical leave. Mike Hiebert, former pastor at Inman Menn., is serving as interim.
- > John Stainbrook has been affirmed by the Crystal Springs Mennonite Church, Harper, KS, in a co-pastor role with Josh Paterson.
- > Steve Schmidt, interim lead pastor at Whitestone Mennonite Church, has agreed to stay in that role through December. A Pastor Search Committee continues its active recruitment of a long-term lead pastor.
- > Gabriel Pennington, former Associate Pastor at Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Hydro, OK, will be installed as pastor at Southern Hills Mennonite Church (a Western District congregation) in Topeka, KS on September 6

Assembly 2020:



Due to coronavirus, congregational delegates and conference leaders connected via Zoom on July 25. They heard reports from the year, celebrating 13 pastors credentialed for ministry, multiple long term conference volunteers, and two new church planting initiatives. Delegates approved a projected \$49,000 deficit budget that will require drawing down reserves in order to support a new organizational structure, which was also approved by the delegate body, which will require more funds for staffing. Friday and Sunday congregations were treated to two video worship services with presentations by Keas Keasler who had intended to be present in person, but instead recorded his messages on video.

Tim Sweigart, conference moderator for the past four years, facilitated the delegate session, emphasizing a theme that has been his focus during his tenure: God is ready to do a new thing with South Central Conference as it continues to serve as a network of 33 churches spread out from northern Missouri to south Texas, Colorado and New Mexico.

The two church planting initiatives include a Swahili language congregation in Wichita, KS, being led by Masemo Wakibogo, which primarily serves immigrants from Africa who have settled here, and an outreach ministry by the other most recent church plant, Eden Life church in Kansas City, led by Omot and Hannah Aganya.

A major agenda for discussion and action was a proposal to change the structure and staffing of the conference. After three years of discernment and visioning of how we can best serve our pastors and congregations, the principal change will be the employment of a part-time Network Director who will become the leader of the conference and the facilitator of resourcing for pastors. The moderator position, newly named Network Chair, will be filled by past moderator Gary Wolfer for the next year, and a chair-elect will be named to take over that task in August 2021. A Network Leadership team will replace the group formerly known as the Executive Committee.

A second major item for discussion and delegate action was the presentation of Discovery 20.21, a process through which the leadership team, pastors and congregational leaders will review and discern continued affiliation relationships or an alternative networking arrangement. A motion that SCC take action at this meeting to withdraw from MC USA was tabled, pending the outcome of the Discovery process. The team providing leadership for this process includes Howard Wagler, Clarence Rempel, Rod Schmucker, and Jeff Selzer.

The featured speaker for the weekend was Keas Keasler who addressed the assembly theme, Why Church? Keas is assistant professor of spiritual formation and the program director of the Master's in Christian Spiritual Formation at Friends University in Wichita. His two messages are still available to view. Information can be found at sccmenno.org/annual-assembly. On Friday evening, Keas noted that Jesus did not leave a book, but a community. He affirmed that the church exists to produce people who resemble Jesus. His Sunday sermon was based on the proposition that Jesus came into the world primarily to introduce the Kingdom of God, with the provision of a path to personal salvation as a byproduct. As Jesus' disciples, we have a part to play in putting the world right. Kingdom work is both now and not yet, believing that our everyday, ordinary activity is our response to Jesus' call on our lives.

Executive Committee Activity

The conference Executive Committee has met four times since the last newsletter was published, all online, with some sessions including the regional conference ministers. Major agenda discussion includes the following items:

- > Made the decision to conduct the Annual Assembly online rather than in person, to include some worship features for Sunday morning that all of our congregations will be encouraged to use. Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman, KS, had offered to host the assembly.
- > Continued to refine the proposed organizational structure, which is built around a half-time salaried Network Director and the formation of some supporting commissions staffed by volunteer members. The intention is to present this to delegates for discussion and approval at the Annual Assembly on July 25 (see accompanying article).
- > Appointments to the Ministerial Commission and Gifts Discernment Committee were affirmed, along with a Search Committee for the Network Director.
- > Appointed a task force to give leadership to a so-called Discovery process of several months to enable pastors and congregational leaders to engage in discernment that will clarify South Central Conference's ongoing affiliation, currently as a member of Mennonite Church USA.
- > Continued to support the new Swahili-language church plant in Wichita, which is being provided some financial contributions as well as an elder support group that meets regularly to assist the pastor and lay leaders.
- > Received and distributed to churches the compilation of responses to the proposed changes in the Mennonite Church USA Membership Guidelines.
- > Updated the SCC Scholarship available to students at Hesston College enrolled in Bible and Ministry classes, including the college's new Center for Anabaptist Leadership and Learning (CALL) program.
- > Reviewed the proposed operating budget for the fiscal year beginning September 1, 2020 amounting to about \$158,000.
- > Received regular reports from the Regional Conference Ministers.
- > Agreed to arrange for regular online consultations with pastors, to include conference leaders.
- > Continued to give attention to sustained relationships with the south Texas churches, many of which have been limited in their ability to meet for worship during the COVID-19 restrictions.
- > Planned the delegate session agenda at the Annual Assembly, and reviewed the schedule for two worship services.
- > Responded to an invitation to identify one or more names of persons interested in serving on the denominational Mennonite Men leadership team.

The Executive Committee (now called Network Leadership Team) is scheduled to meet next on September 21.