

South Central Mennonite Conference
Annual Assembly
July 24, 2021

MINUTES

Because of the ongoing pandemic (COVID-19), this annual assembly was held in a hybrid format using both an in person gathering at Whitestone Mennonite Church and a delegate zoom meeting hosted in the sanctuary through which online delegates could listen, watch, and address the gathered in person group.

1. Network Chair Gary Wolfer opened the meeting with a greeting and welcomed agencies to give reports
 - a. Mark Diller, regional Everence representative, brought greetings and noted the availability of Everence to help merge faith and finances.
2. Gary Wolfer asked participants to sit in groups by delegate and non delegate participants and asked for groups of prayer and discernment to sit together. He then led the group in an introduction to a discernment process that was used for the morning session. The small groups introduced themselves and then took communion together.
3. Participants then entered a time of discernment prayer centering on scripture from Romans 12:1-3 and asking for God's glory and wisdom today as well as listening.
 - a. Delegates were then invited to share what they heard from God during the prayer time
 - i. shared his gratitude for those in the room who have nurtured him and his hope for continuing to be a blessing to the world walking alongside each other.
 - ii. shared a confession time and that which binds us together is far greater than that which separates us in Jesus
 - iii. shared a feeling of gratitude and confidence that God will be made known and we can be Christ to the world.
 - iv. shared Jeremiah 29:11-12
 - v. shared his struggle between the infinite and finite understanding of God's will: in the infinite sense, God desires that we are whole and healthy human beings loved by God and loving one another and asked in the finite sense, "Does it really matter to God how we give expression to that in a group and governing sense?"
 - vi. shared that God has given us the answers for what He wants in this conference and weekend, revealed in scripture.
 - vii. shared a new, even positive, understanding of indifference during his prayer time.
 - viii. shared that Mennonites have something real and powerful to share with the world that should not be lost and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, that we should not mess with what God has told

and taught us as well as need for understanding that remaining connected to our denomination means for us and the need to be formed to handle persecution well and love through it.

- ix. shared the reminder of the importance of humility and yielding to the Lord personal desires and understanding.
- x. offered her own paraphrase of the Romans scriptures as a prayer.
- xi. shared truth as an important thing to discern together.
- xii. offered a prayer to remove confusion and God's will to be done.
- xiii. shared the need to release preconceived ideas and that only as we do, we will be able to hear and see God
- xiv. shared the reminder that in her home congregation (Journey @Yoder) in the last year and a half if more time had been spent blessing the work of God in each other rather than pointing out the perceived wrongs, the Kingdom of heaven would have been more glorified.

The group took a break to eat lunch together, challenged to continue to be in the spirit throughout the following hour. Howard Wagler offered a blessing for the meal.

- 4. Howard Wagler shared a brief overview history of South Central Mennonite Conference (written by Marion Bontrager)
- 5. Phil Rosenberger shared an overview of the past year's "discovery 20.21" process
- 6. Delegates were again invited into a time of prayer focusing on scripture from Matthew 18:19-20 and praying for each person in their group, testing what was heard in the last sharing time, and listening to what God had to say.
 - a. Again, delegates were invited to share following the silent prayer time
 - i. shared gratitude for the process thus far and a desire to also soon have conversations about the decision in front of the group.
 - ii. shared a desire to do right and carry out the will of God.
 - iii. shared that God is with us today, making a way and a sense that God is bringing a new thing in this conference
 - iv. asked for clarification of a comparison between SCMC and a cheap strand of pearls (an analogy used earlier) and it was clarified that the comparison was not of SCMC to cheap pearls, but that pearls were loved more than anything
 - v. shared acknowledgment that we have been blessed with a healthy, well working conference for a long time and that whether we stay together or take that blessing to other places, we carry that blessing with us.
 - vi. sacrificing personal views reminded him that after Pentecost the Spirit led the disciples to different places and asked whether our conference model is serving churches to be able to be sent?
 - vii. shared the conviction that the underlying issues matter, and that scripture shows Jesus and the apostles taught about the underlying issues.
 - viii. shared from Philippians 1: 12-18
 - ix. shared that he, from Hesston Mennonite values relationship with SCMC and MC USA and that there are provisions for congregations in SCMC to

be part of conference without being members of MC USA, or to leave conference and requested that congregations that desire that do so boldly and not cause the conference to cease in those disagreements but rather remove their membership.

- x. shared a spirit of love in disagreement
 - xi. shared a reminder of God's presence no matter where we are at the end of the day and our ability to be a reminder of what unity looks like.
 - xii. gratitude for being part of SCMC
 - xiii. shared there will be differences of opinions no matter where we affiliate, that God is bigger than those differences and maybe we need to let go of our pride and that maybe God has put us together with those differences for a purpose and trust the Holy Spirit in each other and let go of worrying whether others are wrong, to let God take care of that.
 - xiv. we are more the same than we often think. He pointed out that because our minds tend to go first to how different we are, we often miss that unity that we do have in God.
 - xv. encouraged us to have courage and believe that God knows where we will end up even if we don't. Relationships with other Mountain States churches have been better since joining SCMC than when they were members of the same conference.
 - xvi. shared hearing God's voice saying He has given wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and the mind of Christ.
 - xvii. shared the words from a song earlier in the day "the truth hurts the brethren" and that at times the truth does not want to be heard because it hurts "I will tell you God sees you, if you do not repent you will perish" and that repentance needs to happen.
7. Gary shared I Kings 19: 11-13 and I John 4:1-3 inviting delegates again to prayer and reflection on testing the things that have been heard discerning what was from God as well as continuing to listen to God. This was followed by sharing:
- a. reflected on the need for love and unity, that we are all part of the body of Christ, will be together with Christ in heaven and we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ as well as how difficult these conversations have been during a pandemic and asked to bring the vote to the floor.
 - b. asked which congregations could bless the work of God in other congregations while staying together?
 - c. reminded us of the source; Jesus, compass; the Confession of Faith that we are following alongside others. He asked if we could stand in a room and hold the compass up and point toward the source, acknowledging that the underlying issues matter but hearing that the source is why we are together.
8. By show of hands, it was confirmed that delegates were ready to move forward. The group was given a 10 minute break during which the song "Waymaker" was led by the worship team and brought back together with an invitation to spend some time kneeling before the Lord in prayer.

9. The resolution for moving forward from the SCMC Network Leadership Team was presented, projected and read in full by Gary Wolfer. The resolution was seconded by David Norris (Spring Valley)
10. The motion to suspend the $\frac{2}{3}$ majority required by the SCMC constitution just for this resolution was proposed and seconded by David Schmidt (Bethel)
 - a. shared that she believed the $\frac{2}{3}$ majority should not be removed because this is a very significant decision.
 - b. also shared the need for more than $\frac{2}{3}$ majority and that there is a strong relationship here that will be lost with dissolution of the conference.
 - c. shared that there is a lot of pain being the small fragment that remains and imagining a 40-42% group that could remain after a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote is hard (this comment comes after having walked that for a year)
 - d. shared that yes, it has been a hard walk for a year, but also that at times even then, it is the right thing to do and that strength and growth have come from that endurance.

David Schmidt (Bethel) called to move to a vote, seconded by John Flaming (Inman) and approved by majority raise of hand.

The motion to suspend the $\frac{2}{3}$ majority for the resolution for moving forward failed by a vote of 44(39%)-YES; 69(61%)-NO.

11. Discussion on the Resolution for Moving forward included the following sharing:
 - a. commented that we will all likely walk away feeling a bit like winners and losers. He shared from I Kings 3:16; Solomon's judgment of a disagreement about which mother's baby had lived and which had died, illustrating that dissolution is a lose/lose, but offered an alternative that congregations that do not wish to associate with MC USA be blessed to find another place of affiliation.
 - b. shared three things he thinks we discovered during the past year's Discovery 20.21: most of our congregations love and value SCMC, most of our congregations stand by our confession of faith, some of our congregations (though he could not give and would like to hear a percentage) have a problem with MC USA. Based on these discoveries he believes the decision is whether to continue to affiliate with MC USA or not. He desires more discussion of the implications of either of these two decisions.
 - c. offered the opposite proposal from what Don Weaver of Hesston shared to highlight the problem with that suggestion. Jack suggested SCMC leave MC USA and those congregations that want to remain with MC USA leave conference and join a conference of MC USA. He also shared an image he believed was from God of a new shoe (new denominational or conference affiliation) with a nail in it (all the issues with a new affiliation) and today, the nail turning into a spike keeping the person wearing the shoe from being able to move.
 - d. asked how much exploration has been done to find another denomination SCMC could affiliate with thus avoiding what is happening with MC USA? He stated MC

USA is not following the bible or what Jesus says and personally, does not want to see SCMC dissolve.

- e. stated his understanding that though he feels connected to MC USA, there are congregations frustrated that MC USA leadership chose not to take a hard stance, but allow conferences and congregations that make up MC USA to represent MC USA to each other.
- f. asked what happens to credentials if there is not conference affiliation? And asked congregations that wish to leave MC USA if they will still identify as Mennonite after leaving?
 - i. It was clarified that credentials will be transferred to a new affiliation organization when a letter requesting transfer is received. If SCMC leaves MC USA but stays intact, credentials will continue to be held by the conference since SCMC holds credentials not MC USA. Credentials will not be transferred to an individual unaffiliated congregation.
- g. lamented the feeling that there is just one issue that makes us true believers or sinners. She asked if we would be having the same conversation about any other biblical understandings.
- h. shared that Inman Mennonite was Mennonite before MC USA was created and would still be Mennonite if the following of the same confession and creeds was agreed upon.
- i. shared Acts 15:29 the statements to Gentiles becoming Christians as an example of the ways it is important to look to scripture when asking which issues or sins are more important than others. He stated these same 4 things are repeated multiple times in scripture as the apostles items to remember if you want to be part of the church following Jesus together.
- j. stated that the integrity of scripture is an issue of importance and the opinion that what MC USA is saying about sexual orientation is not what God's word says and thus cannot be followed, stating Romans 12:2-3
- k. reminded the group of God's first and second greatest commandment: to love God and love each other and noted many ways we already conform to the world and other sins pointed to in the bible that are clear and against God's will and stated that if we follow those first two commandments we can live together.

A motion to cease discussion was made by Don Weaver (Hesston) and seconded by David Schmidt (Bethel) and passed by raise of hand

The vote on the Resolution for Moving Forward failed by a vote of 49(41%)-YES; 70(59%)-NO; and 2 abstentions.

12. Bob Yates (Bethel) moved that we bring from the table the Motion that SCMC leave MC USA it was seconded by Jack Norris (Inman).

The motion to discuss the resolution Passed by a vote of 61(55%)-YES; 49(45%)-NO; and 4 abstentions.

13. Mark Landes (Whitestone), incoming SCMC Treasurer, presented the proposed budget for the coming fiscal year with explanation that there are a lot of unknowns but that no

matter what, SCMC has reserve funds to cover the full proposed budget if income does not meet the projected levels.

Don Weaver (Hesston) moved that we approve the budget as presented and Bill Zuercher (Whitestone) seconded the motion. The motion passed by raising of hands.

14. Gary gave an update on the coming year's leadership terms. Phil Rosenberger (Light of Life) will begin as Network Chair and Mark Landes (Whitestone) will begin as Treasurer. A slide of the other roles to be taken on was shared including Matt Jackson (Pleasant View) who will join the Financial Resource Team, Kenzie Intemann (Pleasant Valley) and Todd Lehman (Hesston) who will continue into a second term on the Ministerial Leadership Team, and Jim Diller (Hesston) who will begin a term as the KS West representative on the Gifts Discernment Team.
15. The updates to the SCMC Constitution and Bylaws were presented, including adding one or two additional members at large to the Network Leadership Team, by raise of hands it was shown that delegates support the addition of members at large to the Network Leadership Team.
16. The motion that SCMC remove its membership from MC USA was discussed.
 - a. Kevin Reimer (Inman) reviewed Bethel's process of leaving Western District and joining SCMC and shared since then the concern that MC USA does not value the relevance of the Bible and stated that it was time to distance ourselves from that.
 - b. asked to hear the rationale behind Bethel's motion as a delegate who was not present last year.
 - c. asked if there was any timeline given when the motion to leave MC USA was proposed.
 - d. Bob Yates (Bethel) stated the resolution was proposed to be an immediate change and shared a 20+ year process to bring the resolution last year of seeing MC USA move away from the relevancy of the Bible and not clearly having a definition of sin as well as the allowance and acceptance of many different religions
 - e. asked attendees to look at the Hymnal number 44
 - f. asked if SCMC leaves MC USA if individual congregations can still be members of MC USA and was told (by Gary Wolfer) that without a church being a member of a MC USA conference, that congregation cannot be a member of MC USA. Also, though not fully recognized by MC USA, SCMC has allowed member congregations to be part of SCMC but not MC USA.
 - g. asked what happens to credentials if leaving MC USA is immediate? It was clarified that SCMC holds credentials, not MC USA so leaving MC USA has no effect on credentialing if the conference remains intact.
 - h. shared his experience as a youth sponsor who took young people to convention, the highlight of their church life. Most of those kids are not here. He has been disappointed by the focus on sin.
 - i. shared a survey from Conrad Kanagy in 2005 highlighting the percentage of respondents who view Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.
 - j. pointed out the Anabaptist church began as the hands and feet of Jesus and has seemed to turn into the fingers, pointing out sin and judging one another.

- k. shared that young people are being told to find what they like on their phones, not go to church. He stated that to bring young people to the church you have to tell them something different.
- l. asked what authority the denomination holds over us and stated the feeling of being asked to choose between a connection with the denomination or brothers across the room. He asked that we be centered on Jesus and not choose between brothers from Hesston Mennonite or Bethel Inman and asked that because the denomination (which he would see as falling away from our understanding of the Confession of Faith) holds no authority over how we understand (and overall agree) and follow the Confession of Faith, we instead choose to remain together and follow Jesus, our center, together and govern ourselves together regardless of where MC USA is at.
- m. shared the feeling of being in the synagogue discussing matters while Jesus would be out with someone that needed him. She asked to be with Jesus rather than the religious leaders and asked how we get there.
- n. noted the woman caught in adultery told to go and sin no more and stated that in love we must also talk about sin and that we need to stick to all aspects of the Jesus way.
- o. noted that there is no way to avoid conflict and that we can follow Jesus without conflict as Peace has been able to do with fellow churches in Denver since leaving Mountain States.
- p. noted the passage from John 8 about the woman caught in adultery but focused on the crowd holding stones which were called out by Jesus and eventually left leaving Jesus to talk to the woman alone.
- q. clarified that Jessica Ulrich has stated that we have a chance to decide to leave MC USA together but that there will be outliers, stating that this decision stinks, that no matter the decision we will not be moving forward together. He asked for clarification from congregations of the truth to that. (asking if the resolution does not follow a particular congregation's desires will they leave?)
- r. stated a continued path of MC USA progressive values that he will not lead the congregation toward; accepting other ways to God besides Christ, normalization of gender confusion, and scripture being up for grabs.
- s. noted that the biggest concern is the salvation of those around us and the seriousness of pointing out sin.
- t. struggled with the MC USA bashing and with the idea of making a decision of this magnitude without any representation from MC USA, or serious prayer and discernment. After spending a year processing the other resolution that was brought it feels irresponsible to vote on this one now when we are tired and have not taken the same kind of consideration as a group for this motion that we did the first one of the day. He also noted that we have no idea what it will mean not to be part of MC USA and have not studied or discussed it before taking this to a vote.

John Fleming (Inman) made a motion to cease discussion of the motion to leave MC USA seconded by Sam Kiester (Inman) motion passed by raise of hands.

The motion that SCMC remove its membership from MC USA failed by a vote of 52(51%)- YES; 50(49%)-NO; 9 abstentions.

17. The changes to the constitution were brought up again as mostly for the purpose of matching verbage to the new structure adopted last year. The new document has been available for some time online and was not read or reviewed in full.

A motion was made by Bill Zuercher (Whitestone) and seconded by Kevin Wilder (Whitestone) to amend the constitution as presented. The motion passed by raise of hands.

18. Clarence Rempel, SCMC Regional Ministry Coach shared an update and celebration of the founding and flourishing Amani Community Church in Wichita, KS under the leadership of pastor Masemo Wakibogo. The Paradizo Choir is very active and has been recognized internationally from their Youtube videos of songs. Half of that choir shared their ministry with us in worship this morning.
19. Howard and Cathy Wagler, SCMC Network Directors, gave an update and report on the past year, using the Regional Ministry Coach team as well as their own work communicating with congregations. They gave gratitude to this team. Their hopes for the future are more educational events for pastors and congregations as well as visiting and communicating more with congregations.
20. Howard and Cathy called Gary Wolfer to the stage and presented him with a gift of gratitude from SCMC for Gary's leadership and service to Christ's church this past year.
21. James Wenger, SCMC Regional Ministry Coach gave an update on the Eden Life Church in Kansas City, MO and pastor Omot Aganya's vision for planting more churches across the midwest.
22. Kurt Horst gave an update from the Ministerial Leadership Team about vision for the coming year, items that have been on hold because of Covid like leadership retreats and calling of future pastors from among SCMC congregations, and credentials that were granted in the past year. Kurt welcomed those in attendance to hold out their hands and led in a prayer for those leaders who have been called this year and those God is currently calling.
23. Gary Wolfer offered departing words and Phil Rosenberger closed the meeting, inviting all to join in worship tomorrow morning.

Becky King
Recorder