

Mennonite Church USA
Delegate Assembly Session Minutes
San José, California
July 2 to 6, 2007

Monday afternoon, July 2, 2007
SESSION ONE

1. Opening the session – welcome and introductions

Following a time of congregational singing led by Janeen Bertsche Johnson, Moderator Roy Williams extended a welcome to the third churchwide delegate assembly of Mennonite Church USA. He reminded those assembled of the theme, “Live the Call! Vive El Llamado!” The Biblical text for the assembly, Eph. 4:1-6 was displayed on the screens, which Roy read aloud and then led in prayer.

Those providing leadership for the week, seated on the stage were introduced: Sharon Waltner, moderator-elect; Jim Schrag, Mennonite Church USA Executive Director; Ed Diller, parliamentarian and moderator-elect designate; and Bill Zuercher, recording secretary.

Dave Maurer and Amy Nissley were introduced as persons who are providing oversight for young adult delegates. All young adult delegates in attendance were invited to stand to appreciative applause.

Leah Ann Alcazar, moderator of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, brought words of welcome and greetings on behalf of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference.

Since the delegate body is the authoritative decision-making group in Mennonite Church USA, Roy announced that approximately 850 delegates were registered by mid-afternoon. He reviewed the composition of the delegate body and outlined their authority to act. He referred to the delegate workbook page 25 describing the procedural rules for delegate discussion and action, noting the presence and duties of a Resolutions Committee chaired by Jim Harder. Two standing rules for the convention designed to facilitate action by large assemblies such as this, in a relatively short time, were presented for action.

Action 1 M/s/c that any motion that brings substantive business to the body must be taken to the Resolutions Committee before it can be brought to the floor. Ed Kauffman/Duane Oswald

Action 2 M/s/c that amendments to resolutions that appear on the agenda must be presented to the Resolutions Committee before they can be brought to the floor for discussion. Ed Kauffman/Duane Oswald

2. Adoption of agenda

Roy reviewed the agenda that has been prepared for delegate consideration during the week.

Action 3 M/s/c that the agenda as presented be adopted. Sandra Hersh/Roy Jimenez

Roy Williams drew attention to the Listening Committee, chaired by Executive Board member Jane Hooper Peifer, assisted by Charlotte Hardt, Noel Santiago, J. Daryl Byler and Yvonne Platts. This committee will be reporting at several times during the assembly.

3. Minutes of Charlotte 2005 Delegate Assembly

Secretary Bill Zuercher summarized the minutes from the Charlotte 2005 Delegate Assembly, noting that all churches received a copy of the complete text of the minutes following that meeting. The minutes of the Charlotte 2005 assembly were approved as recorded and summarized without objection.

4. Workbook Overview

Roy took note of the priority outcomes for Mennonite Church USA printed in the workbook that will receive attention at several points during the assembly. He reviewed the table group process, noting that each group has

a designated leader. Much of the work of the assembly will be done in table group discussion, with a procedure for recording and giving feedback. Attention was drawn to the printed job description of delegates, supplemented by a table group covenant. Time was allowed for table group members to get acquainted with each other.

5. Churchwide agency presentation

Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership and churchwide agency staff collaborated in a joint PowerPoint presentation. Sharon Waltner, representing Executive Leadership, introduced the presentation. Other participants included Carlos Romero, Mennonite Education Agency; Larry Miller, Mennonite Mutual Aid; Stanley Green, Mennonite Mission Network; and Eleanor Snyder, Mennonite Publishing Network.

Following the presentation, table groups were given time to discuss the following: “Together, how do/can the churchwide ministries of Mennonite Church USA help your congregation?” Table group recorders were instructed to submit a written summary of the group’s discussion to designated staff.

6. Introduction of resolutions

Moderator-elect Sharon Waltner introduced the resolutions already on the agenda for presentation, discussion and possible action during the week, to include the following:

- Proposal for Mennonite Church USA to join Christian Churches Together
- An apology to Native Americans for injustices they have endured
- Health insurance for pastors
- Affirmation ballot for nominees for Executive Board and churchwide agencies

Sharon noted that any other business that requires voting will be accommodated on Friday.

7. Building Campaign promotion

Sharon introduced Jim Schrag, Stanley Green, Bill Hochstetler and Peter Wiebe who stood in support of a three-year development campaign now underway by Mennonite Mission Network to raise funds sufficient to construct a new Mennonite offices building on the campus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Space will be included for other churchwide agency staff. Bill spoke as the incoming chair of the Mission Network board; Peter as co-chair of the fundraising committee.

8. Introduction of guests

Roy recognized a number of international visitors who will be with us in this assembly. He then introduced Bert Lobe, interim Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee who gave a brief presentation on behalf of his agency. Bert was followed by Jack Suderman, General Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada, who was present by video to bring the greetings of our sister denomination which is meeting during these same days in Abbotsford, British Columbia. In an act of reciprocity, Jim Schrag has sent taped greetings on behalf of Mennonite Church USA to the Canadian assembly.

Roy drew attention to several papers that were placed on the tables, meriting the attention of all participants.

Tuesday morning, July 3, 2007

SESSION TWO

9. Vision for Mennonite Church USA

Jim Schrag, Mennonite Church USA Executive Director, shared his hopes and expectations for the developing Mennonite Church USA, based upon his own vision and pastoral experience. Jim began by repeating the assembly scripture, Eph. 4:1-6, with its “audacious statement of unity”—the foundational reason for Mennonite Church USA’s existence. Being missional, as we have declared ourselves to be, means a rediscovery of the unity of God and God’s purpose of unity in a new humanity. This call to oneness in God through Christ is beginning to govern our priorities and forming us as a community of faith. Table groups were instructed to spend time is discussing two questions:

- What is God trying to accomplish through all of us in Mennonite Church USA?
- What kind of church has God fashioned us to be?

Roy concluded this segment with a reminder that our predecessor denominations have approved three foundational documents that have become pillars of our missional calling in Mennonite Church USA. These are *Vision: Healing and Hope*; *The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*; and *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*.

10. Bible study

Jim Brenneman, president of Goshen College, led in a Bible study focusing on the statement, *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*, based upon excerpts from Acts 15:1-31. His thesis for the presentation was that conflict in the church, as in life, is inevitable. The first lesson of Acts 15 is to accept, admit, and acknowledge that conflict is a normal part of life in the church and out. The mission of the church depends on such honesty.

In a nutshell, the process of healthy conflict resolution calls us to voice our disagreement; tell our story; listen to others' point of view; compromise (find a win/win solution); act on the new decision; spell it out; announce it; and draw up plans accordingly. This process is masterfully spelled out in the statement, *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*.

Table groups were instructed to spend time with the following discussion questions:

- Is conflict inevitable as was argued in this Bible study? If not, why not? If so, why so?
- What benefits are gained from living through conflict? Pitfalls/dangers?
- Describe a time when you successfully resolved what seemed to be an intractable disagreement with a friend, family member or member of the church community. What effect did such reconciliation have on your relationship? What was the process you used?
- Do you agree that the document, *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*, is ultimately a missional document important for witness, evangelism and outreach? Why or why not?

Tuesday afternoon, July 3, 2007

SESSION THREE

11. Church member profile report

Conrad Kanagy, associate professor of sociology at Elizabethtown (PA) College, gave oversight to the Mennonite Church USA part of the Church Member Profile, completed in 2006. He has written a study book based upon the responses from church members and has prepared a DVD containing excerpts of interviews with pastors. Conrad gave a PowerPoint presentation, highlighting the significant findings and implications. This presentation and related printed materials are available for access to the details of the findings.

Table groups were instructed to reflect together on the following:

- To what should we be paying most attention?
- What opportunities and challenges do we face for becoming a missional church?
- What do you think the Spirit is saying to us through the results of the Church Member Profile?

12. Six-year review process led by Executive Board

When Mennonite Church USA was formed six years ago, the transformation process mandated that a six-year review be undertaken; we are now at that point. Ed Rempel, member of the Executive Board, was instrumental in designing and implementing this review; his report is included in the delegate workbook. Ed summarized the salient points from the review, assisted by a PowerPoint presentation:

- a. **Statement of purpose and priorities.** The purpose of our Missional Church is to join in God's activity in the world. We develop and nurture missional Mennonite congregations of many cultures. Derived from this statement of purpose are the following priorities, to be implemented between 2006 and 2020:
 - (1) **Witness.** The Gospel of Jesus Christ is practiced and proclaimed through a seamless web of evangelism, justice and peace across the street and around the world.
 - (2) **Anti-racism.** We will honor the dignity and value of all Racial/Ethnic people in Mennonite Church USA, ensuring just and equitable access to church resources, positions and information as manifestations of the new humanity in Christ.

- (3) **Leadership development.** Church members with leadership gifts are called, trained and nurtured in Anabaptist theology and practice in order to fulfill the church's missional vocation.
 - (4) **Global connections.** Mennonite Church USA fosters fellowship and develops partnerships with Anabaptists and the broader body of Christ around the world.
- b. **How should we organize to carry out our core strategies and priorities?**
- (1) Growing healthy, missional congregations is the primary focus of all parts of the church.
 - (2) Networking and flexibility are both necessary in and among all parts of the church.
 - (3) Executive Leadership will focus on teamwork and collaboration among all parts of the church.
- c. **Executive Board review.** Ed noted that the six-year review has also focused on the optimum size of the Executive Board, specifically whether the current number of 20-21 members should be reduced to 12-15. Additionally, the idea of lengthening the term of the moderator from the current two years (following two years as moderator-elect) is open to further discernment.

Following Ed's presentation, table groups were instructed to consider the following questions, with written summaries to be submitted:

- In what ways do you recommend that Mennonite Church USA organizational structures be modified as the church moves into its next phase of growth?
- Do you favor a reduction the size of the Executive Board? Why or why not?
- Do you favor lengthening the potential time that a moderator could serve? Why or why not?

13. Introduction of resolution to join Christian Churches Together

As part of our churchwide goal of establishing new global and interchurch connections, a proposal comes that Mennonite Church USA become a full member of a developing ecumenical movement known as Christian Churches Together (CCT). André Gingerich Stoner, part-time director of interchurch relations for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership, began with the observation that the key question for a missional church is "What is God doing and how can we be part of it?" He then reviewed the rationale and process leading up to the recommendation to join CCT. After four years of attending meetings as observers, Mennonite Church USA Executive leadership staff have developed a clear and compelling sense that our Anabaptist perspectives will be welcomed and that our voice among the assembled groups is important. Additionally, there is the conviction that we have a great deal to learn in this fellowship of Christian bodies. André noted that two years ago at the biennial assembly in Charlotte, strong affirmation, along with some questions, was expressed, suggesting that we move toward positive action at the end of the following biennium. He highlighted additional discussion that has happened within conferences, at the Constituency Leaders Council and with the Executive Board.

Table groups were instructed to address the follow question:

- What do you need to know before you can make the decision about joining Christian Churches Together during the delegate session on Friday?

14. Native American resolution

During the morning worship service, a video was shown regarding a resolution pending before the U.S. Congress that offers an apology to Native Americans. Steve Cheramie Risingsun, a Native American Mennonite pastor and Mennonite Mission Network board member, gave additional background information and impetus for this proposed acknowledgment and its significance which he further symbolized by his presence on the platform during this delegate session.

Action 4 M/s/c We, the delegates of Mennonite Church USA, gathered in San Jose, California in July 2007, support the joint U.S. Senate and House bills that "acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the United States government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States." Michael Smith/S. Roy Kaufman

15. Listening Committee Report #1

On behalf of the Listening Committee, Noel Santiago and Charlotte Hardt presented its first report. See Listening Committee report on page for their report.

16. Lifestyle and sustainability

Following an appeal received at Charlotte 2005 for Mennonite Church USA to look at sustainability issues, that is, how our lifestyle relates to our care for creation, time has been allotted to a presentation on how the way we live our lives and care for God's creation impacts our missional calling. This message was communicated by Anita Amstutz, pastor of Albuquerque (NM) Mennonite Church, and Luke Gascho, executive director of the Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College. Aided by PowerPoint, they addressed four questions:

- What is the connection between creation care and sustainability?
- Why are creation care and sustainability important issues today?
- What is our theological framework for caring for the earth?
- How should we respond?

Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of all people and all of creation today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This is an important issue today because “creation is groaning.” Examples are deforestation; diversion of agricultural land; widespread hunger; water scarcity; disproportionate consumption of energy by Americans; burgeoning amounts of waste created; climate change with resulting severe weather patterns; and rapid pace of biodiversity.

Our theological framework derives from our Anabaptist identity as a servant people, a stewardship people, and as a peace and justice people, with the wide-ranging implications of those characterizations. A compelling question is, how do we live this image of shalom and well-being with all of God's creation, human and non-human alike—instead of a paradigm of dominion as “domination,” “power over” and “violence against?”

A proposed response lies somewhere between the concept of a wild, untouched earth on the one hand, and the earth as nature factory on the other, justifying the human role of taming, subduing and extracting. This third view embodies the concept of earth as home—a place that we care for in harmony with God's created order and system of right relationships among all its component parts.

Table groups were instructed to address the following questions:

- What concepts from the presentation resonate with you? Why?
- What can you do to significantly reduce the ecological impact of your household and congregation?
- How can your actions support other mission objectives of your household and congregation?

17. Open microphone

The concluding segment of the afternoon agenda provided open microphone time, giving opportunity for individual delegates to comment on any of the presentations up to this point. Following are the responses.

- There was disappointment in our quick action to affirm the resolution regarding an apology to Native Americans (see Minute # 14). This seemed to trivialize the concern, allowing us to think we have taken care of the matter without taking time to feel the pain that our Native American brothers and sisters have felt for generations.
- Nothing was mentioned in the Native American resolution about the work that Christian Peacemaker Teams have done with native groups in both Canada and the U.S. We should recognize and support them.
- Although a small minority, we do have members who are the working poor, homeless and voluntarily poor. Such persons are rarely welcomed to participate in leadership nor are their voices heard otherwise. Instead, the middle class is the ruling class in Mennonite Church USA. Congregations should get to know the poor and invite them to share their perspectives and serve on their boards. Conferences should do the same. The Executive Board is encouraged to discuss ways to help such persons attend our assemblies as full participants.
- The creation care discussion is a vital part of our vision of being a missional church, and our ministry. It will involve continuing education of our people. Delegates should go home and talk to their congregations, with plans to do something concrete.

- The Mennonite Church USA priority #2 addressing anti-racism is framed negatively. How might Racial/Ethnic people prefer to have it stated so that it is more positive?
- There is disappointment that the immigration issue is not receiving more attention in the delegate sessions.
- There is concern that the trends in congregations do not line up with what we are saying regarding peacemaking. We are not practicing what we are preaching about peace being central to the gospel.
- We offer a note of caution on the first churchwide priority, that we need to differentiate between a holistic witness and a seamless web of evangelism, justice and peace. We can make a case for allowing evangelism to have its unique character, with repentance and conversion being integral parts.
- In response to our concern about creation care, can we implement some specific ideas like bringing our own mugs, asking hotels not to change linens every day, and bringing our own bags?
- We spend billions of dollars destroying creation through war, to which there is no mention in the presentation. We should talk more about how we are pursuing the Iraq resolution passed at Charlotte 2005. We should advocate for an end to war as part of caring for the earth.
- The issue of lifestyle gets the greatest hearing when we talk about creation care, but it is just one piece. Systems and structures that we have created are also very vital in realizing real change. We should move from a single bottom line profit mentality to a triple bottom line that includes profit, sustainability, and social justice concerns.
- In the transformation to Mennonite Church USA, it appears as if Native American ministries and concerns have been given secondary, even diminished status. We hope that today's vote can put some shoe leather to our voice.
- The Monday night worship focus on deconstructing walls is not only related to race and poverty. It also applies to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.
- A legacy of Miriam Martin, whose death was announced earlier today, was her ability to hear people of different backgrounds and languages. Can we act on that to provide financial resources to leaders from such groups to enable them to be more involved and visible?
- As with the scriptural advice to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, we are advised to beware of the leaven of the Republicans and Democrats!
- There are economic barriers to full participation in Mennonite Church USA, including assemblies such as this one. The voices we are hearing today are those of the richer, more educated. We need to consider more economically accessible places of meeting.
- Having open microphone time immediately follow specific presentations is far preferable to having a consolidated time at the end of the session. Further, there is the sense that reliance on table group discussion actually suppresses open communication rather than abetting it. There is no open airing of disagreements.
- Prayer is requested for our congregations in the Gulf Coast region who increasingly find themselves without property insurance and casualty insurance, both Mennonite-sponsored and otherwise. When the next disaster strikes, we can be sure that they will ask for help.
- As a white person, one can also consider oneself a Racial/Ethnic person (e.g., Germanic, Swiss). Can we find a better term (besides Racial/Ethnic) for other than white persons, such as non-Caucasian?
- Appreciation is expressed for the presence and participation of a larger number of young adults than has happened in the past.
- Urban congregations attempting to purchase and/or build facilities are faced with million-dollar plus price tags—much more expensive than a generation ago. Can we find ways to help such congregations?
- The applause that follows some comments is regarded as offensive, and an appeal was made for discontinuing the practice. [Note: In a subsequent session, the moderator requested that such applause should be discontinued.]
- In recognition of the recent tornado that destroyed the town of Greensburg, Kansas, and the Greensburg Mennonite Church, and being aware that some momentum is growing for the town to rebuild itself as a “green environment,” the suggestion is made that we try to connect Greensburg town leaders with the Merry Lea director who has already implemented some green construction.
- The absence of the team of Ted & Lee, due to the recent untimely death of Lee Eshleman, brings great sadness and loss. We need to find ways to give expression to our grief rather than to cultivate silence.

- One table group raised a question about what Jesus said about the issue of sustainability. All the evidence is that he was an itinerant, leaving a tiny ecological footprint.

Worship leader Janeen Bertsche Johnson led in a prayer of intercession on behalf of the individuals and situations identified in the open microphone time.

Wednesday morning, July 4, 2007

SESSION FOUR

18. Access to healthcare – Part 1

Today’s session is the first of two (see also Minutes #26 and 29) dealing with the issue of access to healthcare. Sharon Waltner acknowledged persons who have been leading the response to action taken at Charlotte 2005, commending serious study about healthcare access leading to further action at the end of the biennium. She gave a brief account of activities that have occurred during the past two years. Dr. Glen Miller was introduced as the program manager for the healthcare access initiative. He led the presentation aided by PowerPoint.

Glen identified four areas that have occupied the time and attention of individuals, congregations and other groups during the past biennium. These include congregational study of *Healing Healthcare*, stewardship of health, public policy advocacy, and access for pastors and church workers. One result of the work has been publication of *Healthcare Access Public Policy Advocacy Guide* which was distributed at this delegate session.

Following Glen’s presentation, Jim Schrag spoke to the options available to us as a church body. A primary challenge is to create access to healthcare coverage so we can find and enable leaders in our congregations. Basically, we are faced with a choice between existence as an association of independent congregations or as a group of interdependent units who put the best welfare of the whole ahead of local self-interest. Jim outlined the implications of a vote in favor of the proposed action (see Minute #29), making clear that there will be further action steps and decisions that will be needed in our congregations and conferences. In sum, we are being asked to take a long-term view, even though that will have financial implications requiring those who are able to share their resources with others who have less.

Glen followed with additional statistics related to pastoral healthcare coverage currently, addressing availability and affordability. The current MMA plan for pastors, Covenant Mutual Benefits Plan (COMB), is financially viable but has been losing members, and with the reality of adverse selection, faces an uncertain future. In the last year, a consortium has met to devise a plan that would insure pastors and congregational employees. The result is a proposed single plan that would cover the named group. This plan has been tested through telephone conversations with 34 congregations in 13 area conferences. A variety of affirmative and cautionary comments have been received which are now being shared in the study documents for delegates to review. We are moving toward a decision to adopt the proposed concept that would later lead to the development of a plan.

Table groups were given time for discussion based on the following issues and questions:

- Identify affirmations and concerns about the proposal to provide health insurance for pastors and congregational employees.
- Based on what you know today, can you vote “yes” to the proposed plan to provide insurance to all eligible Mennonite Church pastors and church workers? Why or why not?

Following the discussion, opportunity was given for table group spokespersons to raise questions for clarification, or to give comments arising from their group work. Written comments will be taken by the advisory group led by Glen and integrated into later discussion this week.

Time was available for 32 of the 93 table groups to report their consensus and raise questions or concerns. Those still wanting to report will have an opportunity later in the week (see Minute #26). On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest level of affirmation for the proposal), tallies ranged from 5 to 10, with 8 having the largest number of votes.

Some common themes were expressed, including the following:

- Promoting this as mutual aid will have a higher likelihood of success than as insurance. Even so, congregations will need a great deal of education on the concept.
- The participation of the largest possible group of persons is seen as vital, including staff of all of the agencies and institutions. Note was taken that not all such groups have declared their willingness to participate, with encouragement that they do so.
- The possibility of combining with other church bodies has merit if feasible. At least, learn from the experience of other church bodies, if any have developed comprehensive plans.
- A single plan covering a wide geographic region with contrasting demographic factors and cost experience seems daunting if not unrealistic.
- Creating a plan that ensures healthcare coverage for the 5% not now included, could jeopardize coverage that the other 95% already have.
- Clarification is needed on the meaning of “eligible pastors.”
- Under the assessment scheme, might congregations end up subsidizing uncovered church agency employees?
- This (and by implication any) insurance plan feels like a Band-aid on a flowing hemorrhage.
- The membership profile report gives evidence that we are losing our concept of the church as a contrast society. This proposed plan begins to work at creating a differentiated identity as a body.
- The promotion of wellness deserves strong support, along with affordability.
- We wonder about the amount of bureaucracy needed to administer such a plan.
- Will a supplemental plan for pastors eligible for Medicare be available?
- If bi- and tri-vocational pastors in small congregations are deemed to be ineligible, that would be a major concern.
- Assessments to be paid by every congregation could divert funds from other important ministries, although in concept the proposal should even the playing field.
- If “the devil is in the details,” we trust the Holy Spirit will be there too!
- This has the feel of mutual aid and care that is to be commended.
- In a real sense, this is a theological rather than an economic issue.
- The deductible should not exceed \$1,000. There are stories of how high deductibles in current plans have placed excessive burdens on pastors’ families, especially young families with expenses for childbirth, etc.
- If assessment is based on membership, that could cause some congregations to clean up their rolls! If a congregation objects to an assessment, the most extreme response could be their withdrawal from Mennonite Church USA.
- We will be faced with competition from other plans that have better coverage and may be cheaper.
- Larger and more affluent congregations need to be challenged to share in the way this proposal calls for, as a justice issue.
- Some pastors are concerned about their role as advocates for this plan in their local settings, at the risk of being accused of self-interest.
- The allotted discussion time was inadequate, and the available information seemed insufficient to make an informed decision. A feeling of having been manipulated was expressed.
- If we are to advocate for healthcare policy changes at the governmental level, our voice will be more credible if we have created a plan such as is being proposed.
- One wonders how the participation of every congregation will be enforced, given our ecclesial system.
- This proposal feels as if we are meeting the passage in Galatians 2 that challenges us to take care of one another.
- We wonder about the adequacy of the number of participants from an actuarial point of view.
- We wonder about the legal status of such a plan in all of our states, given the varying regulations imposed by state insurance agencies.
- Will our experience enable us to differentiate between the cost of direct healthcare services versus mutual aid?
- This appears to address the injustice issues that often accompany those of race and class.

- We have been characterized as having a good concept or theology but with difficulty in implementation. This could fit that pattern.
- The resolution regarding an apology to Native Americans generated a great deal of emotion. The issue of healthcare should generate that same level, but it seems to be conspicuously absent.
- Let's not overlook the law of unintended consequences. Would we lose more churches? Would our numbers decrease significantly, with accompanying decrease in financial support? We should consider other ways of covering the uninsured.
- How do we see this lining up with other efforts underway, both nationally and in some states, regarding healthcare coverage?
- There is the hope that having such a churchwide plan would enable us to negotiate with providers.
- The success of the program will depend strongly on how it is presented and promoted. Gaining acceptance of the idea of an assessment for every congregation will be especially challenging.

Thursday morning, July 5, 2007

SESSION FIVE

19. Listening Committee Report #2

Daryl Byler and Yvonne Platts reported on behalf of the Listening Committee. See Listening Committee report on page for their report.

20. Churchwide financial report

Marty Lehman, director of financial development for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership, supplemented the written information contained in the delegate workbook. She referenced a new opportunity for individual giving that has been created through electronic transfer, described in a flyer distributed to the table groups. Jim Harder, chair of the Church Resources Committee of the Executive Board, highlighted a page of financial indicators, assisted by PowerPoint charts and graphs. Particular attention was given to the current status of Mennonite Publishing Network, which has undergone the largest transformation of all the churchwide agencies in the past six years. One significant development is the retirement of all debt, largely attributed to the sale of Provident Bookstores.

21. Congregational discernment

In the life of the church, issues arise that are deemed essential to our identity but can also be a source of pain and potential divisiveness. Careful congregational discernment is called for, especially when there are differing interpretations of churchwide documents, especially the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

Last March, the Executive Board received a proposed resolution that has been distributed as an addendum to the delegate workbook. The Executive Board and the Constituency Leaders Council have given attention to the proposal and have concluded that, while it is not appropriate to bring it to the delegate body for a vote, it is timely to present it for discussion here today. The statement under consideration is:

“...we call upon the leaders of Mennonite Church USA to discourage and member conferences to end the practice of disciplining or expelling congregations based on differing interpretations of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.”

Two conference leaders have been designated to present their perspectives on the statement: Lloyd Miller, Central District Conference Minister, speaking in favor of the statement; and Kurt Horst, Allegheny Conference Minister, speaking in opposition. Their presentations were influenced by the following factors:

- How we interpret key Biblical passages
- How we use churchwide statements like the *Confession of Faith*
- Differing understanding of roles of congregations, conferences and church discipline
- The value we place on congregational authority
- Relative merit of core values and maintaining boundaries
- Our knowledge about each other and how this influences trust.

Their presentations addressed the following questions:

- Is it appropriate to use the *Confession of Faith* as a basis to exert disciplinary action against a congregation?
- If it is exercised, what is the purpose of congregational discipline?
- Can we actually do spiritual discernment when one party uses power to cut off relationships and conversation with a minority who is also attempting to be faithful?

Table groups were instructed to address the following questions:

- What are healthy examples of how congregations and conferences have worked through disagreements about issues of Christian faithfulness?
- What advice do you offer to leaders about the statement?

Time was allotted for persons to raise questions, give comments, or express concerns. Time was sufficient for 33 tables to respond. Points of interest include the following:

- A third-party mediator may be needed to help us work this through.
- On this issue, it is important to take time to discern the mind of Christ.
- There is a need for some discipline, but we need to be aware of power plays and how they affect others.
- A unanimous opinion that some sort of discipline is necessary if we want to maintain our identity as a church of Christ. Some rules need to be in place.
- While discipline is necessary, expelling congregations may not be the way to go. When such issues arise, they should be taken to a higher authority in the church for processing.
- We have not had enough information or time for processing. This is an emotional issue and not a biblical one.
- When facing issues of variance, each party needs to trust the good faith of the other. Above all, we need to keep talking to each other, with clarity of articulation of the point(s) of variance, working at it positively in the spirit of *Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love*.
- Our discussions should be based on differing interpretations of the Bible, not differing interpretations of interpretations (e.g., the *Confession of Faith*). This is an important discussion.
- This is a very pastoral issue. It is doubtful if a group like this can give credible advice.
- We need to distinguish between disciplining and expelling; they are not synonymous. The *Confession of Faith* is an important disciplining tool.
- There needs to be a lot of respect for both congregational discernment and conference decisionmaking. Discernment takes time.
- While we are in favor of discipline, it needs to be applied consistently. We need to recognize the right to exclude if individuals take adamant positions that are counter to Biblical teachings.
- Discipline should be regarded as restorative rather than punitive.
- Much more time needs to be given to this kind of dialogue. We wonder how we can have mutual relationships if ending those relationships is one of the options.
- Conferences have a role in disciplining if done in the context of dialogue.
- Discernment processes that have been healthy and productive are framed in a context of discussion and listening to each other, and not attempting to reach a set decision.
- We want congregations to be welcoming places. We do well to remind ourselves that Jesus came for sinners. We should tread lightly on difficult issues, and above all, love each other.
- We do need some level of accountability and the *Confession of Faith* provides that. We should strive for unity among conferences.
- Discipline should be handled in the context of grace and scripture.
- There is value in receiving the opinion of the whole body, even when we disagree. Discipline and accountability are important, but exclusion is not good.
- A message from the youth: No one should be stopped from attending church. Barring someone from membership can keep them from being close to God. Membership should never be revoked for sinful living.
- We are a federation of area conferences with strong traditions of deeply-held practices. If we were to change the polity regarding area conferences, as is being proposed, it would cause deep division.

- Group members could identify strongly with both presentations, desiring to be an inclusive church that loves everyone. We search for answers about how exclusion fits. If we don't have discipline, we could become a church that honors militarism. We need more time, prayer and dialogue.
- This proposal goes back to our DNA and the politics that came together in the merger. We need to be cautious as we move ahead, remembering and respecting our heritage.
- We need to find ways that we can affirm both sides to begin the discernment process, by asking what are the gifts that each side offers. What do we do when a conference appears not to be following the *Confession of Faith*?
- The report from the Membership Profile causes deep concern, revealing that we seem to be getting away from things that are the very foundation to our Anabaptist theology and faith. There are some foundational things that should not brook variation. That calls for discipline, bathed in love.
- While this is an important discussion, there is relief that no vote is to be taken. There needs to be more consistency among conferences about what is important regarding discipline.
- If the rug is pulled out from under us, i.e., the *Confession of Faith* is not to be used as a tool for discipline, we need to provide an alternate way to deal with issues. Why give one article higher value than another? There is a need for discipline, and we do need to have something that defines who we are. The *Confession of Faith* may be too cumbersome to serve that role.
- There will always be differences in interpretation; that may bespeak the need for dialogue, but not discipline.
- Some believe that this body is too large to handle such an issue; at some point we have to stand up for what we believe. After discussion and prayer, there is need for discipline.
- We urge leadership to continue to be thoughtful and thorough in dealing with such issues. We do agree that we need to have discipline but there is no consensus on how far it should or even exactly what it means. We need to regard the *Confession of Faith* in its totality, not just focusing on homosexuality.
- When considering a controversial issue there needs to be a mutually-agreed-upon process for dealing with it. Perhaps we should be discussing the membership guidelines, that define congregational and conference authority regarding membership.

SESSION SIX

22. Discussion with youth

About 120 high school students from the youth convention joined the table groups, having been involved in their own sessions called *Speak Up!* Shana Peachey Boshart, coordinator of the program, explained the purpose of the *Speak Up!* representatives, assisted by Sarah Rohrer. They are bridge-builders between the adult and youth assemblies. As representatives, they can express their views on issues facing the church and talk about the church of their dreams. Concerns of youth include intergenerational connections, mentoring and making the church an attractive place for their continuing involvement. Dominant themes from the *Speak Up!* group reveals that the youth do have a vision for the church, and they want to be involved.

Time was devoted to table group activity where the youth representatives played an important role in becoming acquainted and in sharing their impressions from the *Speak Up!* sessions.

23. New global relationships – Congo

In close cooperation with Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Church USA is developing deeper church-to-church relationships with two Mennonite conferences in Congo. In March 2006, two Congolese Mennonite leaders visited several Mennonite communities in the U.S. In February 2007 a twelve-member delegation from Mennonite Church USA made a two-week visit to various areas in Congo, meeting with leaders and “people in the pew.” Marathana Prothro, interim communications director for Mennonite Church USA and a member of the delegation, gave a verbal and pictorial report of their experiences. The presentation was followed by comments from Pakisa Tshimika, associate general secretary of MWC based in Fresno, California, including greetings from MWC colleagues in the Strasburg, France, and Kitchener, Ontario, offices. He invited special prayer for our brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe who are living in incredibly difficult political and economic conditions.

24. Anti-racism

The Executive Board has activated an anti-racism team from among its members, to help implement the churchwide missional church priority of becoming an anti-racist church. Their work has been informed by the following statement:

We will honor the dignity and value of all Racial/Ethnic people in Mennonite Church USA, ensuring just and equitable access to church resources, positions and information as manifestations of the one new humanity in Christ.

Executive Board members Kim Vu Friesen and Daryl Byler reported on the work of the anti-racism team during the past biennium. An agency-wide racism survey was conducted, the results of which the team analyzed. That analysis included the creation of a study guide to help interpret the findings.

The anti-racism team's work included a session with the Constituency Leaders Council at its March 2007 meeting, led by Kim and Iris de León-Hartshorn, director of Intercultural Relations for Executive Leadership. At the conclusion of that session, the group affirmed three objectives and tasks for attention during the following three years:

- **Empowering leaders.** Define churchwide policy with anti-racism principles and make sure there is money/budget to back it up.
- **Connecting.** Build friendships at individual and congregational levels.
- **Prophetic Vision.** Ask "Who do we want to become?" and involve all parts of the church in answering the question.

Based upon the foregoing agenda, table groups were instructed to give attention to the following items:

- If God's mission is to set things right in a broken world and restore it to God's intention from the beginning, what do we believe God is calling the church to look like in the next five years? How can youth and young adults help move the church toward this vision?
- How do we build authentic relationships among individuals and congregations with different Racial/Ethnic identities?
- How can we support and empower church leaders to better implement this priority?

Written responses from table groups questions were collected. Verbal responses were invited, with the following observations offered from 23 tables:

- At the next biennial assembly, encourage all the Racial/Ethnic groups meet at the same time, with the same theme and same book, with opportunity for both joint and separate meetings.
- To build relationships, share potlucks, Bible school programs, church buildings, and worship services. Send leaders to anti-racism programs, e.g. Damascus Road, enabled by a budget provision so that leaders can attend.
- Since typically there is not much contact between Anglo churches and those with primarily Racial/Ethnic members, form and encourage sister church relationships with shared activities.
- In multicultural churches, white members must be a minority if there is to be authentic intercultural sharing and mutuality.
- White congregations should invite persons from Racial/Ethnic churches to come for a weeklong visit.
- White members need to take anti-racism classes to look at themselves. We need to let go of an attitude of "us versus them," and adopt an attitude of "all of us together."
- Include lay persons as delegation members on cross-cultural trips, and invite delegations from other countries. Be intentional about sending church members to visit persons from their congregation working on location in another cultural setting. Allow pastors to have sabbaticals and encourage them to spend some of that time in intercultural contacts.
- Be more intentional about including Racial/Ethnic persons in leadership positions.
- Change the punctuation in the anti-racism priority statement to: "We will honor the dignity and value of all Racial/Ethnic people. In Mennonite Church USA, ensure[ing] just and equitable access to church resources..."

- We need more education about white privilege and how this affects our ability to be open to and inclusive of other cultures and religions. We need to change to a posture that will enable us to be open and accepting and integrate other traditions and make others welcome.
- Our churches need to be more reflective of the diversity in their communities. One way to do this is through youth inviting school friends and hosting guests from other countries. Include those from other cultural traditions in such things as relief sales.
- Have an extra fundraiser to provide financial assistance for youth group members from a church with few resources to attend the convention.
- Be intentional about moving from toleration to accommodation, then embracing each other in celebration.
- Our hope is that younger people will become increasingly comfortable in crossing racial lines in developing acquaintances and relationships.
- A good analogy to adopt is to be color blind, being inclusive of all people. We need to work at accepting cultural differences and seeing the value of other cultures. One way to do this is to host international students wherever possible.
- A dream is to see MMA have more people of color employed, and to be more sensitive to people of color by including their pictures in publications. The Publishing Network needs to produce more relevant materials, since people of color comprise 20-25% of Mennonite Church USA membership.
- Consider doing a congregational self-audit by having an outside observer attend a worship service and report back on the level of hospitality and inclusiveness evident in the way members relate to each other and to outsiders.
- Other means of relating cross culturally could include mothers' groups; children's choirs; and partnerships between rural congregations (predominantly white) and urban (diverse or Racial/Ethnic membership).
- We wonder about the strength of our convictions when we see a steadily declining level of financial support for leadership training for Racial/Ethnic persons.
- Change the convention registration form so that instead of requiring registrants to check a box to make a contribution to help others attend, registrants would need to uncheck a box if they do not want to contribute.
- An important step in moving toward mutual relationships is to learn each other's language.
- Create a new name for the Executive Board anti-racism team that signifies what it stands for, not what it is against.
- We commonly heard about Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Is there a Mennonite Church Mexico?

25. Affirmation ballot

Ruth Suter, chair of the Leadership Discernment Committee (LDC), introduced the members of the LDC seated on the platform, and explained the discernment process that occurs in each biennium between the delegate sessions. Delegates were invited to suggest names for persons to be considered for any of the churchwide positions. The LDC will use the suggested names for the next biennium's discernment. Delegates were instructed to mark the ballots placed at each table, with the option of omitting selected names at the discretion of the voter. Of the approximately 780 ballots cast, 98+% were affirmative.

26. Access to healthcare – Part 2

Glen Miller resumed his role as spokesman for the groups' work on healthcare access. He drew attention to the study that a number of congregations have done during the past biennium in their use of the guide, *Healing Healthcare*. He supplemented his remarks with visual material.

The issue of advocacy to government for changes in the healthcare system was identified at Charlotte 2005 as a priority for the following biennium. A handbook was created as part of the implementation of this priority. Daryl Byler chaired a multi-agency committee that produced the handbook, distributed to all delegates. He reviewed its contents, which underscores the need for action together. One such action calls for letters from church members to Congressional leaders in the next biennium.

The proposal introduced yesterday (see Minute #18) that an insurance plan be developed that will guarantee coverage for all pastors and church workers, was presented for further consideration. The results from

yesterday's table group responses showed an average approval rate of 8.04 from 77 tables, with a range from 5 to 10 where 10 signifies strong approval.

Karl Sommers, MMA staff member with long involvement in healthcare issues, spoke to several questions raised in the written responses of yesterday. The first is the matter of eligibility. As of now, the target group is all pastors who have an employment agreement with a congregation, with some agreed-upon minimum number of hours of work yet to be determined. The proposal requires that those covered by other insurance (e.g., as a dependent of spouse or Medicare) participate with some assessment yet to be determined.

We need a favorable risk profile for the plan to be viable. The creators of this proposal believe that 100% participation of all those eligible will ensure that viability. MMA is committed to providing the best value possible, even if it means contracting with other insurers for part of the coverage package.

Rick Stiffney, Executive Director of Mennonite Health Services Alliance, spoke to the matter of participating groups, if this plan is to include the participation of all of the affiliated agencies and organizations. It will be essential that all the parts agree to join in, in a gesture of recognizing what is for the good of the whole. Our polity historically does not empower us to mandate coverage by all, nor to impose sanctions on those who do not participate. It will have to be regarded as a *movement* acceptable to all, including the compromises involved.

Table groups were instructed to address the following question:

- If the resolution is approved to move forward to find a way to insure pastors and church workers, what resources will you find helpful to talk to congregational decision-makers?

Verbal responses at the microphone include the following points:

- Jim Schrag's introductory remarks of yesterday should be recorded and made available to delegates.
- It is vital that this proposal be couched in mutual aid language. Is there a danger that this will be another COMB in 5 years?
- Our assessment needs to include attention to end of life issues.
- There is a perception that the Mennonite church has a history of starting something and then walking away from it; if true, we will have to change our history.
- One resource we are asking for is sufficient time to process this proposal, especially in modestly staffed conferences. We need an advocate for each conference—a person passionately engaged and able to communicate. Mutual aid and stewardship dimensions will take time to reshape our thinking.
- Our task is to save the forest, leaving the care of the trees up to the “rangers” (staff). Mennonites have led the country in pioneering humane mental health care and Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs; we have faith that we can do something in general healthcare. It will take an extensive and innovative educational campaign to re-convince our members about the value of mutual aid.
- A documentary-type DVD with lots of personal stories will be essential to “selling” our congregations. We need a concise summary of the rationale and key points of costs and benefits, along with statistics and numbers to back up the existing crisis. Information about what other church bodies have done or are doing will be useful. The crisis we identify regarding the shortage of pastors will become even greater if healthcare coverage is not available.
- We hear heartbreaking stories of accumulated debt by pastors due to prolonged or repeated illness. How will pastors of smaller churches feel about receiving a benefit when many, if not most, of their members do not have the same? If COMB did not work or is not working, what is our confidence level that this new proposal will?
- It will be a stretch to convince our agencies and schools to change from a currently successful and viable plan to one with question marks. It will take a capital campaign type effort to succeed in providing the needed financial underpinning.
- Conference staff do not know enough about the proposed plan to serve as effective advocates. There is confusion about the mandatory aspects, when we read language about opting in or opting out. Is it all or nothing, or not?
- We might take some lessons from Amish communities about the practice of mutual aid.

- Congregational decision-makers will balance mutual aid and theology with economic realities. Have we thought about the cost of doing nothing?
- If the plan is not affordable, congregations will look elsewhere. Will we have a big enough pool to negotiate lower costs with providers and drug companies?
- Will pastors' families be included?
- Our own enthusiasm for the plan will be a factor in convincing others back home.
- How can we "sell" mutual aid as being an important part of our missional identity in inter-congregational relationships?
- We will need a detailed cost/benefit analysis that can be communicated to members. There are only so many dollars in congregations. Will this plan result in taking funds away from conferences, missions, etc.?
- We cannot avoid the reality that some insurance principles are at work here. Premiums pay claims, and claims determine the amount of premiums. If we cannot mandate that all congregations participate, can we at least mandate that all 21 area conferences do so?
- We need a chart that compares benefits in this plan with other national plans.
- Given mistrust in the healthcare system generally, we are faced with the need to build trust in this plan. That includes transparency in giving bottom line information.
- This has implications for how congregations will calculate their membership numbers. We should give a new push for congregations to use the study guide on *Healing Healthcare*
- A congregational decision about participation should go beyond a Benefits Committee or Finance Committee. We are talking about a decision based on mutual aid concepts, not just bottom line issues.
- Resources are needed to help us continue or increase our advocacy for public policy changes with our Congressional representatives.
- We need to show that our administrative costs will be competitive with those in the public sector.
- What will happen to pastors who join the plan, and then leave?
- What do we do with pastors who are undocumented?
- Since COMB seems to be fading, what will we do in the meantime between now and the implementation date which may be 2-4 years away?
- Larger congregations should consider developing a partnership with a small congregation and include that pastor as part of their own staff.
- We need information on why people have been dropped by MMA from previous insurance plans. What about post-retirement coverage? State regulations?
- Would like to see a profile of pastors eligible, those who have coverage and those who do not, to share with congregations. There is concern that this plan would be available to pastors in tent making situations whose pastoral duties are essentially volunteer. Will the cost to congregations include underwriting factors?

Glen concluded the session with an expression of thanks to all for their work. He noted several recurring themes that the coordinating group will take into account. As we hear stories of people suffering, we ask, is doing nothing an option? Even in our household of faith, we hear the voices that say we don't want to spoil something for the many in order to benefit a few. We hear questions about whether this is just another COMB (a comb-over?).

Keith Harder, director of ministerial and congregational leadership for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership, responded that COMB will be folded into the new plan. We envision a standard high deductible plan with a possible lower deductible option. This new vision is that we will be doing it together, in contrast to the diminished level of participation in COMB. The only way we can continue to provide health insurance for pastors and church workers is if we do it together.

A timeline for additional work will be influenced by the outcome of the vote to be taken tomorrow (see Minute #29). It cannot be stated too often or too strongly, **ACTING TOGETHER IS THE KEY**. An affirmative vote tomorrow will be just the beginning of an extended process that will require the time and attention of delegates and others. It will be a collaborative process that will involve denominational and agency staff, area conference staff, and local congregation leaders. The hoped-for result will be the development of a plan that will be acceptable to congregations. A great deal of advocacy will be required all along the way.

Friday morning, July 6, 2006
SESSION SEVEN

27. Greetings from Mennonite Health Service Alliance

Roy noted that Mennonite Church USA has developed a covenant relationship with Mennonite Health Service Alliance, an association of more than 70 Mennonite-related healthcare agencies. This continues the legacy established during and after World War II, when Mennonites made a significant national contribution in the area of mental health treatment. Rick Stiffney, President of MHS Alliance, brought greetings on behalf of the Alliance. He was joined on the platform by members of the board. A primary challenge faced by member institutions is to strengthen the integration of faith with service.

28. Israel/Palestine Report

From May 11-24, the Executive Board led a delegation of churchwide representatives to Israel/Palestine to talk with Jews, Christians and Muslims about how North American Christians can support peace building in this region. Members of the delegation reported, in word and picture, their impressions and concerns that came from setting foot in this troubled area of the world.

Resulting from this first-hand visit, delegation members are urging the institutions and congregations of Mennonite Church USA to get involved in the Middle East in ways that promote peace and provide hope for people who are oppressed. They have prepared "An Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations" in printed form, distributed at the delegates' tables. This letter includes a series of recommendations, calling us to act as people who seek to be aligned with God's purposes for Israel/Palestine as we best understand them. The delegation members communicated their sense of increased urgency in letting our voice be heard as agents of reconciliation.

29. Access to healthcare – Part 3

Following the previous days' presentations, time has been designated for action on the proposal brought to the delegate assembly. Jim Harder, chair of the Resolutions Committee, presented the proposal and moved its adoption.

Action 5 M/s/c 1. That we affirm the Healthcare Access work completed since the Charlotte 2005 Delegate Assembly, including the Stewardship of Health and Public Policy Advocacy resources included and referenced in the following pages of this report.

2. That, as a denomination, we are committed in principle to providing basic health insurance for all eligible pastors.

3. That we request the Executive Board to oversee the development and implementation of a plan whereby all congregations of Mennonite Church USA participate together in an arrangement that covers all of our pastors with basic health insurance.

Of 752 ballots cast, 93.4% were in favor.

Questions and comments regarding the proposal are summarized as follows:

- This appears to be a Health Savings Account type proposal, whose intent is to limit usage. A \$6,000 family deductible will limit access to preventive care. Isn't there some credibility in failure, in recognizing that we are unable to meet an overwhelming national need?
- Some understand that this proposal authorizes the Executive Board to develop a plan to be approved at the next biennial assembly, Columbus 2009. Others understand that development will begin immediately if the proposal is approved, with implementation as expeditiously as possible. Which is it? **Response:** The latter. Jim Schrag compared it to a four-lap race. Action today is Lap 1. Lap 2 will be to get responses from the universe of potential participating groups (institutions, agencies, conferences). Lap 3 is processing by the CLC and conference leaders. Lap 4 is the congregational vote of acceptance. All have to be taken in sequence, without knowing the final outcome at the outset.
- Sounds ideal for a plan that covers all congregations, but are we too congregational for this to be acceptable?

- Will this plan be portable as pastors move around? Currently, MMA plans are not available in some states. **Response:** As foreseen, this will be completely portable and available in all states.
- Comments have been heard about the failures of MMA and COMB; the truth is that those are our failure, not theirs! What is the cost if we fail to do anything?
- Health Saving Accounts do allow greater freedom in choosing how to spend healthcare dollars. We need to do more study and look at options in healthcare plans.
- As the process continues, one proposes a lockstep approach. First, find out if institutions are open to participating; if not, stop the process. In that event, look at what it would actually cost to provide mutual aid assistance equivalent to health coverage for pastors not now covered. Consider a totally alternative plan outside of insurance based strictly on mutual aid, with an appeal to the church to raise the needed funds. The complexity of the process involves enormous amounts of time and money even to get a plan set up. The process should allow us to back out before committing millions of dollars that would be spent before we have determined feasibility.
- Conferences with sufficient staff can help move the process forward. Since this plan will require an additional investment of time at the area conference level to assist the denomination in selling it, there is concern for those conferences that do not have staff time available.
- The proposal identifies only eligible pastors as participants, but our language has been more inclusive of other church workers. Which is it? **Response:** There is an assumed requirement that all pastors will join. Others will be eligible to join, but their participation is more optional (although the implied philosophy is that the majority of those will participate).
- This plan is a step toward addressing priority issues of justice, anti-racism and calling leaders.
- Unless other subsidy support is available, this plan means nothing to poor pastors who cannot afford the front-end deductible. It could take away coverage now available through conference premium support plans.
- Can we invite other Anabaptist groups to participate, in order to enlarge the group?
- Our expectation is that this plan will cover preventive healthcare, as now provided by COMB.
- What does Lap 4 in an earlier analogy mean? **Response:** If less than 100%, enough congregations to form a critical mass will have to join in, or it cannot be implemented. We have not predetermined the level of participation needed.
- Some define preventive care as more than an annual checkup. They would include nontraditional forms of treatment, including acupuncture, therapeutic massage, chiropractic, etc.
- Acknowledging that “Our healthcare system is broken,” this is our attempt to be faithful and do what we can do, not knowing what the U.S. healthcare system will become.
- If this is a race, let’s run in such a way as to win it.

30. Resolution on National Identity

Jim Harder reported on behalf of the Resolutions Committee, which has received a variety of items for consideration. One that has met the requirements for presentation as a resolution relates to the matter of national identity. See Minute #37 for the text and action taken.

31. Situation in Zimbabwe

Attention has been drawn to the dire situation facing persons in Zimbabwe, growing progressively worse. Ed Rempel, member of the Resolutions Committee, shared information that has come to the committee, calling for a stance of solidarity with Zimbabweans and the 30,000 members of Anabaptist groups, including the sharing of spiritual and material resources. MWC officials have addressed communications of concern to international bodies, calling for changes in current policies that are causing such hardship and suffering. Repentance of exploitive behavior is called for, along with prayers for peace, justice and reconciliation. Help to refugees from Zimbabwe will be needed. Acts of support in other ways are urged.

32. Situation in Colombia

Gay Brunt Miller, member of the Resolutions Committee, informed delegates of letters of concern that have been written to Colombian and U.S. political leaders and she invited delegates to sign. Letters of support and solidarity for Colombian Anabaptist Christians have also been written and are available for individuals to sign to

show their support. Gay reported that a letter dated July 1 from Colombian Mennonite leaders has been received, which she read in part. A serious recent development was the theft of two computers that included identities of persons who have been involved in some protest activities. Other computers and items of value were left untouched, emphasizing the obvious targets of the assailants that has given rise to fear and apprehension about their intentions. Persons are available to answer questions that delegates have, and websites were listed that provide access to additional information.

Friday afternoon, July 6, 2007

SESSION EIGHT

33. Listening Committee Report #3

Jane Hooper Peifer and Noel Santiago reported on behalf of the Listening Committee. See Listening Committee report on page [redacted] for their report.

34. Young Adult report

Jeremy Yoder and Roxy Allen began the report with a screen presentation that reflected the ways that young adults are dealing with questions of faith and faithfulness. This included a feature on a program called Bike Movement in which a number of young adults biked across the country, engaging persons in churches in conversation at stops along the way. They expressed appreciation for opportunities to become involved in leadership activities, including serving as delegates at this assembly. They are looking for a church that practices its beliefs consistently and with integrity. They are open to being mentored, even as they are regarded as equals within the church. They seek to answer the question “How do we live, worship, and continue to cultivate relationships in the midst of acknowledged differences?”

Marlene Frankenfield described the “call wall” that has been in place during the week, on which participants are encouraged to add the names of persons who they believe have the gifts and potential to be pastors. A video presentation featured interviews with persons who suggested persons for pastoral ministry.

35. Action on Christian Churches Together

Information was presented earlier (see Minute #13) about the desirability of having Mennonite Church USA become a full member of Christian Churches Together. André Gingerich Stoner briefly summarized the information presented in greater detail earlier, referring to the information in the delegate workbook. He acknowledged the receipt of a number of questions and comments from table groups following the earlier presentation. A page was distributed that identified the church bodies that have already joined, and those, like Mennonite Church USA, that are in some stage of decision making. We have the task of identifying with one of the five family groups of churches with which we would be aligned, recognizing that we do not neatly fit into any of them. Joining CCT does not mandate that we declare that choice immediately. It is possible that we would join with other peace churches in a caucus during the annual meetings. Our likely representatives to attend the annual meeting include the Executive Director, Associate Executive Director and/or the Director of Interchurch Relations. In summary, this is a modest but important way of demonstrating our desire to be in relationship with other church bodies.

Action 6 M/s/c that Mennonite Church USA join Christian Churches Together in the USA. Wayne Hochstetler/Susan Balzer

Vote by show of hands revealed large majority, with a few opposed.

36. Situation in Iraq and Immigration Issues

Jim Harder noted the passage of a resolution at Charlotte 2005 regarding Iraq. Steve Brown, member of the Resolutions Committee, gave a refresher on the content and intent of that resolution, the text of which is included in the delegate workbook. Further explanatory information on this and other related issues is included in a printed document, *Faith, War and Government*, distributed at the tables.

Susan Mark Landis referred to the statement on immigration that was adopted at Atlanta 2003 and reviewed the range of activities that have been undertaken since then. As peace advocate for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership, Susan has been involved in contacts in Washington D.C. and elsewhere. A page has been

distributed that provides some possible action steps that individuals and congregations can take in an effort to bring a rational voice to what has become a highly emotionally charged political issue within the Congress.

Time was allotted to table groups for prayer on behalf of the issues raised and the human face of each of these who need our intercession and response.

37. Resolution on National Identity (concluded)

As a follow-up to Minute #30, Jim Harder noted some assumptions behind this resolution. This will be a 2-4 year project to implement, guided by a designated task force with the likely development of some congregational study materials. Engaging our Canadian and Mexican neighbors, and perhaps other Mennonite bodies, will also inform the process in helpful ways. Next summer there will be a joint meeting in Winnipeg (July 8-10, 2008) with Mennonite Church Canada, dealing with the theme of living faithfully in a global reality as a contrast community.

Action 7 “We, the delegate body of Mennonite Church USA gathered for San Jose 2007, have been challenged to consider both the promise and peril of living faithfully as Christians in the USA. As a recently-created national body of Mennonites, we call upon the Executive Board to formulate a process that helps us explore our identity as Mennonites living in what many consider to be the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. We ask for resources that help us live faithfully in Christ-like ways, sometimes at odds with our national culture, acknowledging that no culture is either completely redeemed or completely fallen.”

Of 659 ballots cast, 564 yes (85%), 95 no, 13 abstentions.

Discussion related to the resolution produced the following observations:

- This sounds similar to an existing statement as part of a global community, and one of our priorities regarding global connections and thus might appear to be redundant. **Response:** Our concern is not so much that we do not already have global connections, but that we are a fairly new national church, and our history does not have us calling ourselves American Mennonites. We need to understand better what that means, with the rights, privileges and responsibilities thereof. We can't answer those questions by ourselves. This resolution calls on us to do work on a national identity that has not yet been done.
- It is hard to imagine a more important topic for our focus. So many other things hinge on it, so it needs our attention. As we consult with other national church bodies, do not overlook our brothers and sisters in Colombia, who have given analytical and pastoral thought to the question of what it means to be a faithful church in a [difficult] national context.
- We can also learn from Canadians in their work on contextualizing their existence in their unique setting. Learning from the Northern Ireland experience can also serve us well. They can teach us much about living in an age and state of terrorism.
- Some of our congregations have welcomed persons from other backgrounds, who come with a strong sense of cultural allegiance to the country. It becomes difficult to explain what it means to be a transformed community. The work related to this resolution can be a helpful resource in such situations.
- A primary motivating focus of the Anabaptist radical reformation was the awareness that the established church had become complicit with the power structures of society. Without focused attention to the issues contained in this resolution, we can become unwittingly complicit with power structures.
- There are already massive amounts of resources available that deal with issues of identity. We should by no means take four years to implement this.
- This is largely a pastoral task. We should encourage Executive Leadership to make maximum and expeditious use of existing resources, and encourage pastors to move ahead quickly.
- If a task force is to be activated, young adults should be involved from the beginning.
- We derive a lot of benefits from living in an empire society. We don't fear being broken in on and hauled off to jail, or having our computers stolen. We have a lot of responsibilities, and this resolution identifies the perils involved. A study can help us see the positives and negatives.

- As Americans we feel as if we corner the market on nearly everything. This is an opportunity to stop making assumptions about what it means to be Mennonites, and to listen to our international brothers and sisters about how they perceive the American church. What are the implications of being the wealthiest nation in the world? Our study should include hearing from Mennonite churches in Asia and Africa.
- We would do well to couch more of what we are doing in the language of the Bible. The engagement of empires (principalities and powers) is an inherent part of that language.

38. Open microphone

Sharon Waltner expressed the view that the church should take time to celebrate, and we need to hear each other's stories. In this final open microphone time, delegates were invited to share those things that have brought joy to themselves and others. Samples include the following:

- Working on the MDS house project this morning, one brother learned all about “deconstructing walls.”
- Mission support teams in Berne, Indiana have enabled workers to be in significant outreach in Kosovo and Spain. The congregation and multiple mission agencies have teamed up for effective missional activity.
- A church in Michigan with an average attendance of 30 has 14 persons here in San Jose.
- A pastor noted that their congregation has been able to take advantage of a grant from Dollar General Stores (available up to \$2,000 for literacy projects) to hold English classes for Spanish speakers. Other congregations may want to consider this program.
- We make an impact in the cities when we come to assemblies; we regret that we have no Mennonite Church USA congregation in San Jose. Let's think about planting a church a year ahead of an assembly when we meet in Mennonite-free venues!
- Gulf States Mennonite Conference thanks all those who responded so generously to their plight following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- One church received seed money from Mennonite Church USA and is now serving supper two evenings a month to the community, inviting both neighbors and members to develop friendships in this setting.
- In Salina, Kansas, a church member cleaned up a trashy vacant lot “across the tracks” and planted a peace garden. One child who came by often was uncommunicative at first but by the end of the year, his interaction and touch with the earth revived his ability to speak.
- A Harrisonburg, Virginia church raised \$6,000 and sent a delegation to Kenya to assist in the construction of sand dams, as part of a \$2.4 million project of MCC.
- Connections with Canadian Mennonite enabled contacts with Mennonites whose plowing practices were endangering a particular species, brought to our attention by a professor in California.
- Forks Mennonite Church in northern Indiana is celebrating its 100th anniversary, and is hearing some wonderful stories of God's faithfulness and leading.
- A Mexican pastor who migrated north in 1984, found the Lord, a wife, and hope, and gives thanks for the opportunities offered to him here, with the assistance of MCC.
- Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind. is starting a new MVS unit, with a house and one volunteer.
- In Seattle, a church is working to develop relationships with homeless neighbors. They conducted a memorial service when a homeless person died, and recently received into their fellowship a person who was living in a parking lot.
- *A church in Schaumburg, Illinois, has welcomed three members from Zimbabwe, and recently sent \$630 to that beleaguered country, with additional funds being raised in cooperation with Mission Network and MCC.
- A church in Cincinnati, Ohio recently held a garage sale of donated household furnishings, using the proceeds to support a health clinic for low-income persons.
- Illinois Conference is opening a center for missions in southern Illinois where there are no Mennonite churches, and are next looking at establishing outreach in the western part of the state.

39. Resolution of Thanks

Action 8 We, the delegates, church members and guests gathered here at the San Jose 2007

Assembly, the third gathering of Mennonite Church USA, express our deep thanks and appreciation to all the dedicated and hard-working people who have made this time together possible.

We thank the Pacific Southwest and Pacific Northwest Mennonite conferences for their welcoming spirit, hospitality, and for sharing their speakers, musicians and others who have inspired us. We thank the convention program and worship committees for their vision and careful planning; the Executive Leadership staff for their attention to detail; and the many volunteers from across the country for their gracious service to the church.

We thank speakers and leaders of music, worship, Bible study and seminars for their spiritual inspiration and for equipping us for God's work in our congregations and communities.

We thank the dedicated volunteers who have nurtured our youth and children during these days. We thank those who organized the *Speak Up!* and YODA conversations with youth and youth adults.

We thank our moderator, Executive Board members and Executive Leadership staff, agencies, schools and their staff members for interaction with us here and for carrying out the ongoing work of the church.

We thank the San Jose Convention Center, food service and hotel staff for their assistance.

We thank our congregations, conferences and associate groups for making this Assembly a priority and for sending us, the delegates.

And we thank God for the leading of the Holy Spirit in providing wisdom and strength before and during these days.

Moved by the Resolutions Committee on behalf of the assembly. Passed enthusiastically with a standing vote of applause.

40. Assembly in 2009

Ron Byler reported that the next churchwide assembly is scheduled for June 29-July 4, 2009, in Columbus, Ohio.

41. Transfer of moderator leadership

Jim Schrag called Moderator Roy Williams to the podium, in recognition of his service during the past four years. Jim gave expression to the debt of gratitude owed to the College Hill Mennonite Church (Tampa, Fla.) that has enabled Roy to take the needed time away from his congregation to tend to the work of Mennonite Church USA. He thanked Roy on behalf of the Executive Board, Constituency Leaders Council, and the entire assembly for his sacrificial servant leadership.

Roy gave his expression of gratitude for the opportunity of serving, in particular his close working relationship with Jim. He acknowledged the effective work of the Executive Board and its Executive Committee. He presented incoming moderator Sharon Waltner with a picture of a John Deere tractor, recognizing her strong rural roots in farming in South Dakota.

Jim invited Sharon to the podium, observing the ways in which she has already proved to be an effective leader for the CLC and Mennonite Church USA. She was welcomed warmly with a standing ovation from the delegate body. Sharon spoke of her passion for Mennonite Church USA, and her vision to be that of listening, to really hear and understand God's spirit speaking through God's people. She invited all to join her in both listening and praying for the church and the world that badly needs the people we can be.

Jim introduced the incoming Moderator-elect, Ed Diller from Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, noting the ways in which Ed has already served effectively in churchwide roles, primarily with Mennonite educational institutions and agencies. Ed accepted this assignment with words of affirmation and joy for the privilege of serving the church in this way.

42. Closing

Worship leader Janeen Bertsche Johnson led in a closing song, *Now Thank We All Our God*. Roy gave concluding remarks, including an expression of gratitude to his congregation, College Hill Mennonite Church, and its other pastoral staff who have freed him for his service with Mennonite Church USA. He explained his own pilgrimage that brought him to the Mennonite church that welcomed him at a time when others would not.

His parting challenge is not to forget to do all we can to bring all God's children into God's family of faith. Roy then led in a prayer of benediction.

William R. Zuercher
Recorder

Glossary of Abbreviations Used in These Minutes and Listening Committee Report

| | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| CCT | Christian Churches Together |
| CLC | Constituency Leaders Council |
| COMB | Covenant Mutual Benefit Plan |
| EB | Executive Board |
| LDC | Leadership Discernment Committee |
| MCC | Mennonite Central Committee |
| MDS | Mennonite Disaster Service |
| MHS Alliance | Mennonite Health Services Alliance |
| MMA | Mennonite Mutual Aid |
| M/s/c | Moved/seconded/carried |
| MVS | Mennonite Voluntary Service |
| MWC | Mennonite World Conference |
| YODA | Young Adult Delegate to Assembly |