

**DELEGATE ASSEMBLY MINUTES**  
**Mennonite Church USA Biennial Assembly**  
**June 30-July 5, 2015**  
**Kansas City, Missouri**

**Tuesday afternoon, June 30**

**1. Training for table leaders**

Moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht welcomed all the table leaders for a one-hour training session. She introduced process consultants who will lead this session, Larry Hauder and David Brubaker, assisted by Jane Hooper Peifer.

The Table Group Covenant Litany was repeated together. A feature this year is the use of a circle process for speaking and listening, with three core commitments. A stone was placed at each table which is to be held by the person speaking, passed along to the next speaker if needed to keep the process moving forward.

Larry reviewed a paper, *Guidelines for Table Group Leaders*. He drew attention to the various items at each table. He noted that we are combining both *Roberts Rules of Order* and Biblical Communal Discernment—two processes that are not always in harmony. He then outlined the seven steps that will be engaged for each resolution that will be introduced during the week.

Ervin Stutzman, executive director, drew attention to the attendance sheet at each table, which will form the official record of attendance. He reinforced the importance of feedback that is generated during table group discussions, the most helpful form of which is a summary of the discussions submitted to staff.

Jane introduced the activity of spiritual communal discernment, which process will be used throughout the week, including as part of each resolution. A beginning assumption is that each person present is a valued child of God.

In summary, David noted three things to be emphasized: The leader's job is to facilitate, for which the circle process is a tool; a recorder will need to be designated first thing; and the tone that is set is more important than the words that are uttered.

David described the process of determining consensus that reveals the sense of the group short of taking a vote. All delegates will have green, yellow and red papers that may be used at points during the sessions to determine the sense of the meeting.

The three leaders did a role play to illustrate how to use the circle process with a talking piece, including how to deal with disruptive behavior during table discussions.

David and Larry will be available by phone or text during the week if a table group leader feels the need for some intercession during a particular discussion.

Larry noted that there is a process by which amendments can be made to a resolution, in consultation with the officially-appointed Resolutions Committee.

After a break, the remaining delegates were seated at their tables.

**2. Opening and testimony (Mennonite Mission Network)**

Moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht invited all to this important gathering for the church, referring to the theme, *On the Road*, with Luke 24 as the foundational scripture passage. She cited examples of racism and violence since two years ago, hoping that we can manifest the fruit of the Spirit as we have gathered here. She expressed the belief that God has a surprise for us during these days, with

the prayer that we can embrace that. She concluded her remarks with a passage from I Cor. 13, calling on us to witness as a peace church, living in love.

Joy Sutter introduced a time of worship, with Luke 24 and *On the Way* being highlighted during the delegate sessions, which will also feature our Mennonite Church USA program agencies. Today's scripture selection was verses 14-33.

Representatives of Mennonite Mission Network gave a testimony, led by Stanley Green, Executive Director. The testimony focused on the witness of the church in Benin, and in particular the Benin Bible Institute, whose ministry has been recorded in the latest *Missio Dei* booklet, *3-D Gospel in Benin*, copies of which were distributed at the tables.

Stories were shared by Luke Gascho, speaking on behalf of a partnership with Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana; Janet Stucky, nutrition consultant to Bethesda Hospital; and Paulin Bossou, director of La Casa Grande children's home and a graduate of Benin Bible Institute.

Stanley provided a gift to each person present—a card that can be exchanged for a copy of *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice*, at the MennoMedia booth. He concluded with prayer.

### **3. Pastoral letter**

Elizabeth, Moderator-elect Patty Shelly, and Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, read a pastoral letter issued by the Executive Board calling for us all to be a faithful missional church, acknowledging its failures to provide the needed leadership in dealing with divisive issues, and leading us toward to unity.

Elizabeth drew attention to an unoccupied table, the Christ Table, with various symbols that call attention to Jesus as our center.

Patty referred to the II. Cor. 4 passage depicting Christ as the light, drawing attention to a wood sculpture by John Gaeddert on the Christ Table, called *Growing Together*, created especially for this assembly.

See Minute #11 for a follow-up action.

### **4. Table introductions, affirmation of group covenant, welcome of guests**

Ervin invited all the table group members to engage in a time of introduction, using the "I Am" table group sharing guide provided. After the sharing, all were invited to repeat together the Table Group Covenant Litany.

Elizabeth introduced all the persons in positions of responsibility prior to and during the assembly. Others recognized included first time delegates and area conference ministers. A number of special guests will be introduced and participating throughout the week.

### **5. Adoption of agenda and rules for the meeting, introduction to resolutions and other decisions to be made**

Elizabeth drew attention to the printed agenda for the week. She gave some comments on the resolution process that has resulted in five specific resolutions that will be introduced, discussed and acted on during the week. Motions will be approved by simple majority votes, although there will also be opportunity for determining consensus without vote.

Elizabeth noted that the minutes from the delegate sessions in Phoenix 2013 were distributed in the fall of 2013, and called for formal action on this record of discussion and actions.

**Action 1 M/s/c to approve the minutes of delegate sessions in Phoenix in 2013.**  
Wilma Bailey/Richard High

Ervin drew attention to the Executive Summary of the 2015 Survey of Kansas City Delegates in Mennonite Church USA, completed by 637 delegates. This will not be the subject of scheduled discussion unless brought up during open microphone time.

Patty reviewed a series of formal rules that apply to gatherings such as this. She recognized delegates appointed in a variety of ways: congregations, area conferences, Racial/Ethnic groups, and Executive Board members. She cited some special rules related to possible new resolutions and amendments, both of which must be received and processed by the Resolutions Committee.

**Action 2 M/s/c to adopt the agenda and special rules.**  
Clyde Kratz/Brenda Martin Hurst

Patty introduced Hannah Heinzekehr, Director of Communications and Marketing for Mennonite Church USA, who described the #WeAreMenno series of stories that are based on the three criteria adapted from Palmer Becker's treatise: "Jesus is the Center of our faith; Community is the center of our life; and Reconciliation is the center of our work." Stories have been posted on the website since February, and will continue indefinitely, with a new focus on congregational stories.

Tomorrow, there will be a #Greenout feature, with invitation to all to wear green as a symbol of creation care and our unity.

**6. Stories of church-to-church partnerships**

Don Kempf and Linda Shelly related a story of a partnership between Central Plains Mennonite Conference and the churches in Ecuador and Colombia, which partnership began in 1998 and has flourished since then. Elizabeth offered a prayer of blessing in Spanish for this and other partnerships. Patty concluded the session with an invitation to participate in a prayer walk scheduled this evening from 6-7:15 p.m.

**Wednesday morning, July 1**

**7. Opening and testimony (Mennonite Health Services Alliance)**

The worship team introduced the worship theme, *On the Way*, focusing on the healing ministry of Jesus, with several references to the ways healing occurs in our own lives.

Rick Stiffney, president of MHS, provided the testimony, noting that the member agencies work diligently at integrating faith with their wide variety of healing ministries. He recited stories that demonstrated how the surprises come in acknowledging Jesus' healing ministry in their settings: Bluestem Communities in Hesston/North Newton, Kansas; Sunnyside in Sarasota, Florida; and Kings View in the central valley of California. He concluded with a video depicting the wide variety of ministries under the MHS umbrella.

**8. Teaching/activity on Biblical/Communal Discernment**

Elizabeth introduced the topic of Biblical/Communal Discernment, with teaching by Ervin Stutzman, who has written on the subject. He began with the identification of the principles of such discernment.

The term “discernment” has the feel of jargon, not commonly understood or articulated. It is nearly a synonym of “discriminate” or “distinguish.” We are faced with the need to determine if it is *this* or *that*. For example, physicians spend an inordinate amount of time in discernment in order to decide on a diagnosis. We spend a great deal of time throughout our lives in identifying the fake versus the real. In many such circumstances, we need the assistance of people around us who have greater knowledge and expertise.

The scripture is full of examples of discernment between good and evil; our own Confession of Faith also makes reference to it. When the issue is a serious moral matter, we struggle with understanding where truth lies. The puzzler that often comes, is the motive *this* or *that*? The ultimate truth is that Satan cannot make a move that Jesus in the end cannot counter. There is nothing that can happen that God will not redeem in the end. Much of discernment is figuring out what God is up to in this situation.

Ervin drew attention to a paper in the packet *Guidelines for Biblical/Communal Discernment*. He spoke to the section explaining why we use Biblical/Communal Discernment, then turned to the essential elements of such discernment. In our meeting this morning, we are organized into small communities (tables) of discernment which will practice it throughout the week. Ultimately, we are here to celebrate what Jesus can do among us as we talk together.

Ervin next highlighted the steps in discernment. In our process during these days, we will describe the resolutions, have some reflections, engage in table discussion, determine where there is a consensus, and finally vote.

Jane Hooper Peifer led the time of reflection, acknowledging that we do not yet know each other very well, having just been introduced yesterday. We bring a wide range of experiences and perceptions about how to go about doing discernment. We come with a wide range of ideas about all kinds of things, and from very different life contexts. But we also come with faith that the Spirit can bring all of these variables into a sense of purpose and commonality. After some deep breathing exercise, she then read passages from Psalm 139.

Jane instructed table groups to discuss the following question: What is the commitment that you hold that brings you here today? She concluded this part of the session with prayer.

## **9. Discernment regarding the Resolution on Endless War**

Elizabeth introduced the 7-step process that will engage us with the resolution. She highlighted the content and intent of the resolution, pointing to a visual symbol stationed at the front of the room—a replica of the Reaper drone.

Patty Shelly, on behalf of the Executive Board and the Resolutions Committee, made the following motion, which requires no second.

### **Action 3      Moved that this resolution be adopted.**

Two persons spoke who represent the bodies that developed the resolution: Ruth Harder, lead pastor of Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City, Kansas; and Clair Good, church planter in Lancaster Mennonite Conference. They identified a number of factors that convinced them that it was timely to develop the message embodied in the resolution.

A brief time of silence followed the foregoing explanation, followed by a prayer led by Bishop Leslie Francisco of Hampton, Virginia. Table groups next spent a brief time in considering the issues surrounding the resolution.

The following amendment was offered by Table 40, to be added to the resolution as action step #4:

**Action 4**      **The delegate assembly of Mennonite Church USA therefore calls for an immediate ban on research, development, production and deployment of robotic and autonomous weapons, including military drones, and associated Artificial Intelligence technologies—placing them in the same category as chemical and biological weapons.**

Peter Lumsdaine, on behalf of Table #40 moved, and Guy Smoker seconded, the foregoing amendment, **which was carried.**

**Action 5**      **Moved that this resolution be adopted as amended.**  
**The motion carried.**

Open microphone enabled the following questions or statements for clarity:

- The intent of the term “ecumenical” is to embrace all faith groups in addition to Christianity.
- This resolution is comparatively weak, especially in contrast to the one related to Israel/Palestine questions. We should boldly and insightfully proclaim the evil of endless war.
- The wording is helpful as we talk about why and the results, especially as an entrée into discussion with other than Mennonites.
- We wonder what it means to be conscientious objectors in situations that involve more technological tactics.
- As stated in the resolution, it is literally true that the U.S. president determines how, when and whom to kill.
- This resolution gives rise to new language. There are three ways to be in the world: pretender, dissenter and amender. This resolution speaks to the pretender who denies the reality of a new kind of warfare.

The session concluded with prayers by Sue Park-Hur and Duane Beck.

## **Wednesday afternoon, July 1**

### **10. Leadership Discernment Committee report and vote on ballot**

Patty introduced Edie Landis and Paula Brunk Kuhns, members of the Leadership Discernment Committee, who reported on its work during the past biennium, resulting in a slate of names for delegate action. Patty gave instructions about marking the ballot, either individual names or the slate as a whole.

Elizabeth reported that the vote was 728 in favor of all persons named; 40 ballots with individual names checked; and 2 abstentions.

### **11. Response to pastoral letter**

Clyde Kratz spoke on behalf of ten persons from three conferences who communally discerned that a response was in order to the pastoral letter referenced in Minute #3.

Clyde moved to approve the following resolution, with second by Harold Miller:

**Action 6** As a delegate body, we wish to express our deep appreciation to the Executive Board and their staff for the careful and thoughtful leadership processes that they put into place during this past biennium.

We acknowledge the challenges, confusion, and uncertainty that they have faced as they sought to provide non-anxious leadership in this time of turbulence that surrounds our church life associated with the pressures of our cultural challenges.

As part of our covenant with you as our leaders, we acknowledge your sincere confession represented in your pastoral letter to us. We offer to you mercy and our sincere forgiveness.

As we navigate the uncertainty of our future together, we welcome your continued transparency with the challenges you are facing and your commitment to clarity of leadership practices.

We seek to walk together knowing the challenges, but trusting your leadership practices to guide us into the work that lies before us.

The motion carried.

## **12. Engaging with *Our Purposeful Plan***

Elizabeth called on Ervin to report on the work having been done during the past biennium on *Our Purposeful Plan*. He worked through the Plan, beginning with our missional vision and purpose. Seven priorities were noted, which provide guidance for the performance of staff. Twelve missional character traits were referenced. An environmental scan was followed by the identification of next steps on the journey, and alternate routes to arrive at the destination.

Ervin focused on the last of the next steps and alternate routes: *Resources or Regulation*, lines 785-805. Table groups were instructed to share which of the ten items most closely touch their church, and whether they agree with the message contained in lines 788-789: “We do not, however, see ourselves as a highly centralized denomination organized to regulate the life of conferences or congregations.”

Ervin turned to a document in the packet, which is a report to delegates on the *Plan*. He called on the following staff persons to report on exciting new developments related to the priorities:

*Christian Formation* - Amy Gingerich, anticipating a new hymnal

*Holistic Witness* – Stanley Green, describing a new book, *Fully Engaged: Missional Church in an Anabaptist Voice*, underwritten by a donor

*Leadership Development* – Jenny Castro, reporting on the Women in Leadership conference

*Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation* – Carlos Romero, reporting on the Hope for the Future events primarily involving leaders of color

*Church-to-Church Relationships* – André Gingerich Stoner, speaking to connections to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Table groups were invited to review the 32 goals described in the document, and name the ones that most closely touch members of their congregations.

Ervin referred to another document in the packet, *Goals for Our Purposeful Plan in the 2015-17 Biennium*. These contain 32 goals that will be the focus of staff time during the next biennium. The following persons reported on specific items of note:

*Christian Formation* – Rachel Gerber, reporting on The Gathering Place

*Holistic Christian Witness* – Mauricio Chenlo, describing plans for a Church Planting Summit

*Stewardship* – Beryl Jantzi, commenting on a survey of pastors to be conducted, underwritten by a \$1 million Lilly grant, related to financial issues unique to pastors

*Undoing Racism* – Iris de León Hartshorn, explaining the Doctrine of Discovery which gave legitimacy to confiscating land and exterminating aboriginal people

Table groups were instructed to identify which one or ones of the 32 goals named for the next biennium, most closely touches the members or their congregation.

Open microphone time yielded the following comments:

- Note was made that some past goals have been removed from the previous versions of the plans. Those that have been completed are included in a so-called milestone document as a permanent record. A few were deemed to be unrealistic and were withdrawn.
- An appeal was made for better preparation of our pastors and others to be able to articulate the gospel message.
- A priority of creation care is left off the list.
- The Leadership Development goals do not adequately represent the acute need for pastoral training and preparation. Overall, we are understaffed with pastoral leaders.
- More resources for Christian/spiritual formation are needed.
- There is a call to focus on peacebuilding as holistic witness, in order to strengthen our core identity.
- A strong desire was voiced for Anabaptist resources for Sunday school teaching.
- We recognize with regret those among us who are marginalized, and who cannot afford the cost of participating in conventions.
- When a congregation or individual wants more assistance with working on a specific priority, they can send a request to Ervin or Shelley Buller, executive assistant, and the request will be forwarded to the proper person. An effort will be made to upgrade the website so that such contact information is readily available.
- Concern was expressed that the voices of those on the margin, many of them Racial/Ethnic minorities, are not well heard, and some are considering withdrawing. We need to seek a deeper kind of unity that values the more traditional voices. Such persons should help set the agenda for our meetings.
- A new pearl under Christian Formation could relate to ministry to college students with emphasis on those things that appeal to young adults.
- Active pastors need training in personal financial management, perhaps even more than the goal of including this in a 3-year seminary program that many will not access.
- We will do well to rely more on the Holy Spirit as we seek spiritual direction.
- We have a unique opportunity to reach out to immigrants and refugees, about which we could do more.
- A broad definition of leadership development would be helpful, including ways of supporting and developing them.

- Our stewardship concerns should go beyond ourselves to deal with the increasing disparity of wealth across racial lines. We should use our resources to be better neighbors.
- Hispanic churches have felt invisible. There is the absence of a pearl that relates to Hispanic/Latino churches.

Elizabeth emphasized the fact that the work on *Our Purposeful Plan* is a joint effort among congregations, conferences and the national church.

### **13. Parliamentary procedure issue**

Dick Thomas noted that parliamentary procedure is one tool in the tool box. He reported that the motion to amend the Resolution on Endless War was made by a non-delegate. Since the action was approved by the delegate body and is owned by them, the action will stand. Therefore, no corrective action is called for.

Patty noted that we are still learning in our attempt to combine the more formal *Roberts Rules of Order* and Biblical/Communal/Discernment, and may thereby make some missteps, for which forbearance is appreciated.

### **14. Discernment on Resolution on Israel-Palestine**

Patty introduced the resolution on Israel-Palestine, and called on Elizabeth to place the resolution on the table. Elizabeth noted that the resolution comes from the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and thus requires no second.

#### **Action 7      Moved that resolution on Israel-Palestine be approved.**

Tom Harder and Femi Fatunmbi provided some background information that led to the formulation and support of the resolution. There is some general agreement that actions of the Israel government and military are largely responsible for the injustice that exists today, and have been for decades. The resolution is not anti-Israel nor anti-Israeli; it is pro-peace. It addresses acts of violence that result in further such acts.

Jane Hooper Peifer led the time of reflection, including a time of silence, prayer and the Lord's Prayer spoken together. Table groups were instructed to spend time discussing the resolution.

Open microphone yielded the following comments:

- There is concern that this speaks to only one area of conflict, when there are many in the world.
- Several expressions of concern about withdrawing support of companies, such as Caterpillar, which employ sizable numbers of our members. Does the church ask them to leave that employment? If so, are we prepared to provide a living for them? For some, a yes vote implies such commitment.
- There was a call for a more humble voice than what was reflected in the resolution.
- If this passes, we should be prepared to have conversations with our Jewish neighbors.
- Any mention of Israeli Christians is missing. Boycotts will adversely affect Palestinians, many of whom work in the settlements. We wish for something that is more bridge building.

- Israelis are being characterized as brutal males. Normal Israelis have disappeared from the discourse.
- The resolution feels slanted. It names just one country and does not name others doing violence against Palestine.
- We wonder what Menno churches can do here in the U.S. to reach out to Jewish neighbors. We need to reflect on our own history of anti-Semitism.
- Such resolutions by other church bodies have virtually ended the Jewish/Christian dialogue. Our experience in the Northern Ireland “troubles,” staying in touch with both sides, is instructive.
- If this passes, where does this go from here? With whom will it be shared? What do we do now if we pass it?
- It seems hypocritical of us to demand peace in one part of the world while we are engaged in war elsewhere.
- The casualties are overwhelmingly Palestinian, with 80% of land controlled by Israel. As Mennonite Christians we need to target the entity that has perpetrated the most violence.

Table groups were instructed to test the level of support. Green, yellow and red sheets were raised to indicate a sense of consensus, revealing about 1/3 division in each category.

The moderator invited expressions from three persons: one in favor of tabling; one opposed to tabling; and one with major reservations.

**Action 8      Moved and seconded that we table the motion, have it rewritten, and bring it back at next biennial conference.** Guy Smoker/Gary Nabors

**A straw poll revealed again a 1/3 division. A ballot vote was called for, with the following results: Yes—418; No—336; Abstain—26.**

Suggestions that we do the redraft and consider it yet during this assembly were heard, but the judgment is that there is not sufficient time for the Resolutions Committee to do its deliberative work. In addition, the wide range of views expressed in the open microphone time, indicates the need for more time and deliberation.

### **15. Hopi Mission School announcement**

Carlos Romero reported on behalf of an Executive Board appointed Task Force, led by Mennonite Education Agency, to work with the Hopi Mission School, which has operated under Mennonite auspices since 1951. They were to gather information and facts about concerns that were being expressed including possible financial misconduct and other relationship issues with Mennonite connections. Note was made that the former General Conference Mennonite Church, and now Mennonite Church USA, has been granted access to 40 acres of land, as long as a school or mission is operated.

A number of conversations were scheduled with school administration and local governing board, both oral and written, and other contacts made. After many such attempted contacts, some unsuccessful, the Task Force recommended to the EB that pending further notice and clarity, any individual wishing to support the school should do so through Mennonite Church USA or the Hopi Mission School Foundation. Information on the current status was shared with federal, state and

tribal agencies involved in education on the Hopi reservation. The present school board after June 30 has no permission to continuing operating the school.

The situation is delicate, requiring much prayer and discernment going forward. Mennonite Church USA is committed to the mission of the school, and does not plan to walk away from that ministry. There is a call for prayer for students and families, for the staff and faculty, the board and present leaders, the Task Force and EB as we walk further on the journey, discerning the next steps.

A time of silence was observed, concluding with a prayer led by Jane Hooper Peifer.

## **Thursday morning, July 2**

### **16. Opening, testimony (Everence) and preparation for discernment**

The theme this morning is *On the Way to Integrating Finances and Faith*, with Everence as the featured agency. Ken Hochstetler, President and Chief Executive Officer of Everence, gave the testimony, looking at Luke 24:19. He noted that Everence is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, now as a successor to the former Mennonite Mutual Aid, serving over 25 denominational groups in alignment with Anabaptist values. An exciting new development is an invitation to apply for a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment, focusing on pastoral compensation issues.

### **17. Framing of resolutions on polity and practice**

Elizabeth recognized an action of the children at the convention, who distributed handprints as members entered the room, with a promise that they are praying for us. She reflected on her own process during the past two years, in deepening her understanding of what she believes, speaking as is appropriate, and holding things lightly.

Ervin provided some background to polity issues, in particular the process of discerning the order of the presentation of the resolutions, deciding that the ones related to Forbearance and Membership Guidelines should be included on the same day. He noted that Executive Board acts on behalf of the church in between biennial conventions. Now that we are in session, delegates have the opportunity to affirm or question decisions of the board. In particular there is some sense that the two resolutions are in conflict with each other. The board has determined that the two together articulate the polarities that we identify—freedom and accountability. The hope is these will bring clarity to our common commitments, in an effort to hold our brothers and sisters together.

The Membership Guidelines resolution is a way of stating our theological intent—indeed God's intent, as our teaching position. The resolution on Forbearance speaks to the reality of what is necessary for the church to be able to function in today's context.

### **18. Discernment on Resolution on Forbearance**

Patty explained that the resolution has been processed and approved by the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and moved to adopt the resolution, which requires no second.

#### **Action 9      Moved that we adopt this resolution.**

Megan Ramer and Charlotte Lehman gave some background information on behalf of the sponsoring churches, resulting in the development of the resolution, recognizing the diversity that exists among us but expressing the hope that we can remain together.

Jane Hooper Peifer called for a time of deep personal reflection, beginning with the question, what am I grateful for this morning? Then, is there something I need? Table groups were instructed to share their hopes and/or fears for this day. Jane concluded this time with a prayer of confession, seeking God's mercy, followed by words of assurance.

Elizabeth instructed the tables to engage in a time of discussion of the resolution prior to determining the level of consensus.

Open microphone yielded the following comments:

- Mennonite Education Agency regards this resolution as having a positive outcome for them. If adopted, this will form an important denominational document.
- The Hispanic pastors of Dallas, Texas, regret that a statement they made applicable to their area conference has been taken out of context in multiple references across the country. These pastors affirm the Confession of Faith position on marriage.
- Does it not matter where we go as long as we go there together? It creates hypocrisy, when we say one thing and do another.
- Mennos have always been a fractured church in our search for purity. Some deeply motivated by compassion, some by truth, and others by mission. We will fulfill God's purposes most faithfully if all of those are united in one church.
- This is an extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate that we can live in tension; we cannot agree on many things. God moves within us in tension.
- We are at a high intensity point in our discussion. If we can keep on talking, and find a center, we should be able to live together. We may have to work forever, but it will be worth it if we can stay together.
- Does not forbearance name what has been happening in our church in a variety of issues: nonresistance, divorce, women in ministry?
- The Hispanic Mennonite Church has had a strong position, since St. Louis 99, understanding marriage to be between a man and a woman. Regretfully, a majority of their churches are ready to withdraw if this passes. But they are not homophobic, nor do they hate those in same sex marriage.
- Two brothers in the same state are far away from each other geographically and theologically on this issue, but they love each other and believe that the church would be diminished without both perspectives. The resolution will be as important as we make it, if we can accept that all are trying faithfully to walk with Jesus with the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- The new song we learned on Tuesday evening, entitled *Together*, is a testimony to what can happen to us.
- A man who works with "recovering" gay men has learned from them that forbearance only allows sin to continue. He can find no exceptions in scripture.
- We need to be reminded that God is bigger than Mennonite Church USA and bigger than the decisions we make in this room. We are a broken body, and this resolution is an opportunity to trust the work of the Holy Spirit.
- This resolution will allow us to be an example to others that there is a third way, and we don't need to be afraid.

- When we talk about unity, we should remember that we are part of a global church, among whom Mennonite Church USA is a small component. This resolution does not reflect the position of most of the global Anabaptist church.
- Our church will be diminished if we lose any of our brothers and sister, diverse as we are. Together we can still be church.
- It is a heartfelt desire to affirm that all people are created in the image of God, they are not malformed. We are not ready as a church to move completely forward but this resolution helps.
- We should remember that we Gentiles were at one time separated from Christ, excluded from Christ, without hope, without God in the world, but now in Christ we have been brought near by His blood. He has destroyed the barriers, the dividing wall of hostility. Forbearance destroys those barriers.
- He has not always agreed with others on many things, but can genuinely put his arms around people who see things differently. He has misgivings about this resolution, but encourages all of us to embrace and love.

Elizabeth instructed tables to take a reading on consensus, with one color only per table to be displayed. Virtually unanimous response revealed readiness to vote, so ballots were cast, with the following results: **Yes–581; No–228; Abstain–10; total 819. The motion carried.**

## **Thursday afternoon, July 2**

### **19. Testimony (MennoMedia) and preparation for discernment**

Russ Eanes, Executive Director of Menno Media, provided the testimony, beginning with the distribution of a complimentary copy of *Leader* magazine. His focus was on how MennoMedia does its work on a daily basis, using the practice of praying the office, which connects them with Christians everywhere.

### **20. Discernment on the resolution On the Status of the Membership Guidelines**

Elizabeth explained that the resolution has been processed and approved by the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and moved to adopt the resolution, which requires no second.

**Action 10      Moved that the resolution be approved.**

Yvonne Diaz and David Sutter, on behalf of and as members of the Executive Board, gave background to the development of the resolution which comes from the Executive Board. They acknowledged that this resolution speaks to the polarization that exists in our culture and in our church regarding same sex marriage. It is presented as one way of moving forward amid the widespread diversity we are all living with.

Jane led the time of reflection, beginning with words from Psalm 46, ending with the words, “Be still and know that I am God.” She noted that adopting this resolution, along with the one on Forbearance, would hold in tension a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” context.

Table groups were invited to share personal experiences in which opposing views needed to be held simultaneously. This was followed by a time for discussion of issues and questions related to the resolution.

Open microphone yielded the following comments:

- The Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) has not yet had opportunity to discuss the implications of this resolution for its future work. That will happen in future meetings. Several comments raised questions about the place of the CLC pursuant to this resolution.
- Comments confirmed that approving this resolution would be reassuring to those congregations that voted against the Forbearance resolution.
- Several questions were raised about what happens to the Membership Guidelines if the resolution is not approved.
- Only one paragraph from Part III of the Guidelines was moved to the new polity document.
- Numerous questions were raised about the effect of the 4-year “moratorium,” with several voices opposed to this inclusion. Some felt it would provide some stability. If this passes, it does not prevent continuing conversations on human sexuality questions; it removes the specter of changing denominational polity during this interval.
- Based upon some reactions to area conferences’ decisions that are at variance, there is question about how much trust exists across the church.
- Is this primarily a statement about our ideals about sexuality and marriage, or is it a question of discipline regarding those at variance?
- There were several expressions of confusion between Pearls #1 and #4.
- There is some confusion about the relationship between this resolution and the one on Forbearance. If we manage them helpfully they will serve us well. If not, we might fly off into space.
- It is possible we will not really understand the reasons, whether it passes or not.
- What one calls living in tension, another calls living in contradiction.
- CLC brought together two groups with differing polities. The resolution appears to give unintended authority to CLC.
- Regarding continuing conversations: Would they be voluntary? Peer to peer? Who initiates? Who leads the process? To whom do participants report? Why not initiate conversation about our theological convictions before there is variance? Could we also call a moratorium on punitive action for 4 years?
- The two resolutions seem to work well together, but there seems to be a disconnect in the language between the two.
- Could a constituency group be considered, consisting of persons from the LGBTQ population?
- How are power and authority shared among area conferences, CLC and the Executive Board?
- This resolution appears to be more about regulation than resources.
- The resolution would be stronger if there was clearer organizational structure.
- Is there a parallel process such as MCC that would help us identify core values that pull us together?
- As we live together, there is hope that we can look to the fruit of the Spirit rather than running away from something. Let’s move toward them.

In response to a number of questions about what happens to the Membership Guidelines if this resolution does not pass, Ervin referred to the sheet with Frequently Asked Questions: "...the Executive Board will take it as a mandate to free congregations and area conferences to work out their own practices without specific accountability to the commitments stated in Part III of the Guidelines. In any case, the Executive Board will take into account the degree of support or nonsupport for each resolution in the voting process, as well as the specific feedback from table groups."

Table groups were asked to consider whether they are ready to vote on the resolution. The response indicates readiness of a majority of the table groups to cast ballots.

**Results of the vote: Yes—473, No—310, Abstain—28; total 811. The motion carried.**

After the results of the ballot were announced, Elizabeth communicated a profound sense of lament, sadness and fear. In the face of this, she recognized that the Spirit of God was present. What does it mean to pass such a resolution? Not only the pain of what follows, but learning to trust in God, who is walking with us. We do have a Mennonite Church, and we say to God, we trust you: people of all colors, ideologies, philosophies, economics, and sexual orientation. There has been, and still is, an incredible amount of prayers interceding for us. Now the Executive Board has a mandate to continue working at these documents in humble ways—ways that will not divide us. In the Spirit of God, we can come together. We have a majority and a minority. Some day perhaps we can emulate the Quakers and uphold a practice of true consensus, giving up much, including our fear.

## **21. Feedback on A Shared Understanding of Church Leadership.**

Elizabeth drew attention to the recently revised polity document, and called on Ervin to provide some background. He was joined on the platform by Nancy Kauffmann and Terry Shue, staff persons who work with ministerial credentialing.

Terry began the presentation, noting that this current document replaces one in use since 1996. It had become evident that much had changed since 1996, calling for a several-year process of revising it, including several discussions involving area conference ministers. One notable change was the transfer of the statement that disallowed credentialed ministers from performing same-sex covenant ceremonies, from the Membership Guidelines to the Shared Understanding.

Nancy commented that this book represents a "labor of love" which attempts to reflect healthy relationships that should and do exist with credentialed ministers. The first section describes the theological background of leadership. Three other sections address the matter of call, accountability, pastoral ethics, issues of power, and how to deal with broken relationships.

This is not intended as a rule book, but is descriptive of our best understanding of healthy relationships between pastors and their congregations.

Willard Metzger, Executive Director of Mennonite Church Canada, joined the team on the platform to address issues from the Canadian perspective. They began a process in 2008 called Being a Faithful Church, with specific attention to human sexuality issues. Their delegate body will consider the document at its biennial assembly in 2016. Because of the difference in timing of dealing with sexuality issues, there is one section of the polity document that applies only to Mennonite Church USA. Their focus is how they can maintain the unity of the church in the face of significant disagreements related to same-sex relationships, with a strong commitment to avoid

splitting the church. Mennonite Church Canada has approved the Shared Understanding as a working document, subject to future modification.

Terry reported that the Executive Board has acted to approve this polity document, but solicits counsel from the delegates. Table groups were instructed to discuss the following: 1) To what degree is this document something that your leaders are aware of and use in your local setting? 2) Is page 70 helpful and necessary (a reference to the prohibition of performing same-sex covenant ceremonies by credentialed pastors)?

## **22. Report from Listening Committee**

The Listening Committee gave a preliminary report, with a final report to be given on Saturday. See Addendum 1 for the text of the report.

The session concluded with a time of prayer at tables and a benediction led by John Murray, a member of the convention prayer team.

## **Friday morning, July 3**

### **23. Discernment on Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse**

After opening songs, Elizabeth introduced the resolution, noting that we are dealing with sensitive issues, and we have persons among us who have been victims and are in the process of healing, calling for extra sensitivity in our discussion and comments.

Ervin joined Elizabeth to communicate a message of confession and lament on behalf of the entire church for the lack of recognition and action that could have made a difference in the suffering, often in silence, of those who have been harmed.

Patty explained that the statement, which has the effect of a resolution, has been processed and approved by the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and moved to adopt the resolution, which requires no second.

**Action 11      Moved that the resolution be approved.**

**A standing vote declared the motion to be approved.**

Linda Gehman Peachey and Ted Koontz provided some background information on the development of the resolution, including the involvement of a churchwide Discernment Group. A spirit of repentance and lament has characterized the entire process that has resulted in the resolution, which looks forward in a commitment to do preventive work in implementing the action steps included.

Jane began the time of reflection with a prayer, including a recognition of the high level of emotion surrounding the discussion and approval of the two resolutions yesterday. She invited all to a time of silent prayer, followed by a spoken prayer of repentance, forgiveness and restoration.

Elizabeth instructed table groups to engage in table discussion of the components of the statements and its commitments to action.

Open microphone yielded the following comments:

- Power imbalance is also common between male and female pastoral leaders, not just where children are involved.
- Recognizing the reality of sexual harassment on our college campuses, it is very important for parents to reinforce to their children they can say no, starting well before college.
- We need strong statements on offender accountability.
- In addition to “tell[ing] the truth about sexual abuse, we need to add “...to hear...” including voices from same-sex oriented persons.
- Harassment can also be same-sex in nature, needing continuous attention and intervention. It applies to all, not just women and children.
- Domestic abuse could also be included in the statement.
- Pastors and church leaders are mandated reporters of abuse.
- Our first priority as a Christian body is to support the victim.
- This is a good start, but does not go far enough. We don’t see any consequence for church leaders who don’t follow procedures, or do cover up, and there is a risk of moving predators around. More public accountability is needed to identify perpetrators.
- A sexual abuse document needs to address the perpetrator. Some of what we address in the document can leave the perpetrator in place. We can’t have an approach that just cares for victims.
- Help is needed to understand what wholesome sexuality means. Will Mennonite Church USA provide financial assistance to churches to cover the costs of background checks of prospective pastors and other staff leaders? The reference to manageable schedules is a distraction; it is about power and control.
- Not including LGBTQ and denying full access to involvement in the church constitutes institutional violence.
- The statement does not include any direct reference to John Howard Yoder’s abuse. A suggestion is that the Executive Board draft a resolution addressing the victims of his sexual abuse, for which a suggested outline for a resolution was voiced.
- A survivor admitted that pieces of her heart are still trashed. She needs the church to let her know she has a voice and is not filthy. She pled for open hearts that listen to persons like her.

Table groups were instructed to assess the level of consensus regarding the acceptance of the statement.

**Action 12**      **Moved that the resolution be sent back to the committee for reworking, to be brought back tomorrow for action.** Tyler Culler/Luke Yoder

**Motion failed.**

The session concluded with a Litany of Response, based on Psalm 5:2-5, 8-9, led by Carolyn Holderread Heggen and Ervin Stutzman, with response from the audience.

## **24. Alan Hirsch teaching on missional church**

André Gingerich Stoner introduced special guest Alan Hirsch, whose participation with us has been underwritten by Mennonite Mission Network. His assignment is to address different forms of the New Testament church to follow Jesus.

He began by encouraging us not to be a fearful people, but a redemptive people, bearing witness to what God can do. He wants to speak to the challenges that can confront marginalized people. We have lived in settings in which the church is regarded as a privileged body that tragically has done some very evil things. But in the past 50 years we have experienced extremely rapid change. Our world is like a pile of sand, with every grain being interconnected.

So much of our behavior is influenced by our history and tradition. This has implications for how we define leadership now. We have to be open to new paradigms, thinking radically differently. We don't have to invent new truths; our current truths are remembered and retrieved.

Alan began with a passage from Ephesians, verses 1-16, which he divided into three components:

- 1) Verses 1-6 provide a focus on unity
- 2) Verses 7-11 describe a fivefold ministry, APEST (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers)
- 3) Verses 12-16 describe Christian maturity.

He then defined each of the APEST (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers):

Apostle: a person intent on getting the message out—being sent. He maintains the integrity of the core ideas—the guardian of the DNA.

Prophet: the one who hears God's voice, speaking on God's behalf. He feels what God feels—a vertical relationship.

Evangelist: proclaims the gospel, the narrative of the church.

Shepherd: A provider of care for the flock.

Teacher: One who provides instruction.

The ministry of Christ is expressed through the church, moving out in all directions. Jesus exemplified all five characteristics. If we want to be an extension of Christ's ministry, can we do it only by being Shepherds and Teachers? The evidence is that this is what we are trying to do as the church today. We are attempting to accomplish God's mission without using all of God's methods. We are admonished to attain to the fullness of Christ, just as He carried it out. Jesus lives his life in and through his people, and we shortchange that if we are only Shepherds and Teachers. We need to be able to express what God intends for us in this day and time, not with wisdom from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. We need to use Biblical language to express Biblical truths. The future of the missional church depends upon the involvement of the APE, not just the ST.

## **Saturday afternoon, July 4**

### **25. Opening and testimony (Mennonite Education Agency)**

On the journey to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus is the theme for this final delegate session, with Mennonite Education Agency providing the testimony. A call to worship acknowledged the important ministry and witness of our Mennonite schools.

Carlos Romero, Executive Director of MEA, provided the testimony, calling to our attention the multiple times that the scriptures refer to God and Jesus as teacher, including many references in the Old Testament. In the Gospels, we learn the many ways in which Jesus taught his disciples, preparing them to take his place. Our Mennonite educational institutions are in partnership with the church to carry on a significant teaching ministry in Christ-centered community. Students are called to be Christ followers, peace seekers, community builders, rigorous learners, service givers, and difference embracers.

## **26. A statement of support for our Palestinian and Israeli Partners in Peacemaking**

Prior to introducing the resolution, Elizabeth recognized those persons, both progressive and traditional, who have surrendered their name tags as a symbol of their decision not to remain with our denomination. Those badges were placed on the Christ table as a sign of both sadness and love.

This week has been a time of lament, and a time of joy, as two additional resolutions have been prepared and are submitted for consideration and action. Jane led a time of reflection, asking when during the week we have felt God's near presence, and when we have experienced the fruit of the Spirit. She spoke a prayer, acknowledging God's sustaining presence.

The statement submitted for discussion and action is as follows:

*As delegates of Mennonite Church USA, we express this statement of support for our Palestinian and Israeli partners in peacemaking; we confess that we have much work to do. Over the next two years, we will strive*

- *To understand more fully the social, economic, and political context in which you live, work, and pray;*
- *To reflect on our own theological and political understandings of the land of Israel-Palestine; and*
- *To discern ways we can seek a more just future for all peoples of Israel and Palestine.*

*During this time of learning and discernment, we pledge to pray for peace and act for peace.*

Patty explained that the statement, which has the effect of a resolution, has been processed and approved by the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and moved to adopt the resolution, which requires no second.

**Action 13      Moved that the resolution be approved.**

**A standing vote confirms that the motion carried unanimously.**

Rod Stafford provided some background on the creation of this resolution, arising out of earlier action to table a resolution on Israel-Palestine (see Minute #14 ).

Limited open microphone expressions encouraged personal visits to this area for as many as possible. Appreciation was voiced for the conciseness of the statement, and the call for various agencies and organizations to provide resources for further discernment.

Following the vote, André Gingerich Stoner introduced Reverend Alex Awad, a Palestinian Christian who teaches at Bethlehem Bible College, who addressed the delegate body. He expressed his appreciation for this action, having worked with Mennonites for many years. His first acquaintance came through a towel-wrapped Christmas gift from MCC when he was a boy in

boarding school. Later he became the director of a Mennonite School in Beit Jala. The Mennonites and Quakers began their connection to Palestinian people in 1948, providing medicines and relief supplies, which generosity has been continued since, as a demonstration of the principles of Jesus' love.

He urged all of us to examine the Kairos document, and understand its message as a positive way forward. He also encouraged participation in the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions process that some have adopted. He identified a book that he has written that is available for sale that also provides illumination on the complex issues in the Holy Land. He concluded with a prayer of blessing and a call for peace.

## **27. Resolution on Expressions of Lament and Hope**

Pastor Ken Thompson spoke on behalf of the African American Mennonite Association which prepared a statement decrying the violence in Charleston, South Carolina, resulting in the recent shooting death of nine persons while participating in a prayer meeting in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The statement makes reference to other acts of violence in many other communities across the country. The statement concludes with the following Resolution: *Therefore, Mennonite Church USA covenants together to pray for the victims' families, the local ministries in the communities where these atrocities occur, and the lives of our brothers and sisters living under the threat of violent, malevolent, and menacing spirits of hatred and oppression.*

*Mennonite Church USA and all its parts will continue to build awareness and direct resources and energy to continue anti-racism education among our constituencies and to stand in solidarity with the African American community as destroyed properties are rebuilt and ministry occurs to broken bodies and souls.*

Patty explained that the statement, which has the effect of a resolution, has been processed and approved by the Executive Board and Resolutions Committee, and moved to adopt the resolution, which requires no second.

### **Action 14      Moved that this resolution be approved.**

Pastor Ken Thompson read the content of this statement, after which table groups shared their thoughts and reflections.

### **A standing vote revealed unanimous support for the resolution.**

Brief open microphone time resulted in the following:

- A suggestion that the Executive Board write a letter to the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, recognizing their redemptive actions in response to the violent death of nine members during a church service.
- A suggestion that Mennonite Disaster Service consider reconstructing one of the burned-out churches that occurred after the shooting. [Note: word has been received the Mennonite Disaster Service has already begun investigating this possibility.]
- Note was made that the Church of the Brethren has established a rebuilding fund as a possible example to be followed.
- A word of caution was expressed that care be taken in using the term 'covenant' in this and other resolutions, possibly substituting 'pledge' or 'promise'.

## **28. Unscheduled open microphone expressions**

### A. Expressions of lament

In response to a request for five minutes of open microphone time, a number of persons, representing those who are advocates for the LGBTQ persons in the church, voiced a variety of laments and deep sorrow, citing sections of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.

### B. Iglesia Menonita Hispana

Madeleine Maldonado, representing Iglesia Menonita Hispana, reported that IMH has begun a discernment process regarding its own future, including its relationship to Mennonite Church USA. It will conduct a survey of all member churches, declaring November to be designated a month of prayer and fasting. They will schedule an extraordinary general assembly later in the year to determine its future relationships.

## **29. Address by César Garcia of Mennonite World Conference**

Elizabeth introduced César Garcia, Executive Director of Mennonite World Conference, who was invited to speak on behalf of the global Mennonite Church. He spoke in Spanish, with translation by Paul Neufeld Dyck of Bluffton University.

He began his address with an expression of appreciation in English, acknowledging that it was a blessing to be present, even during times of difficult discussions and conflict.

We are people on the way, as the convention theme reveals, as well as the MWC theme of *Walking with God*. About 7000 persons have registered to date, but there is space for another 2000.

The idea of being on the way suggests that we still have a ways to go—we have not yet arrived even though we are tempted at times to believe that we have, citing a personal example of such self-assurance as an immature church planter. He has many stories of failure, even when he thought he had the right answers. He then began to re-evaluate his approach to evangelism.

He cited John 15:7-10 as a reference to the joy that comes from remaining connected to Jesus. But we admit it is difficult to imagine finding joy by reading a book. It is tempting to think that formulas can lead us to truth and unity. He recalled reading a book, *Never Ending Story*, which was alive, bringing joy and hope. But the Bible brings much more than any book. We conclude that we need to approach people as Jesus did.

First, a theo-dramatic approach (in contrast to rationalistic) and the scripture becomes a script. The children of Israel became the actors, until Jesus entered the scene with the disciples being part of the drama, leading to the final act.

Second, an imaginative approach. Jesus ignored some Biblical traditions, but reinterpreted them as a foundation for a new message. We must follow His example. We do not need to try to convince people, but put on the cloak of Jesus and act like Him. This constitutes walking on the path, not having all the answers, not needing to convince others.

He concluded with two pictures: the Bible as something concrete, and finished; and a picture of an open Bible that has loose pages moving to a center. We are called to enter into the story in a way that ends in a coherent message. Mennonite Church USA is called to creativity in finding new ways to be a faithful church.

## **30. Report from Mennonite Central Committee**

Patty introduced Ron Byler, Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee U.S., who gave a report from this important worldwide service organization, to which Mennonite Church USA relates. MCC is part of a network of worldwide relief, service and mission organizations. He expressed appreciation for the strong financial and prayer support that comes from individuals, congregations and conferences in addition to the national church.

An important cooperative effort is now underway as a five-year initiative called Come and See, providing support for teams from area conferences to visit Israel and Palestine in order to get a first-hand introduction to the complex issues that militate against the effort to achieve peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.

### **31. Report from Listening Committee**

Tina Begay, Carmen Horst and Byron Pellecer provided the second report on behalf of the Listening Committee. See Addendum 2 for the text of the report.

### **32. Report from Anti-Racism Monitoring Team**

The Anti-Racism Monitoring Team presented their observations as they have monitored the delegate sessions and seminars throughout the week. See Addendum 3 for the text of the report.

### **33. Installation of new moderator**

Elizabeth gave a parting message, recalling a 1999 communication that referred to the move toward integrating two Mennonite bodies, believing it to be a movement of God. In the meantime, we have experienced some polarities that have threatened to diminish the reality of the heart of God being our center. There have been both joys and pain during the past biennium, with a call for incoming moderator Patty Shelly and moderator-elect David Boshart to continue to lead us in Spirit-directed ways. She affirms the emphasis on increasing the participation of persons of color in important leadership positions. She lamented the temptation to pit one group against another, calling on us to find positive ways of navigating through this problem. She acknowledged with some regret the reality of breaking communion in a variety of settings, which appears to be a matter of the perceived need to be right rather than to foster relationships. But in many ways, we have learned how to live peaceably among ourselves.

She identified those persons who have provided the critical support that has enabled her to keep on in this demanding position of leadership on behalf of the church she loves. She has felt held in the prayers of many, many people across the church. She concluded by inviting the crowd to stand and share a dance with her, as an act of celebration even in the midst of our pain.

Patty joined Elizabeth at the podium. Elizabeth gave her a symbol of the transfer of leadership. Patty in response gave a response of appreciation to Elizabeth for the ways that she has accepted the challenges of leadership during the past biennium.

Ervin joined in the words of appreciation, recalling that hardly a week had passed during the past biennium without up to an hour or more of time being in communication with Elizabeth via various media. Ervin cited samples from an alphabetical list of attributes that he created, describing the ways he has experienced his relationship with her. He presented her with a card promising a stained glass window which will be crafted by Bonnie Stutzman.

Patty accepted the mantle of leadership, accepting the call to be the moderator with resolve, but with dependence on God and the support of everyone across the church. She has experienced a wonderful spirit in this place, even in the midst of pain, disappointment and uncertainty. That demands that we commit ourselves to the highest level of cooperative work together. Along with Solomon, she asks who is able to lead this great people. It is the Spirit of God that will be our primary source.

Patty invited Executive Board members to stand, describing them as servants of the church for Jesus' sake, taking seriously the mandates for action and discernment that have come from actions during these sessions. Our prayer is that as a church, we will get a heart of wisdom.

Patty invited David Boshart to the platform, recognizing his role as incoming moderator-elect, expressing hers and many others' appreciation for his willingness to serve the church. Ervin draped a prayer shawl over David's shoulders, prior to a prayer of blessing offered by Heidi Regier Kreider, lead pastor of Bethel College Mennonite Church, and Patty's pastor.

The delegate session concluded with a final word of blessing and challenge from Patty, who declared the meeting to be adjourned, followed by a closing song.

Bill Zuercher  
Recorder

### **Glossary of Abbreviations Used in the Minutes and Addenda**

CLC	Constituency Leaders Council
EB	Executive Board
e.g.	For example
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MEA	Mennonite Education Agency
MHS	Mennonite Health Services
MMN	Mennonite Mission Network
M/s/c	Moved, seconded, carried
MWC	Mennonite World Conference

**Addendum #1                      Report #1 from the Listening Committee                      See Minute #22**

Thursday afternoon, July 2, 2015  
Given by Kurt Horst and Nisha Springer

Dave Sutter introduced the committee and thanked Nisha Springer for substituting for Charlotte Hardt who was not able to attend the convention to care for a family health situation.

#### **Affirmations/appreciations**

- We would like to celebrate that there is a good interchange of ideas and honest conversation at table groups. There is also some great dialogue and listening to each other with respect.
- Appreciated that the moderators reminded us about the inappropriateness of applause in the delegate assembly. We ask them to continue doing so.
- Appreciated Iris de Leon-Hartshorn's green shirt confession AND grant her forgiveness and forbearance for her green toenail substitute.
- Appreciate the convention office sacrificing two reams of white copy paper to assist our Moderator to achieve better access to the cameras and microphone, but we are concerned about the # of trees we are using in this convention to prop ourselves up.
- Appreciate the prayers being lifted for us in our deliberations—especially by the children. It has been good to see their hands and notes at our tables.

### Concerns/questions:

- Many persons visited the Listening Committee table to express a sense of being rushed through the process of the amendment related to the Endless War resolution on Wednesday morning. They expressed frustration about a lack of either table time or microphone time to ask questions or talk about the amendment and being pushed for a vote on something which seemed important. It was unclear to some why the amendment could not have been brought to the delegate body earlier to see and to process.
- Rushing process in a group this size is not healthy and does no one good. Suggest asking for more time from the delegate group if necessary. There might be willingness to stay longer.
- Expressed opinion that table time offers better opportunity for expressions of ideas and interchange than microphone time. If given a choice, table time should be weighted more than microphone time.
- Affirms moderators for keeping order. Times for table conversations should be adhered to and microphone contributions should be timed.
- Some noted a sense of somberness in the first delegate session. Where is the sense of joy?
- We would note as a Listening Committee that sometimes lament and expressions of collective sadness are appropriate and warranted, too.
- We heard a request for clarity regarding colors for affirmations, particularly the middle option, the yellow option, as it pertains to each vote. “you can live with this” from Moderator OR Screen “strong caution”. Sometimes yellow seemed to be understood as yes with reservations, sometimes “I’m not sure” or “I’m leaning towards No”.
- We heard that 2 years to table the Israel-Palestine document is too long of a time.
- Re-state the non-delegate rule often in case some come into the room who have not been with us before and are unaware of the rule.
- Questions were raised about artificial intelligence from the amendment on Endless War. Is this military only or all artificial intelligence?
- Concern about delegates with children. No childcare on Wednesday and now being asked to leave to pick up children before the end of the session and a vote.

The majority of the issues we have heard to this point are issues of procedure.

Nisha...do you think these reactions might have been related to general anxiety? Yes.

Nisha...do you think these reactions might be to a lack of trust? Yes.

Nisha...do think the reactions might be to our concern of use of power?

I'm wondering if I could propose an amendment to this report? No please.

Overall, an observation from the Listening Committee...we note that so far your concerns and grievances outnumber statements of encouragement and affirmations about 40-2. We know this doesn't happen in your congregations or conferences so we'd invite the delegates to consider coming up to share appreciative comments at our table as well lest we feel like the Assembly Lament Committee rather than the Listening Committee. We know you have to be experiencing positive things during our time together. Just sayin....

Tina Begay, Byron Pellecer, Carmon Horst, Kurt Horst, Nisha Springer, Dave Sutter, Chair

Saturday, July 4, 2015

Tina Begay, Byron Pellecer and Carmen Horst

This summary references comments received from you the delegates from noon, following the Thursday morning session, through last evening. Some have expressed disappointment that comments offered at noon on Thursday were not conveyed in our Thursday afternoon report. Our committee prepared our report prior to the Thursday afternoon delegate session, but you should know that each and every written comment received has been transcribed as it was written. The EB will receive all comments as well as our Listening Committee reports. Original documents will also be passed on to Mennonite Church USA.

- We continue to hear appreciation for the prayer support surrounding our deliberations. There was appreciation for the process of introducing resolutions, including the prayers, as we experimented with methods of table discernment. Thank you to Jane Hooper Peifer and others and those who have encircled us during these sessions. Several noted with affirmation the “heart” of the moderator shown in responses to various reports and persons throughout our session. Appreciation was also expressed for the humility in leadership of Patty Shelly, Ervin Stutzman, and Elizabeth Soto and others who gave leadership.
- Greatly appreciated was the model of Charlotte Lehman and Megan Ramer in how to talk about difficult issues.
- It was awkward not to have an expert on the Israel-Palestine resolution readily available to answer questions.
- Regarding the way forward related to the Membership Guidelines, can we find a way to hear the stories of those who are at variance? We need processes so that churches and congregations can invite different perspectives to share within the church in the next four years.
- We heard deep frustration that the conversation was too much in control of the executive leadership.
- Though strongly affirmed by the delegate body, some felt the forgiveness resolution toward denominational leadership was rushed and perpetuated patterns of leaving out the voices of those most injured by our church policy--LGBTQ voices among us. The question was asked, “Did this action take steps toward transformed relationships OR relieve anxiety among straight people?”
- We heard frustration that time for congregational caucusing was not allowed before the Membership Guidelines vote...especially since it occurred right before a break.
- There were many comments and questions of concern related to process and procedure. We heard that making decisions by voting while seeking to honor a consensus approach was confusing.
- Adding this just a few minutes ago: we heard sadness and disappointment that families of LGBTQ sharing lament with us were not completely heard, meanwhile we were given a 28 minute break.
- There was an absence of creation care emphasis/mention of papal encyclical.

### **Living with the tensions of our life together:**

- Regarding the Thursday morning demonstration/interruption, some expressed empathy and affirmed our leaders for the way they sought to provide order for the assembly. We also heard disappointment regarding the response of the floor and leadership; for example attempts to cut off the microphone and drown out with singing. Some felt it would have been more appropriate to encircle the individuals in love and give them a few moments to share their comments.
- Some appreciated greatly the humor of the Listening Committee; others found it to be inappropriate.
- We received several requests to give opportunity for the pink Mennos to speak to the delegates or to share in singing with us as delegates. Others have found the lobbying tactics to be unhelpful in this setting.

### **Delegate suggestions to consider at future assemblies:**

- Find a way to help keep mic time consistent from speaker to speaker.
- Hearing and seeing are important to the whole of the delegate hall. Screens at the back of the hall would help.
- Find a way to hear stories of how God has moved in the heart of people as they learned more and reflected on a specific resolution.
- Continue with orientation for table leaders. This was helpful and necessary. Emphasize tables talking together over side conversations.
- Biblical references need to be a part of all resolutions and our discernment.
- Find a way to have the drafters of all resolutions available to the delegates for questions of clarification.
- When we are asked to vote by ballot, encourage comments, especially on ‘no’ votes, so that there will be greater understanding of what a ‘no’ means.
- Perhaps delegates could be provided a “Frequently asked questions” sheet for each resolution several weeks before the convention.
- Encourage congregations to consider appointing younger delegates.
- Provide more time in our sessions to consider vision for the future.

### **Listening Committee summary observations:**

- The Listening Committee has noted throughout the delegate conversations that our tables have almost always been full. We have heard affirmation for the diverse representation at tables and the conversations at the table, including honest and authentic sharing. It will be very important for us to replicate this at home and in various settings during the next four years.
- Related to discernment, we need to talk about voting expectations. Do we rigidly represent specific people/groups of the church or come with an expectation that the Spirit will guide us in our meetings?
- Whether persons came with concerns or affirmations, we sensed that in all who came there was a love for our church and a desire that it become all that God and Jesus desire it to be through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Anti-Racism Monitoring Team  
*Summary Report to Delegates*  
July 4, 2015

The following is a *summary* report that was presented orally to delegates on July 4, 2015 by Anti-Racism Monitoring Team members. A full written report will also be submitted to Mennonite Church USA Executive Board following convention.

**Team Members:** *Yvonne Diaz, Calenthia Dowdy, Elaine Enns, Leo Hartsborn, Ewunare Osayande, Saulo Padilla*

We were grateful for the opportunity to serve to as the Anti-Racism Monitoring Team at this year's convention. Those of us wearing the big blue buttons were recognizable and often affirmed for our work as we walked through halls or sat in seminars. Many people took the time to let us know that they were appreciative of the work we were doing. Thank you.

**General Observations:**

- We noticed improved attempts at inclusivity of people of color up front during worship times in leadership, either as scripture readers, drama team, speakers, or musicians. Many attendees made a point to highlight that there seemed to be more people of color on the worship stage than ever before.
- Several felt (no numbers available) there were more people of color in attendance at this year's convention and wanted to affirm that.
- There were a better number of seminars dealing with topics related to Native American people, the Doctrine of Discovery, issues of this land. We liked the recognition of the indigenous people of this land during the opening night; this is something that should always be done wherever we are.
- We affirm greater visual diversity in the exhibit hall and in overall communications; more people of color and youth in exhibit hall photos.
- There was a diverse array of seminar topics that could appeal to people of color convention goers.
- Broader discussion about intersectionality (the intersection of oppressions) at this convention has been fairly good.
- People of color Mennonites continue to have a heart for the church and are steadfast in having the hard conversations that it takes to find a real home in this church.
- Overall, it is clear that ongoing work is being done to insure a visually colorful convention.

**General Concerns and Recommendations:**

- While the visuals have improved, the depth is still lacking, especially when it comes to power and power brokering – where real difference is made.
- The delegate sessions, where voting power lies, were primarily white. Out of 800+ delegates, not even 10% were people of color. We must have more delegates of color!

This means that except for perhaps one resolution, all those asked to endorse resolutions were white. This is highly problematic.

- Singing during delegate sessions was primarily from the Mennonite hymnal – no diversity of music, prayers, language, worship. The delegate sessions were overwhelmingly white.
- Find people of color to write, present and support resolutions.
- Convention planning team is majority white (except for Glen Guyton).
- Bookstore resources were almost exclusively directed toward a white audience with no non-English resources.
- There were no invitations to worship in one's own language, e.g. Spanish speakers should always be encouraged to sing in their own language if they choose.
- The number of seminar topics addressing issues of race and cultural diversity were underrepresented. There should be at least one seminar per time block that focuses on topics, concerns, hopes and aspirations of people of color.
- There are signs throughout the convention indicating those persons who can provide help/assistance and how they can be identified. The Anti-Racism Monitoring Team should be included on that sign.
- It might be useful to have a space at the conference where people can come to share concerns and/or seek counseling/support. Or a hotline they can call to talk.
- Race continues to be a wedge that drives our church apart, even more so in a post-Ferguson U.S.A.

**Final Note:** The noted racial inclusion at this convention was outside of the delegate hall. Until the delegate sessions look a bit more like the seminar and learning sessions, no real change will occur in the broader church.