

Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly Minutes

July 2-6, 2019
Kansas City, Missouri

Wednesday, July 2 Session 1, 8:15 am

1. Welcome

Moderator David Boshart called the first session to order and welcomed all to this opening delegate session. Our opening worship last evening was a time of great celebration. No table groups were assigned this year, but groups are encouraged to remain together for the week to provide continuity and develop deeper relationships. He led in a prayer of invocation and anticipation.

2. Introductions and Overview of Delegate Week

The following persons or groups were introduced:

- Recording Secretary – Bill Zuercher
- Executive Director – Glen Guyton
- Executive Assistant – Shelley Buller
- Parliamentarian – Dick Thomas
- Resolutions Committee - Samuel Voth Schrag, Byron Pellecer, Linda Dibble
- First-time delegates
- Youth delegates
- Conference Ministers
- Churchwide Agency CEOs

David provided some initial information for and about delegates, recognizing those from congregations, area conferences, Racial/Ethnic groups, and Executive Board members. All of these persons have voting privileges.

As of today, 499 delegates have registered. A revised agenda was provided at all tables. Nondelegates may have floor privileges if time allows. We will use the process of spiritual discernment to the extent possible, using consensus as the primary decision making process. More formal parliamentary procedure will be used if required.

All decisions will be by simple majority unless otherwise specified. Two special rules are presented for decision:

- A. Any motion that brings substantive business must first be brought to the Resolutions Committee.
- B. The adoption of the agenda will constitute the only items that will be considered for delegate discussion and action.

Action 1 **M/s/c to approve the special rules.** Joyce Kusuma/ Natalie Francisco

Action 2 **M/s/c that the agenda as revised and presented be approved.** Dylan Keller/Nathan Luitjens

3. Table Introductions

Joy Sutter, moderator-elect, instructed the table group members to take time to become acquainted with the following:

- Your name, where you grew up, and what church you attended
- A story of the Holy Spirit's work in your conference, congregation, or constituency group
- What you love most about Mennonite Church USA

4. Delegate equipping Session I - Tom Yoder Neufeld

David introduced Dr. Neufeld who has been invited to present a series of messages based upon the letter to the Ephesians. He has had a lifetime of teaching, writing and pastoral ministry, with the status of professor emeritus at Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo. His writings include the Believers Church Bible Commentary on the book of Ephesians. He is currently living in Ontario, Canada, attending First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

The theme for his presentations is **Gathered into One**. Today's message is entitled **All things gathered in Christ**.

Question and Answer:

A question about the meaning and significance of the term "harmony" which can include many notes but can also be messy: **Response:** The Greek and Latin notions of harmony bespeak agreement, peace and being on the same page. He sees harmony as more complex, and even dissonant. We do not experience the unity of Christ after we have everything sorted out. He loves complex harmonies in music, even dissonance. Toleration for diversity has increased significantly. The wonder of God's gathering in is that it pulls us together. What makes the body of Christ perfect is the strangeness of our diversity being together. The church is a mess; thanks be to God!

The notion that diversity is problematic. **Response:** There is wondrous diversity that God places into this world. That is already an enormous challenge for us, dealing with diversity that is good. But there is diversity that comes about from hostility, fear, etc., that is difficult to deal with. But Christ gathers those in with us. The church is the place of new creation. Strangers and enemies become members of one family, but not overnight. That is why the unity of the body of Christ is missional. Diversity in itself is not a problem.

The idea of the near and the far: how do they come together? **Response:** Be careful not to think we know where salvation ends. God's love for creation is the basis for salvation. We need to be careful when the specificity of the gospel no longer has a hold on us. Ephesians does not give us a comfortable stool to sit on.

Diversity in religion and spiritual belief inside the community of faith. **Response:** Paul and other church fathers crossed borders because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Since they didn't stay home, we are here today. The Christian faith is one flower in the floral arrangement of religion. The multifarious wisdom of God is made known through the church. We need to be creative in conversation to discover where God is already present. We don't purchase that by watering down the gospel for ourselves. Don't quench the spirit; test everything.

Session 2, 1:30 pm

5. Minutes from 2017

Secretary Bill Zuercher reviewed the minutes from the July 2017 delegate assembly in Orlando, Florida.

Action 3 **M/s/c that the minutes be approved as distributed.** Mark Wenger/Galen Kauffman

6. State of the Church

Executive Director Glen Guyton presented his view of the current state of the church in the midst of major change, asking how we will respond, from the perspective of our vision of healing and hope. MC USA is not alone in facing these challenges. Indeed, we are Christ's ambassadors, Anabaptists, a community of believers.

Our hope comes through in contacts with individuals and groups across the church. But we need more resources, encouraging people to give time, talent and funds at every level but especially in the local congregation. We need less structure, moving from mechanical authority to relational authority. What served us well in 2001 is no longer the best now.

We need to embrace the generations, including all ages. Older persons need to mentor the younger and pass along their wisdom. We should be training our replacements, which makes the youth delegate vote so important.

We need better leaders, following the example of strong leaders in the past. We need persons who can navigate differences and be active peacemakers. We need to understand our call and commitment.

We need to be willing to say "no" to more things: worldly labels and practices that divide us; to things that don't model who we are as Anabaptist peacemakers; to traditions and practices that divide, discriminate, or hide evil.

We sit at the foot of opportunity and change, in which the power of God is the only thing that will save us. It is time to be bold together and struggle together.

We are people of faith and prayer, part of the body of Christ, a family for which there is hope for us. We are reimagining ways of doing business, clarifying roles at every level of the denomination.

We are living into our renewed commitments to follow Jesus, practice peace and be led by the Holy Spirit.

7. Everence report

Beryl Jantzi, Director of Stewardship Education for Everence, and Martin Navarro, Stewardship Consultant for the Hispanic community, reported on ways in which Everence has been making use of the financial funds entrusted to them. Their operations are based upon the teachings of Jesus. They included first-person stories of persons with financial questions and concerns.

One program has been an interactive seminar in collaboration with Lake Institute, designed to help pastors and others understand more completely what it means to be a people of generosity.

Everence has been the vehicle through which a grant from Lilly Endowment to Mennonite Church USA was distributed to pastors to help reduce their debts, with a focus on educational debt but also available to cover other types of debt.

Everence is in process of opening a financial wellness center in the city of Philadelphia, in order to serve urban members better.

8. Youth Delegate Proposal

Shana Peachey Boshart, Denominational Minister for Faith Formation for MC USA, provided the background for the proposal to amend the bylaws to provide for youth delegates with voting privileges. At the Kansas City 2015 assembly in Kansas City, one youth in particular expressed concern about what appeared to be a divide between the youth and adults, resulting in a lack of information to youth to help them understand the church from the inside out.

One response was the creation of the Step Up program prior to Orlando 2017 which authorized conferences and congregations to name a youth delegate to the adult delegate sessions. The Step Up program has been repeated for MennoCon19.

The result of all of this activity is a proposed bylaw amendment (See Minute #20).

Table groups were provided with a description of the youth delegate bylaw change with a series of questions and answers.

9. Journey Forward Report

Janie Beck Kreider provided an update on the Journey Forward process that resulted from the Future Church Summit in Orlando in 2017. There were three outcomes from the FCS:

- Theme report
- Affirmation from participants
- Delegate assembly resolution (included in the 2017 Assembly minutes)

A Renewed Commitment and Pathways Study Guide was prepared by a five-member writing team and seven-person reference council. During 2018 and 2019, denomination-wide discernment has been provided through regional gatherings, congregational discernment, and an online survey for feedback.

Jack Swaim continued the report based on 63 responses to the survey. He supplemented his verbal report with a series of PowerPoint charts.

Ideas about what else should be worked on included attention to the Dismantling of the Doctrine of Discovery, addressing immigration injustice, practicing civil discourse, and gender translation related to patriarchal language in the Bible.

Members of the writing team joined the reporting, noting first a comment in the survey that the study revealed some sentiment that we share a good deal of common history but not a shared mission and ministry.

Table groups were given a *Follow Jesus* question to address, with each table to send an email response to Shelley Buller:

- **Based on how you read scripture, if Jesus were to walk into your town today, where would He go, what would He say, what would He do?**

Sample comments:

*He would go to churches, including Mennonite; schools; restaurants; homeless shelters; VFW; women's shelter; Walmart; the elderly; immigrants; poor people; those working on subsistence wages; the halls of power and those responsible for not dealing with the problems; retirement communities; hospitals; botanical gardens; places where we eat, drink and party; the barrios; detention camps; the fields where people are working.

He would:

- say the Kingdom of God is here
- question our priorities
- encourage us to help the poor
- pitch in with what we are doing
- challenge some underlying assumptions
- have long conversations on how to prevent homelessness, including with law enforcement
- have deep concern for immigration issues
- talk and listen to children and question how we are treating them
- translate for those needing it

- ask where all the people are, in their houses and cars
- get involved in community events, building relationships with members of the community
- remind us of our distractions and question some of our practices, traditions and rules
- look at the landfills and polluted rivers and weep
- console us
- tell us we haven't done our job—making disciples

In fact, Jesus is already here, in our homes and communities.

These responses will go to the EB to help them understand what people in our communities are thinking and doing, which information can help shape their agenda and priorities.

10. Radical Living Urban Youth Garden Story

Manhattan (New York) Mennonite Fellowship provided a video report on their project, located at the Calvary Fellowship AME Church in Brooklyn, to develop gardens in the city that would provide meaningful work for youth and the production of fresh vegetables and some fruit to improve their diets.

Thursday, July 4, 2019

Session 3 8:15 am

11. Mennonite Mission Network Announcement

Stanley Green, Executive Director of MMN, and Madeline Maldonado, board chair, came to podium. Madeline announced that Stanley has tendered his resignation as the MMN leader, effective July 31, 2020. She provided an overview of the work that he has done during his 19 years as our mission leader, with glimpses of his life and work prior to that. A search committee has been formed to begin their work immediately.

Stanley offered a response, expressing gratitude for all of the opportunities he has had to build relationships across the church, and indeed around the world.

Moderator Boshart offered a prayer of blessing.

12. Delegate Equipping Session II

Following a time of group singing, Tom Yoder Neufeld gave his second presentation on the overall theme of **Gathered into One**. Today's message is entitled **Unity of the Spirit—body and temple (4:3)**. He expressed his gratitude both for the words of affirmation received following yesterday's presentation and words and questions of concern.

Question & Answer

Using the art imagery and metaphor, the artist has some sense of what the final result will be. What should be our image of a unified church? **Response:** It is a given that we are talking to each other who have made a decision to join in Christ's mission of gathering in all things. That should be foundational. We learn about that through the scriptures. How can we walk together, enter into the messiness, unless we share a deep accountability to that vision, and shared identity in Christ? When that weakens, we revert to the ideas of inclusion and diversity, which does not take us anywhere. We must be committed to the resurrected Christ.

On the theme of unity and messiness of unity: When we divide as we have, how do we talk about peace? It gets a lot harder. We haven't disagreed about the nature of the gospel but about the boundaries and the borders. **Response:** Ephesians, Galatians and James represent the early Jesus movement. We take

their message and make one New Testament. Let's unleash our creativity at mending what has been broken, by using our prayers and family gatherings.

It is Important to have diversity in the church and grow together. What happens when we need to take [disciplinary] action in an effective way? **Response:** He is not in a good position to answer that for MC USA. He assumes that we seek points and places where we can find answers. Another example of being able to come together is MCC which has demonstrated a wonderful way to bring together people who don't agree on lots of things. That's a gift of the Spirit. We look for ways and places where we can do things together—shared projects.

There are all kinds of spirits at work. There is a conscious effort by the works of darkness to distract us and lead us in many false directions. **Response:** In the early years of the church it was very difficult to understand the Spirit in the Jesus movement. The world was filled with spirits—force fields. We talk about racism; they talked about the spirit of racism. We need the ongoing work of discerning what is the Spirit of God and what is a spirit of division. Division and diversity are not the same thing. Division breaks the body of Christ. Diversity is a creative force that builds, but where one sees division, another sees diversity and vice versa.

We have rephrased our motto to “we are people of God's pieces.” As an artist, her work is informed by her materials and media, the same way with cooking. It is not usually productive to concentrate on the end product. That can be too limiting. **Response:** Thank you.

As a leader, every day she needs the Spirit. But in our busyness, there is not much room for the Spirit to transform the church. **Response:** Thanks.

We want to tear down walls, but what about when the wall holds the house up? There is at times a human biological fear that we are unsafe. How do we co-exist with others who we believe are actively trying to harm another? How do we respond when we feel unsafe? **Response:** A very sobering question. Would like to let it stand, acknowledging times when the church has been seen as unsafe. Analogies have their limits, and we need to focus on how we live within those limits. When walls are unsafe, we need to rush in and rebuild or replace or repair. There are many ways in which we are encouraged to pay attention to that, looking at others' welfare. Matt. 18 has Jesus' words: beware of abusing those who are vulnerable. Better if you went into the kingdom maimed than having hurt others. Jesus incarnates himself in the least in the kingdom--the child. The church has been experienced by some as a body with unsafe spaces. Jesus wants you to think of him as being present in the most unsafe places. A very important point being made.

Thinking of the Spirit as breath: how intimate that Spirit can be. But we wonder about the church as the body of Christ, when many of us have grown up thinking the body is even evil. Given that, how can we feel connected to the body of Christ? **Response:** We should be careful to be aware that body and flesh are not the same term. Sometimes Paul uses flesh as a symbol of evil. But he's working in the first century context. Flesh without the Spirit of God can be unredeemed. It's hard to appreciate the full extent of the earthiness of the body of Christ.

What words do you have for those of us who realize we are messy? **Response:** This is a challenge to the church; it is a key point. People for all kinds of reasons have felt shut out of the church. The walls of the church can be very unstable. Wind can create damage, and some things need to be damaged.

Session 4 – Witness to Piece (The Journey Forward)

1:30 pm

13. Mennonite Mission Network story

Following an opening prayer and singing, Jane Ross Richer shared a story from her family's mission assignment in the Ecuadoran rain forest. She and her family divide their time between that location and assignment, and their home in Goshen, Indiana. They live and work among an ancient and indigenous culture, not too different from the world culture in the time of the early church. One aspect of that culture is the phenomenon of dreams and their interpretation, which has provided a means for sharing the gospel.

She herself had a series of three dreams, each of which focused on the color red. Finding a red remnant of a sea shell while running on the beach, she was reminded of those dreams, and her interpretation which was "follow your passion." She felt urged, encouraged and even invigorated to share the thirst within her to share the gospel story.

14. Update on Israel/Palestine Resolution

A panel consisting of John Lapp (MMN), Mark Regier (Everence), Ron Byler and Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach (MCC), Jason Boone (PJSN), and Tom Harder (MennoPIN) took the stage to provide the update.

In 2015 the Kansas City convention delegates first wrestled with a resolution on Israel/Palestine, which was revisited in 2017 at the Orlando convention. This afternoon a working group took the stage to provide an update. A written report was provided on the delegate page of the convention website.

There were eight major commitments in the document, many of which have been accomplished. Progress reports were given on Understanding the realities of the occupation and Advocating with the U.S. Government.

Michael Crosby, pastor of First Mennonite Church, Champaign/Urbana, and Kathy Neufeld Dunn, WDC Associate Conference Minister, reported on how the resolution has been studied and applied in their congregation and conference contexts.

The work of others around the church was recognized and thanked for their efforts locally and regionally.

15. Peace and Reconciliation story – Eden Life Mennonite Church

Pastor Omot Aganya, founder of the Eden Life Church in Kansas City, Missouri, recounted the story of beginning this new church plant in 2016. He is originally from Ethiopia, from which he came to the U.S. in 1992, first to Georgia, then South Dakota and Minnesota, where he ministered to persons from Ethiopia and Kenya.

On July 4, 2016, Omot, his wife Hannah, and some of their children arrived in Kansas to plant what has become the Eden Life Church, with support from South Central Mennonite Conference. He recalled that in 2003 his father-in-law came for a family visit, and when he returned to his home country, he was murdered as a result of his Christian faith. Omot preached a sermon of forgiveness and reconciliation at that funeral. That has been the focus for his entire ministry since, along with a strong emphasis on the need for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Joy Sutter instructed the audience to take some quiet moments to reflect on the stories that have been shared with us.

16. The Journey Forward Table group discussion

Continuing the study of the Journey Forward process, Jon Carlson and Natalie Francisco set the stage for a continuation of the table group discussion process, with a particular focus on the peace that we believe God intends for us. The topic is Witness to God's Peace, with the specific instruction:

- **Identify one part of our shared peace witness we should work together for the next biennium.**

Table group reporting:

- make peace with God's creation, even shalom and restoration
- engage with each other in difficult issues and love each other in spite of disagreements
- strong scriptural foundation, being Spirit led
- more intentional use of Jesus' call to our life (p. 92)
- internal peace within the church
- immigration
- prison reform/ministries
- ecumenical and interfaith relations
- peace within our own congregations
- gun control
- follow up with congregations and conferences that have left MC USA and seek reconciliation
- model peace internally and holistically, family and denomination
- full inclusion of everyone in the church regardless of their orientation and preferences
- climate change
- war tax resistance
- removal and reform of patriarchal systems within the church
- talk to the Southern Baptist Convention to whom the president listens
- Invite other Christians to study holistic peace together
- racism
- militarism
- extreme materialism
- effect of border security on native persons
- stewardship of resources to address inequality
- provide peacemaker scholarships to ones not inclined to go into the military
- healing around LGBTQ inclusion
- cultural competencies in many manifestations
- Invite every congregation to take the first statement on page 92, and grapple with it for the next two years within their own contexts

Friday, July 5, 2019 Session 5 8:15 am

17. Statistics Update

Of the 625 congregations in Mennonite Church USA, 246 are represented. There is a total of 495 delegates: 417 from congregations, 58 from area conference; 12 Executive Board members, and eight from Racial/Ethnic groups.

18. Resolution

Following a time of prayer and group singing, a proposed resolution about abuse of child migrants on the border (see addendum 1) was introduced. It had been presented to the Resolutions Committee at the beginning of the assembly. After checking the bylaws and the policy for developing resolutions and

collecting 30 signatures from delegates from three separate conferences, it has been processed and deemed to be appropriate for delegate consideration and action.

The Resolutions Committee took the time to read the proposed resolution in its entirety. It has been properly endorsed by the required number of supporters and will be voted on tomorrow. See Minute #27.

19. Delegate Equipping Session III

Tom Yoder Neufeld gave his third presentation on the overall theme of **Gathered into One**. Today's message is entitled **Maintaining the unity of the Spirit when walking together is hard**. He noted that his seminar yesterday on Forbearance, which was originally intended for nondelegates but attended by a sizable number of delegates anyway, could be regarded as a connection to his presentations on Ephesians.

Question & Answer

*While he affirmed the powerful teaching, he was struck by what wasn't commented on, especially in chapters 4 and 5. They provide a perspective different from the strong emphasis on unity. **Response:*** That is an important point and is one of the tensions we have to live with. The constraint of time prevented dealing with that. But the unity of the Spirit is supposed to be transformative. We experience inclusion for transformation. Chapter five is a reminder to people who were brought into the church without knowing about some of those things that should be avoided. We have missed much of the radical hospitality in Paul's teaching. They were admonished to have nothing to do with darkness because you are light. The message is to be different and shine light on the darkness not to eliminate but to transform it.

*The message is to walk together and be patient, but it seems that we need to recognize that the burden and pain are unequally shared. What does it mean for us to share the unequal burden? **Response:*** It is true that the burdens are not equally shared. The demand for humility and patience should be borne largely by those in positions of power and authority. It is true that many of us in those positions do not see the privileges we have.

*There are times when the church must say no, that some things are unacceptable, even the possibility of the drastic step of excommunication. An example such as child abuse comes to mind, but there is a host of other things. How do we come to the point where we can say, this is not permissible, and that those who practice these things need to go elsewhere? **Response:*** The list of what those things include, varies among us. For example, we live in an economy in which greed and covetousness appear to be the norm. Yet greed is most often identified in the Bible as the highest idolatry. There are times when the church should say no, but "when" is the question. How we work at that is very complex.

*Why do we need a resolution on how to treat our brothers and sisters when love is one of the strongest bonds that brings about unity of the Spirit? We talk extensively about the unity of the Spirit but as a church we have not been a good example of that. The fruit of the Spirit is love: we have to love people regardless of who they are, what they do, and what they don't do, as Jesus did. We need a spiritual healing to have the unity of the Spirit. **No response required.***

*We haven't talked much about the power dynamic that Paul writes about, when there is inequality. Those with less power are often asked to bear the brunt of forbearance. **Response:*** Think about our talk as incendiary devices to get us to thinking. We are in a moment when the question of power is still

emerging among us. Encourage us to listen not just about how society defines power but think about how being part of the body of Christ re-empowers us.

There is the matter of trauma-informed reading of scripture. We think about the current context of the denomination, noting a lot of whiteness in this room. What does it mean to use suffering and slavery language when there is real physical suffering among some people groups in contrast to the ego suffering of those in the dominant culture? We experience a delay in finding unity in the face of such contrasts. Response: Let that question stand. We wrestle with the Biblical language, realizing that when Paul wrote these words, a huge chunk of his congregation lived the reality that he described and wrote against. Sometimes it's hard to know what words to use that resonate with the audience. He admits he doesn't know MC USA well enough to know how things may sound based on the words he chooses.

20. Youth Delegate Vote

Moderator Boshart introduced the proposed amendments to the Bylaws, lines 314-325 as follows (changes underlined):

a. Each congregation of the Mennonite Church USA is eligible to send one (1) delegate for each one hundred (100) congregational members, or fraction thereof. Also, congregations may send an additional youth delegate (ages 16-21).

b. Each area conference of the Mennonite Church USA is eligible to send one (1) delegate for each one thousand (1,000) area conference members, or fraction thereof. Also, conferences may send an additional two youth delegates (ages 16-21).

c. Each Racial/Ethnic group which has been officially recognized by the Executive Board, may send three (3) delegates plus one (1) delegate for each one thousand (1,000) members of such recognized Racial/Ethnic group. Also, Racial/Ethnic groups may send an additional two youth delegates (ages 16-21).

Action 4 **M/s/c that the proposed amendments be adopted.** Nathan Luitjens/Gregory Battle 6 "no" votes

Following the vote, youth delegates were called to the stage to be recognized, and to sign a poster indicating their presence as the first youth delegate group to participate. David offered a prayer of gratitude for their presence and participation.

Session 6 1:30 pm

21. Opening and introduction

Following an opening prayer and song, David introduced Cesar Garcia, Executive Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, who brought greetings from MWC to MC USA as one of its 140 member constituents.

The writing team for the Journey Forward process came to the stage to be introduced: Janie Beck Kreider, Jack Swaim, Sarah Bixler, Natalie Francisco, Jon Carlson, and Isaac Villegas.

22. Slate of candidates

Members of the Leadership Discernment Committee came to stage, with Chair Cal Zehr presenting the slate of nominees for all the positions needing to be filled (see Addendum 2 below for details). The

process of selecting nominees between biennial assemblies was explained in detail by committee members.

The slate of candidates was accepted by unanimous consent.

23. Denominational Communications Update

Glen Guyton provided an update on the current communication strategy for the denomination, using a PowerPoint on “The Future of MC USA Communications. “ This provided a detailed outline of the need for a new strategy, including the importance of collaboration and coordination among the various parts of the church. How a new strategy will help was presented. The current role of *The Mennonite* magazine was depicted. Components of the new strategy were described. The timeline was outlined, with the summer 2020 as the target for unveiling the new churchwide communication strategy.

To give leadership to this initiative, a Chief Communications Officer has been named; Wil LaVeist has accepted this assignment. He will move from his current role of Vice President for Communications of Mennonite Mission Network. Wil briefly described his journey into the Mennonite Church and into service with its agencies.

Table groups were given time to discuss their ideas and questions about this new initiative, directed by the following questions:

- What excites you about the new direction?
- What concerns do you have with the development of a new communication strategy?

Questions and comments:

We want to confirm that The Mennonite and Mennonite World Review will be independent and wonder what access their staff will have to MC USA business. **Response:** We do not yet have set guidelines for access but do want the media to cover the stories of the denomination and agencies. We value their distribution systems and want to be open to any media that choose to provide material to them.

What does “unquestioned clarity” look like? **Response:** We want to make sure that what we say is clearly attributable to us and that it is stated as clearly as possible. *TM* and *MWR* are forums that allow for a variety of voices.

Does this mean the church agencies will be doing away with their communications departments?

Response: No, since they have their own constituencies with which they keep in touch. But we do want to collaborate so that important information is shared appropriately and completely. A current problem is that there is a temptation or tendency to operate in silos and we do not do the cross referencing that would be helpful.

Could there be bullet points from the various agencies in the churchwide media? There are still those who like to read things in print. **Response:** There will be a multimedia approach that will include print material. The agencies still use print materials to a large extent.

Where will debate happen in the church? **Response:** There are still social media and other voices. There is diversity in the forums that exist. We will need to continue to work on the strategy that honors the diversity that exists.

We see some institutions become more commercialized when they move away from denominational affiliation. How are we preparing for the challenges that come with that? **Response:** The new media group will remain committed to serving MC USA, continuing to tell our stories. We hope you will continue to support MC USA holistically.

The blogs provide a wide variety of points of view. Will there be a portal in which such diverse voices and points of view will continue to be available? **Response:** We still value diversity and will be intentional about listening to diverse voices across the church.

24. Additional Bylaw changes

David noted that it is important to keep our bylaws up to date, which requires periodic reviews that occasionally result in changes needed. Amendments require a 60-day notice to delegates with a 2/3 vote of support. That advance notice has not happened with the proposed changes. Alternatively, lacking that 60-day window, amendments can be approved at the current delegate session with unanimous vote.

The list of proposed amendments was reviewed in detail and can be accessed from the denominational website under Delegate Resources.

David noted that any member at any time can suggest changes in the bylaws that are not regarded as urgent, by contacting the denominational office. Such suggestions will be taken under advisement and if deemed relevant, will be processed for review and action at a subsequent delegate assembly.

Action 5 **M/s/c that the bylaws amendments be adopted.** Basil Marin/Eldon Epp
Unanimously approved

25. Membership Guidelines Process Update

Michael Danner, Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality, provided an update on the process to date. He started with a history of the creation of the guidelines, beginning in 2001 at the Nashville assembly. That called for a review in six years. In 2013 the current version of the bylaws was distributed. These have served as a point of conflict that is ongoing. In 2015 there was agreement that the guidelines would not be subject to review for four years, but at the same time, a Forbearance Resolution was adopted. That brings us to today's meeting, at which time there was some expectation that they would be revisited, but that is not on the agenda given the major turnover of top leadership within the past year.

The Constituency Leaders Council has taken time in its semi-annual meetings to give attention to the guidelines with some feedback to the Executive Board and other groups, including the area conference ministers. Questions remain about how much energy congregations and conferences, along with other groups, must continue to process the status of the guidelines. The consensus is that this delegate session is another opportunity to determine what discernment may be provided by delegates today. Table groups were instructed to spend time with the following two statements, followed by delegates marking and returning their individual sheets.

A two-year Biblical discernment process, culminating in a delegate decision on the status of the MC USA Membership Guidelines in 2021, is important to my constituents.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

My constituents will give time and energy to a Biblical discernment process that focuses on the status of the Membership Guidelines.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____
Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Saturday, July 6, 2019
Session 7 8:15 am

26. Special Presentation

After gathering songs and opening bilingual prayer by Byron Pellecer, Glen expressed the gratitude of himself and all of us for David Boshart's service to the church through this and many other leadership roles throughout the denomination and area conference.

27. Churchwide Statement on the Abuse of Child Migrants (continued)

See Minute #18 for background. Churchwide statements such as this do provide an important corporate witness. Samuel Voth Schrag, on behalf of the Resolutions Committee, provided information on the development of the final version, highlighting the changes that were made and suggestions that were not incorporated (see Addendum 1 below).

Action 6 **M/s/c that the resolution be adopted.** Jon Carlson/Sandra Montes Martinez
Two opposed

Comments:

- It would be helpful to have an additional document that would provide action step ideas and resources
- We hope that the Executive Board will share this with the government on our behalf
- If there are churches who are penalized for providing sanctuary, let the rest of us know so we can help support them, financially and otherwise
- Be in contact with the Southern Baptist Convention for additional voices to the government
- Let's offer a prayer over this document as a gathered body
- It is important for this body to hear a minority voice back home that will not be happy with the resolution
- There is concern about using the word "condemn," believing that that is an improper word for a peace church to use
- Taking a child from a parent's arms is kidnapping, which is a punishable crime. What do we call it when a government does that? We do not need more tours to the border. We need to go home and act, and support those who live on the border. We say we are committed, but in reality, how committed are we?
- It will take courage to be a voice in support in this resolution, especially in politically conservative areas where we know there are disagreements and divisions.

MCC has a list of items that make up migrant care kits that can be made available to persons being detained at the border. Individuals, congregations and other groups are encouraged to put these together for shipment to border locations.

28. Report from youth delegates

Leah Wenger spoke on behalf of the StepUp and youth delegate group. It was her voice four years ago that provided the impetus for the involvement of this demographic. Their hope is that youth will learn more about the way the denomination is structured and functions and offers an opportunity to be part of the discernment and decision making processes. She expressed appreciation to the group for their support of this initiative.

Morgan Grabill, a StepUp participant for the second assembly, added her words, noting the value of having participated in the Future Church Summit in 2017. She has experienced encouragement and support for her participation, even though earlier she was not given the vote.

Matt Shill is another StepUp participant and commented on the value he has experienced in being part of this process. If there is to be unity of the Spirit as we heard, it will be essential to involve the voices of young persons who will become our future leaders.

29. MennoMedia story

A video presentation on the screen documented the process now in its final stages to create a new hymnal, to be known as *Voices Together*. That was followed by a further update by Amy Gingerich, Executive Director of MennoMedia, and Bradley Kauffman, General Editor of the hymnal project. They confirmed that the hymnal is scheduled to be released in fall 2020. The new hymnal will include songs and worship resources that reflect the diversity that Mennonite Church USA represents. There is a strong belief that the Holy Spirit has been an integral part of the creation of this new collection.

The presentation concluded with the singing of two songs in the new hymnal, *I Will Sing with You*, and *We, Your People, Sing Your Praises*, and video picturing a variety of settings in which the new hymnal has been introduced.

30. Global Immersion (Albany [Oregon] Mennonite Church)

Phil Rempel, Leadership Board Worship Minister of Albany Mennonite Church, provided a video supporting the story of an immigrant from Mexico as a child who after over 40 years was deported to Tijuana, Mexico. He was a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces. Members of the Albany Church participated in a tour with Global Immersion which included a visit in Tijuana and a shelter for migrants. They continued to be connected to Global Immersion, whose emphasis for peacemakers is to see, immerse, contend, and restore.

The congregation continued to listen to voices of the marginalized, to engage in a study of the Journey Forward Pathways, and to study the book *Mending the Divides*. Phil continued the report with a series of vignettes about members of the church who are engaged in a variety of service activities and projects.

He challenged the group to engage in a whole range of actions within their own communities that can make a difference where they worship, live, work and play.

31. Journey Forward responses

Table groups were instructed to address the final component of the Journey Forward process, with two questions designed to address the admonition to Experience Transformation:

- **How have you experienced the transformation of the Holy Spirit in your life?**
- **How might that inform the transformation of our shared life as a church?**

Comments:

- When we talk about Holy Spirit transformation, individual congregation or the whole church, we know that if left to our own choices, the Spirit can take us in the wrong direction.
- Passion, change and encouragement we have received have been so positive. Being with the youth in worship service has added to that passion.
- It will be important to focus one's spiritual energy into the life of children (seedlings) who can develop into strong saplings and trees even beyond their natural habitat.
- The table group experience provided holy moments and gave witness to God's amazing goodness as we shared as new brothers and sisters in Christ. Desires that everyone in our church could be here.
- The Holy Spirit is talking to each of us every day, and each of us can choose whether we act and obey. Sometimes we don't want to do what the spirit directs. It takes courage to follow. When we do, we see transformation in ourselves.

- Generally speaking, not easily impressed, church wise. He came here with much trepidation and did not see a way forward. Saw a lot of fear and mistrust, including his own anxiety. He has been amazed and impressed. He can say at the end of the week that the Spirit is alive and well in MC USA. He has felt a pathway that will lead us through, in spite of the hard work ahead, moving through the weeks. Thank you, MC USA, for staying with it.
- She experienced sexual abuse 30 years ago and is now on a healing journey. God led her here for a transformation of her heart, releasing anger and hurt. Thanks to her tablemates for their honesty. Thanks for the brilliant teaching of Tom Yoder Neufeld. After being immersed with the youth, she has faith in the church.

The moderator thanked all for their openness and vulnerability. We are indeed on a journey forward together, with the hope and prayer that we will continue to follow Jesus, witness to God's peace, and experience transformation.

32. Leadership Transition

David expressed his appreciation to all for the hard work done together this week. As he concludes his tenure, his heart continues to be full of hope for the church.

No one can understand the challenges of the moderator's role better than his wife, Shana. He gives thanks to her for her unending support. He also thanks Central Plains Mennonite Church for allowing him to have the time away to serve the church. Finally, he thanks past moderator Patricia Shelly for the wisdom she provided in the transition of responsibility. He is grateful to the Executive Board—a committed and hard working group of God's servants. And above all, thanks to God who is far more than we can imagine, experienced through Jesus Christ.

David passed the baton to Joy Sutter, incoming moderator. She added her words of appreciation for David's service, whose leadership has been a true blessing to her in her preparation for this role. She introduced Linda Dibble, incoming moderator-elect from Albany, Oregon, and presented her with a prayer shawl as a symbol of God's presence and leading, and of the support of the entire church. She challenged all of us to remember that the church is a mess, but thanks be to God! Her hope is that the Spirit of God will move in our midst, walking with us through the calm and the storm. Her prayer is that Spirit will teach us to love beyond measure, and lead us on the Journey Forward.

A prayer of blessing was offered by Sonya Stauffer Kurtz for Linda and Joy. Joe Hackman followed with a prayer for our denominational leaders.

The session concluded with the song, *Move in our Midst*.

Meeting adjourned.

Bill Zuercher, Recorder

Addendum 1 (see Minutes #18 & 27)

Churchwide Statement on the Abuse of Child Migrants

Passed by the Mennonite Church USA Delegate Assembly on July 6, 2019

³³ *When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien.* ³⁴ *The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:33-34*

Summary

As a historic peace church founded on the principle that Jesus' life, death and resurrection call Christians into reconciled, righteous, and right relationship, Mennonite Church USA finds the treatment of immigrant families and children at the border, as well as around the nation, a horrific violation of the Image of God and God-given human rights.

Background

We make this statement as part of our continuing effort as a denomination to work for justice for all people and in line with the previous resolution passed in Atlanta (2003) and revised after Phoenix (2014). Today migrants are detained at the border in both public and private facilities without adequate medical care. At least seven children have died in the custody of Customs and Border Patrol in the past year.¹ The United States government is currently in court to defend the claim that children should not receive basic toiletries and sanitary items. Children are separated from families without due diligence or regard for the pain of that separation.² Customs and Border Patrol is not trained to care for children and should not be responsible for the care of children, especially at the cost of separating children from the loving caregivers accompanying them.

As disciples of Jesus called to care for those in need, we believe the actions of the U.S. government are unconscionable, and we condemn these practices and commit, as peacemakers, to building better processes for migrants.

Jesus reminds us the greatest commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and the second, which emerges from it, is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." When asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus made clear the neighbor is anyone whose path crosses ours at a time when they are in need. Across the country, our congregations' paths are crossing with those of undocumented families in need.

The current treatment of migrants at our border directly limits our Vision of Healing and Hope to "grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." The United States government's policies also obstruct the purpose of Mennonite Church USA to "nurture missional Mennonite congregations of many cultures." Those crossing the border include members of our congregations and fellow members of the body of Christ. We are a diverse

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/why-are-migrant-children-dying-u-s-custody-n1010316>

² <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/AAP-Statement-on-Executive-Order-on-Family-Separation.aspx>

denomination with many immigrant stories, and the migration story unfolding at the border and around the United States is our story, too. Jesus himself was an undocumented refugee in Egypt as an infant fleeing the cruel hand of King Herod, and when he returned to his homeland, demonstrated hospitality to the immigrants and ethnic minorities he encountered.

What We Will Do:

During this week of Independence Day, we acknowledge that the United States detains many migrants in inadequate and unsanitary conditions. We stand against the traumatic separation of families, the deprivation of basic needs, and the detention of migrants. Therefore, the delegates of Mennonite Church USA assembly condemn the abuse of migrants and call for a change in policy and action by the United States government.

As a denomination we:

1. Recognize that no situation is so complex as to justify the building of internment camps and the abuse of children.
2. Stand alongside the undocumented members of our denomination, welcoming new attendees seeking God regardless of immigration status and honoring the gifts they bring and seeing the Image of God in them.
3. Advocate to the government for humane immigration policies at all levels, especially for children and other vulnerable people.
4. Affirm the 2003 resolution to “advocate for just and humane policies for immigrants and refugees by contacting local, state, and national elected officials.”
5. Seek connections with immigrant communities in our contexts and support those in sanctuary and the thousands of families whose loved ones have been deported.
6. Encourage congregations to send members to the border region through MCC Borderlands tours and similar organizations to learn and witness to the conditions of migrants.
7. Support the work of Mennonite Central Committee and other organizations, local congregations, and community actions to meet the basic needs of incoming migrants; advocate for family unification; and support humane and sensible immigration policy changes.

Addendum 2 (see Minute #22)

The following slate of candidates was accepted by unanimous consent.

MODERATOR-ELECT AND MODERATOR

two years as moderator-elect (2019-2021) followed by two years as moderator (2021-2023)

Linda Dibble, Albany, Ore.,

EXECUTIVE BOARD, 2019-23

Jon Carlson, 1st term, Lancaster, Pa.

Jim Caskey, 2nd term, Goshen, Ind.

Michelle Dula, 2nd term, Lancaster, Pa.

Leslie Francisco, III, 2nd term, Hampton, Va.

Todd Lehman, 1st term, Hesston, Kan.

Phil Rich, 2nd term, Archbold, Ohio

EVERENCE, 2020-23

Nicole Francisco Bailey, 3rd term, Hampton, Va.

Lauren Good, 1st term, Seattle, Wash.

MENNOMEDIA, 2019-23

Lee Schmucker, 2nd term, Wichita, Kan.

MENNONITE EDUCATION AGENCY, 2019-23

Nathan Alleman, 1st term, Waco, Tex.

Melissa Hofstetter, 1st term, Pasadena, Calif.

Alicia Manning, 1st term, Hampton, Va.

MENNONITE HEALTH SERVICES, 2019-23

Maribel Ramirez Hinojosa, 2nd term, College Station, Tex.

Don Tyson, 2nd term, Harrisonburg, Va.

MENNONITE MISSION NETWORK, 2019-23

Steve Breidigan, 3rd term, Douglassville, Pa.

Susan Hertzler Burkholder, 2nd term, Denver, Colo.

Cindy Cumberbatch, 2nd term, Brandon, Fla.

Jim Kielsmeier, 1st term, Falcon Heights., Minn.

David Nickel, 1st term, Lincoln, Neb.

LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE, 2019-23

Marty Lehman, 1st term, Goshen, Ind.

Ruth Yoder Wenger, 1st term, Bronx, NY