

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE  
Minutes for the 61st Annual Session  
June 22-24, 2017  
Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio  
*Abounding in Love. . . Abiding in Grace*

**Thursday, June 22**

*Family Day events*

- \*Golf Scramble at Sycamore Springs Golf Course
- \*Peacemaking Grounded in Prayer
- \*RAWtools Blacksmith Demonstration
- \*Pastor Appreciation Dinner
- \*Backyard Picnic

WORSHIP I: Abounding (Founders Hall)

Text: John 14:27-31     Speaker: Krista Dutt (MCC)

- \*Ice Cream Social

**Friday, June 23**

*Delegate Session I* in Marbeck Center.

Scott Troyer (Cincinnati) led delegates in singing SJ 4, *You've got a place*.

Lisa Weaver (Madison) welcomed delegates and thanked the hosting congregations for their work. She shared that her pastor preached a sermon on Acts 1:12-26. This passage relates how the early Church gathered together to choose a replacement for Judas. This story describes the first business meeting of the new church. It highlights the importance of gathering together to tend to the business of the church. We are called, not only to worship, prayer, mutual aid, service to others, witnessing, but also to the contemplation and care taking of the structure of the faith community. As we open this delegate session to tend to the business of the conference, we are standing in a long and holy tradition. Lisa sounded the gavel to open the 61<sup>st</sup> delegate session.

**Getting acquainted around tables:** Lisa invited delegates to get acquainted around their tables. She read from 1 Corinthians 12:14-19. Central District Conference is a body, a body of many congregations. Each of the congregations is unique and brings certain gifts and blessings to the body. She invited delegates to think about their congregation and consider something that makes the congregation unique and special. In what way is the congregation a blessing to the body called Central District Conference? In what way is the congregation making the reign of God visible on earth today? Guests were invited to share about their congregation as a member of the body of Christ. To end the sharing, delegates were invited to sing HWB#304) led by Scott Troyer (Cincinnati) and Trevor Bechtel (Shalom Community).

**State of the Conference Address:** Lisa Weaver (Madison) shared the following address with the delegates.

*I would like to open my remarks this morning by saying how blessed Central District is, that Doug Luginbill said "yes" to the call of Conference Minister. Doug was present at the CDC Annual Meeting last year in Columbus, but he did not actually begin as Conference Minister until August 15 of 2016. So this Annual Meeting in Bluffton marks only about 10 months into Doug's term. And yet, in the very best possible way, I can say that it seems as if Doug has been here much longer than 10 months, as he partook immediately of the overflowing, bountiful cup of responsibility that is placed in front of the Conference Minister. I have witnessed Doug providing excellent pastoral and*

*administrative leadership, both within Central District, and within the wider MC USA community. So I want to say a public thank you to Doug, for the time, energy and gifts he is sharing. And I hope that if individuals here have not yet had an opportunity to meet Doug in person, that you find a moment to introduce yourself this weekend.*

*In the months leading up to these delegate sessions, it became apparent that the overall theme of the state-of-the-conference address would need to be “the ever-changing, growing, transforming landscape of Central District.” Many of our Board conversations have had this theme as of late, and it was also a central topic at our Leadership Council Meetings which took place at Camp Friedenswald in April.*

*One way in which our landscape is changing is with the addition of new member congregations. For example, we are so pleased that this year on the delegate agenda is a vote to welcome Open Table into full membership of Central District. The official relationship between Open Table and Central District began last year, when Open Table was introduced at Annual Meeting (2016) as a congregation applying for membership. If you were present, you may remember that Sally Weaver Glick, Pastor-Doula of Open Table, brought a slide show to Columbus. She showed photos of their worship space and some congregational events, and shared a bit about their history, style of worship, and vision for being a faith community. As well, at last year’s Annual Meeting, Sally co-led a workshop on prayer practices, and there was a meet-and-greet time on the schedule for informal conversation and visiting with members of Open Table.*

*In February and March of this year, members of Open Table lent their leadership skills to our Central District Regional Gatherings, preparing a segment of each of those days, focused on contemplative prayer. And just yesterday afternoon, some of you participated in the “Peacemaking Grounded in Prayer” gathering which Open Table members helped to coordinate. May I say that this new relationship has already borne good fruit. The Central District community is blessed by the wisdom, the spirit, and the presence of Open Table and my hope is that Open Table can also identify ways in which their congregation has been, and will be, blessed by the larger body of Central District Conference.*

*Now if you happened to notice, the agenda item immediately following the Open Table membership vote says “Introduction of Congregations.” This is not still referring to Open Table. Rather, one of the tasks the Board has had this spring is to process three new applications for membership from interested congregations. The three congregations applying for membership are: Raleigh Mennonite Church (of North Carolina), Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (also of North Carolina) and Berea Mennonite Church (of Atlanta, Georgia).*

*You may wish, at this point, to look at the map that our CDC Administrator Emma Hartman has created, and placed in your folder. On this map you should be able to identify where your congregation is; all current member congregations of Central District are shown in blue. Congregations applying for membership (which includes Open Table for just another couple of hours!) are in yellow. You can likely figure out which ones are Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Berea.*

*So, to clarify, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Berea Mennonite congregations, are at the place this year, where Open Table was last year. This is the Annual Meeting in which they will offer introductions of their congregations and there will also be a meet-and-greet time this evening after worship in Bob’s Place, in the lower level of Marbeck Center. I have had the pleasure, earlier this spring, of speaking*

*on the phone with the pastor from each of these three congregations, and I am pleased that they, and other members of their congregations, are here in Bluffton this weekend for an official welcome and introduction.*

*I would like to take a moment to share what additional steps in the membership process were taken prior to this Annual Meeting. These are steps which all congregations go through, in order to apply for membership. The steps for Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Berea included:*

- *Initial conversations and emails between conference leadership (often Doug) and the congregational leadership (which often was the pastor, or a moderator or chair of a church council).*
- *A visit to each applying congregation, which meant that this spring, Doug, and Arman Habegger (our Central District President-Elect) took a road trip together. Doug and Arman were able to visit Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Berea, and shared about those visits at our spring Leadership Council.*
- *And, an affirmation by each of the applying congregations of the criteria of Central District member congregations.*

*A full list of these member criteria can be found on page 133 of your handbook; the criteria includes:*

- *Keeping Christ at the center of faith and action*
- *Affirming the polity statement of Central District*
- *Being guided by MC USA's Vision of Healing and Hope*
- *Participating regularly in conference*
- *Providing financial support*
- *And, demonstrating willingness for members to serve in conference leadership positions*

*Furthermore, if the congregation applying for membership is currently a member of another area conference within MC USA, and is seeking to transfer membership between conferences, there are additional conversations that take place. And this was indeed true for each Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Berea. These conversations include clarification of intent between the congregation and the originating conference, as well as communication between the leadership of the two conferences. The idea is that all those involved are able to maintain healthy, respectful, working relationships as we will continue to be brothers and sisters within MC USA, even if area conference affiliation has changed.*

*And finally, I think it is important to understand as well, that the year following the introduction of a congregation at Annual Meeting, is a year of discernment. It is a time for both bodies - the individual congregation, and the conference as a whole - to continue to reflect and explore this new relationship and this chosen path. It is an opportunity for the pastor and members of the congregation to participate in pastor-peer groups and Regional Gatherings, to receive newsletters and conference updates, and to access and offer resources. It is an opportunity for the Conference to establish methods of communication, to receive new counsel and hear fresh perspectives, and to adapt to new realities.*

*For example, I think this latter point - that of adapting to new realities - becomes apparent if we all glance once more at the map on the table. Hmmm ....where, how many, and in what format will our Regional Gatherings take place next year?*

*So this is an invitation for the entire Central District community to think creatively, joyfully and energetically about how to build bridges and create sustainable, meaningful relationships with individuals, with pastors, and between congregations, across time and space.*

*Thus far, I have shared my observations on the ways in which Central District is exploring relationships with congregations applying for membership. There is also some realignment that is taking the form of congregations changing from a dual to a single area-conference affiliation. One example of this is Assembly Mennonite Church of Goshen, Indiana, which changed from a dual-membership congregation (Central District and Indiana-Michigan) to sole affiliation with Central District. Another example of this is Lima Mennonite Church of Lima, Ohio, which changed from dual affiliation (with Central District and Ohio Conference) to sole affiliation with Central District. This is all part of the shifting, growing, changing landscape within area conferences, as well as the larger body of MC USA.*

*For the second half of my remarks I would like to update the Central District community about a set of conversations that began last fall, between the leadership of Central District and the leadership of Allegheny Mennonite Conference.*

*If you look again at the map, you will see a cluster of congregations in brown, mostly in the Pennsylvania area. These congregations belong to Allegheny, one of our sister conferences in MC USA.*

*If you happened to be at the third Regional Gathering this spring, you would have met Dave Mishler, Conference Minister of Allegheny. Dave is also here with us this weekend in Bluffton. At this third Regional Gathering, Dave shared with those present that Allegheny is currently in a period of discernment. Allegheny is considering various options of structure and viability. Those options include: 1) continuing as their own area conference within MC USA; 2) disbanding as a conference, and supporting individual congregations in joining other area conferences of their choice, or, 3) dissolving as a separate conference, but keeping their Allegheny congregations together, and exploring ways in which they as a unit could join with another conference.*

*This past March, Dave Mishler, and also Phoebe Sharp (who is Allegheny's representative to the MC USA CLC meetings) were able to meet with Doug, Arman and myself, as well as our Denominational Minister, Nancy Kauffmann. The six of us shared a meal, and wondered aloud together about what the future might hold, for both Allegheny and Central District. So, to clarify, though Allegheny is still in its own period of discernment, and may simply remain as an independent area conference within MC USA, Allegheny is simultaneously wanting to explore whether or not joining Central District as a group of congregations, is a viable option.*

*Now, this is a big-enough idea, and a complicated-enough idea, that it bears some careful reflection, even in these early stages....even when the outcome of Allegheny's own process of discernment is not yet clear.*

*So, the idea took hold during that March meeting, that if there is even a possibility that our conferences would want to explore an official relationship together at some point, we had better get to know each other a little bit better. To this end, Allegheny and Central District together are forming what we are calling a Network Team. This Network Team will consist of three members from Allegheny Conference, and three members from Central District Conference. These six individuals*

*have agreed to take the next 6 months, simply to get to know each other's conference. This will be worked at in the following ways:*

- *Each member of the Network Team will visit, and worship with, a congregation from the other conference.*
- *Each member of the Network Team will attend one other kind of event in the other conference, such as a Regional Gathering, Retreat, or a Leadership Council meeting.*
- *And, the six members will participate together in a series of ZOOM calls, where they will share about conference histories and traditions, locations of significance, cycles of conference events, etc. These ZOOM calls will be facilitated by the two Conference Ministers, Doug and Dave, who will then also share the benefit of getting to know better, how the other conference functions.*

*I think the beauty behind this Network Team idea, is that if Allegheny discerns that they want to pursue a path forward to join officially with Central District in some way, we will all be a step ahead, for having formed some significant relationships, and for having informed ourselves to some degree about each other's conference.*

*And if Allegheny decides to remain as its own independent area conference within MC USA, we will still have formed some significant relationships, and will still have informed ourselves to some degree about each other's conference. Either way, it is the same, positive benefit of building trust and creating channels of communication.*

*So, for now, this is the step that Central District and Allegheny are taking together -- creating a Network Team for the purpose of information-sharing and developing relationships. The individuals from Allegheny Conference who have agreed to serve on this Network Team are: Enos Tice from Springs Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, Julie Swartzentruber from Pittsburgh Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, and LeAnne Zook from Hyattsville Mennonite Church, Maryland. They will be joined by three individuals from Central District Conference: James Rissler from Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship in Georgia, Jane Roeschley from Mennonite Church of Normal in Illinois, and Loren Johns from Southside Fellowship in Indiana.*

*Interestingly, it has already been mentioned, that if this Network Team idea works out well, perhaps it could be replicated with two different area conferences within MC USA, not with the purpose of thinking of any eventual joining of conferences, but simply as a good way to foster healthy conference-to-conference relationships within MC USA.*

*In conclusion, let me reiterate that this state-of-the-conference address has focused on the changing landscape of Central District Conference, describing specific ways in which congregations and conferences are considering membership and official connections. However, I would like to suggest that this examination of the landscape is just one lens through which to view the "state of the conference." In many ways, this entire annual meeting, is a state-of-the-conference address:*

- *Our worship time together reveals the state of our conference.*
- *The spirit of mealtime conversations, reveals the state of our conference.*
- *The ideas discussed in the plenary session, and the themes chosen for afternoon workshops, reveal the state of our conference.*
- *Announcements of new and credentialed pastors, updates from Camp Friedenswald, reports of Reign of God grants, the presence of children and youth-- this all reflects the state of our conference.*

- *And the buzz of voices a short while ago, as you each shared around the tables about what makes your congregation special, speaks volumes of the state of the conference.*

*So, just as I thanked Doug in my opening remarks, I would now like to thank each individual here, for collectively participating in a three-day, multi-session, many-personed 'state-of-the-conference' address, known commonly as our Central District Annual Meeting.*

**Centering:** Sally Weaver Glick (Open Table) offered a moment of centering time. *Be still and know that I am God.*

**Sharing around tables:** Lisa invited participants to discuss the following:

- Share suggestions on welcoming new congregations and/or building sustainable relationships over time and space.
- What are your joys or ideas regarding conference growth and change?
- What questions or concerns do you have regarding conference growth and change?

**Congregational Story:** Wanda Stopher (First Bluffton) shared the following congregational story:

*Earlier this year, on February 1, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, held a memorial service, celebrating the life of our brother, Adan Ortiz. This loss was deeply felt among us. In many small but not insignificant ways, he made his way into our hearts as he made a home among us. Adan came to us from Guatemala. He was not the only refugee welcomed at FMC over the years. But he was one who stayed, living out his life in Bluffton. His death became symbolic of the end of an era begun on Sunday May 6, 1984, when the congregation voted to become a public sanctuary for "refugees from Central America who entered the United States illegally to escape violence in their homeland."*

*From first-person conversations and written reports I learned about the sanctuary movement at FMC:*

- *There was a deep sense of call, passion...a vision for being a sanctuary.*
- *This sense of call was embodied in a whole range of ways in which people participated:*  
*\*Some felt called to leadership. There was a Sanctuary Coordinating Committee, (Richard Weaver, Alison Hiebert, Mary Goings, Mary Anne Moser, Mel Schmidt, later including Harvey Bauman, John Templin.) These leaders set goals, administered, organized, educated, and identified needs as they arose. Others followed as the years went on. Recently, Pastor Steve Yoder and many, many others picked up leadership needed in the continued care and accompaniment of Adan long after the needs of the "movement" itself had dissipated.*  
*\*In addition to leaders, there were workers: Hosting strangers in their homes overnight and for meals...providing transportation or loan a vehicle...translating—people who could speak Spanish.*
- *FMC did not do this alone. Important connections with others committed to the cause provided direction, contacts and consultation: A church in Harlingen, TX, The Overground Railroad network across the country, The Religious Task Force on Central America in Chicago, and attorneys across the country.*
- *From numerous people, I heard, "We didn't really know what we were doing. We just knew we needed to do what we could."*

*One era ends. Since Adan's death concerns all over the world have been heightened as result of travel bans and immigration orders. The need of welcome and sanctuary is ongoing for the world's migrating populations. Some things only change, it seems, by degree. The UN Refugee Agency*

reports that “we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18...and nearly 23,800 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution.” (<http://www.unchr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>, 02-02-17)

*Collaborated with Bluffton University to support a Syrian student.*

*FMC as a congregation is in a time of discernment. We're listening for what God may be calling us to in the next chapter of our life together. We are considering how we might best live into the Welcoming Statement adopted in early 2016. God may call us to renew our commitment to being a sanctuary congregation. If so, some of the same things will be critical: call/vision, leadership, eager workers, specific skills and resources. A renewed commitment will also look different than it did in the past. The conversations about our life and ministry together will be an important element as we extend a wide and authentic welcome, sanctuary, today.*

**Introductions:** Lisa introduced the following:

*Resolutions Committee:* David Stolpe (Milwaukee), Sueann VonGunten (Hively Ave), George Lehman (First Bluffton)

*Listening Committee:* Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community), David Moser (Southside), Brian Bolton (Shalom Mennonite Congregation)

*Parliamentarian:* Gerald Mast

*Medical Persons On Call:* Joyce Suter, coordinator (Grace)

*Youth Delegates/Mentors:* Simia Yoder (Faith), Grace Hitt (Cincinnati)/Mark Weidner

**Summary Review of 2016 Minutes:** Carrie Mast (First Bluffton) summarized the minutes of the 2016 annual meeting. The minutes were affirmed as written.

**Highlight Actions in 2017 Agenda:** Carrie Mast (First Bluffton) reviewed the agenda and highlighted the actions/agenda for the delegate sessions.

### **Break/Snacks**

Scott Troyer (Cincinnati) and Trevor Bechtel (Shalom Community) led delegates in singing HWB 304 *There are many gifts.*

**Announcement:** Willis Sommer (First Bluffton) former treasurer of CDC and a CDC board representative on the MCC Great Lakes Board died Friday morning, June 23, 2017 of an inoperable, non-cancerous tumor.

**Treasurers Report/Presentation of 2017-2018 Proposed Spending Plan:** Roger Nafziger (Eighth Street) invited delegates to turn to p 67 of the report book and review the balance sheet. He then referred delegates to p 68 and reviewed the income/expense statement as of April 30. He shared updated numbers through May 31. He directed attention to p 44 and reviewed the proposed spending plan for 2017-2018.

**Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Slate:** Jim Mohr (First Wadsworth), chair of the Gifts Discernment Committee, introduced members of the committee: Peter Eash-Scott (Milwaukee), Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street), Lois Hochstetler (Mennonite Church of Normal), Lawrence Matthews

(First Bluffton), and Sally Weaver Glick (Assembly). Jim directed delegates to the 2017-2018 slate on pp 46-48 of the report book. He moved to affirm the 2017-2018 slate of nominees. The slate was affirmed as presented.

**Commissioning Prayer:** Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) thanked all those who worked for the conference during the past year. He recognized incoming and continuing committee members for their work and led in a commissioning prayer.

**Receiving Open Table Mennonite Fellowship:** Arman Habegger (Grace) moved to receive Open Table Mennonite Fellowship as a member congregation of Central District Conference. A paper ballot vote was taken.

**Introduction of Congregations:** Lisa Weaver (Madison) invited the pastors and representatives of Raleigh Mennonite Church, Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, and Berea Mennonite Church to introduce their congregations to the delegates.

*Raleigh Mennonite Church (RMC) (presentation):* Melissa Florer-Bixler brought greetings from the south and Raleigh Mennonite. She shared that she values the incredible gifts that people bring to the congregation, including people who preach and teach, do wonderful works of mercy and justice in the community.

Brenda North Martin, a long-time member of the congregation, shared that the congregation is made up of approximately 70 members and is located in Raleigh, North Carolina. She shared a brief history of the formation of the congregation that began in 1986. The congregation meets at the Old Barbie School building and shares space with a charter elementary school whose mission is to provide education and support to at-risk children.

\*Fifty percent of the congregation are Mennonite by choice rather than by birth.

\*Being an urban congregation in a region filled with universities, they see their membership ebb and flow.

\*Their worship style is informal, blending singing from the Mennonite songbooks with contemporary style songs.

\*The congregation is trying new ways to engage adults and children in worship. One of the things they have tried is a “PrayGround” in which quiet materials are provided for use during the service to help engage both children and adults in worship. Parents are asked to sit within reach of their children to help guide/coach them in quiet play.

\*Church business is conducted during Church Life Meetings in a large circle following a fellowship meal. Decisions are made through reaching consensus.

\*Membership at Raleigh is done through an annual renewal/commitment service in which each member is invited to make an intentional re-commitment to be involved and connected in congregational life.

\*The congregation has worked hard to maintain their vision as a congregation that welcomes all. Each person is an important piece that contributes to the unique quilt that is the faith community.

\*Raleigh has sent out two groups who began new congregations: Peace Covenant Fellowship, a Church of the Brethren congregation meeting in Durham, and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship.

\*The congregation has seen many ministries formed out of the vision and passion of small groups and individuals, ministries that have touched the lives of many in the neighborhood and city.

\*Started a Ten Thousand Villages store,

\*Supported an individual who formed a Friends of the World ministry to international students at NCC University. He went on to serve in MCC and is still serving in Asia.



- \*Served as home to a peace center for several years,
- \*Hosted Service Adventure units for 17 years,
- \*Supports a community development ministry founded by one of the members,
- \*Ordained Hugh Hollowell as pastor to the homeless community in Raleigh and support his work,
- \*Helped form a food co-op at the neighborhood Senior Housing complex,
- \*Support a preschool run by one of the members for at-risk three and four-year-olds,
- \*Participate in MDS rebuilds in eastern North Carolina,
- \*Host community events such as bystander training and Christmas coloring and cookie decorating parties.

\*The house that served as their Service Adventure home is now a home for refugees resettling in North Carolina.

\*The congregation holds three annual retreats:

- \*An intergenerational retreat in the Fall that serves as an opportunity to learn and play together,
- \*A women's retreat at the beach,
- \*A men's retreat at the beach or at a local park.

\*In the spring of 2016, the congregation called Melissa Florer-Bixler to be their third full-time pastor.

\*RMC has always been a congregation looking to become involved with those on the margins who are experiencing injustice in its many forms. Two years ago, they developed a statement of ministry that welcomed gays and lesbians to be active members of the congregation. During their last Church Life meeting they realized that they wanted to broaden that statement to welcome individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity to become a part of the church family.

\*Their most recent process of congregational discernment led them to look more closely at their connection with the broader Mennonite Church. While RMC began as a Mennonite church plant supported by Virginia Mennonite Conference, they feel that Central District Conference is a better fit as we understand the role of congregational autonomy, discernment, and decision-making within the vision of the broader Mennonite Church. They look forward to this next year of exploring membership within the conference.

*Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (CHMF):* Isaac Villegas, pastor, shared that the best way to get to know people is to know their arguments, to know what a congregation spends time talking about, all that energy and all those meetings and committee. One of the reoccurring disagreements at CHMF is about chairs. They spend a lot of time talking about the chairs in their worship space: who is going to move them every Sunday, is it worth it to spend all that time and energy. Moving chairs for 70 people is a lot of work. From the beginning of the 15 years of existence as a congregation, CHMF has rented space from other congregations. They met for awhile at a Quaker meetinghouse in Chapel Hill and learned to worship in the round, where they could see one another's faces, to worship face-to-face. That became essential to who they are as a congregation. When they outgrew the Quaker meeting space a few years ago, they rented space from a Presbyterian church where they are now meeting. They don't like their rows which make it impossible to see one another's eyes while they worship. So they have to move the chairs every Sunday and they argue about whose work it should be: the hospitality committee, the planning committee, the moderator, or maybe a new committee. Nothing so far has worked to create a coordinated system but somehow every Sunday the chairs get moved. Isaac summarized this culture of worship at CHMF and their sense of community as a congregation by using the words from Genesis when Jacob reunites with his brother Esau, "To see you is like seeing the face of God." So the congregation gathers for prayer, potlucks, singing, and service projects as their worship, where they are face-to-face with each other, which means they are face-to-face with God.

*Berea Mennonite Church (BMC):* John Wierwille shared BMC's story started about 65 years ago. It's

only been a congregation for about 50 years. Part of the story is told in a letter written in 1951 by a Bishop in Lancaster to four boys. The story of Berea is of seven women and their husbands, four boys, and about 20 sheep and goats. Someone in 1950 told a story to four boys about Moravian missionaries who marched from central Czechoslovakia to Hamburg, Germany because they heard that slaves in the Dominican Republic weren't getting the Gospel because a law had been passed saying that it was illegal for a free person to preach the Gospel to slaves. So they marched across the continent in the middle of winter and sold themselves into slavery in Hamburg, Germany to pay for their passage and spent the rest of their lives, 13-16 years, converting slaves, teaching them the goodness of the Gospel and the hope of freedom. Those four boys heard that story and asked, "What is the difference between what the missionaries did and going south?"

BMC comes out of the very first racially integrated congregation in the Southeast US started by four boys, 16, 17, and two 18 year-olds, who received a letter from their Bishop that said, "I'm worried about you having a car. Take the radio out, paint the car, no bumpers, no hubcaps, and no cruising." It doesn't say anything about moving them into the teeth of segregation. The boys moved to Clay St, started a summer Bible study, eventually had a pastor and became a congregation.

By 1974, the racially integrated congregation split on racial grounds. John heard the story of what happened from one of the long time members, an African American pastor, who because of some disagreements around clothing and cars, eventually moved his congregation down the street from Berea. When John arrived at BMC, the congregation was seven women who were interracially married who had raised their children in the church. Now BMC is known by 20 or so sheep and goats.

The congregation is made up of a remarkable set of people, including seminary students. There are 20-30 people who worship together. They run a farm on 6.5 acres and show people what it means to do creation care. Children have built barns on the site and put in irrigation.

BMC extends their influence by partnering with people:

- \*DOOR - last year about 800 people came from DOOR to work on the grounds,
- \*Coalition of Amakli workers,
- \*Freedom University by doing multiple trainings for them on non-violent direct action
- \*A school,

They focus on peacemaking through their Peace and Carrots Camp, which is a farm camp and a peacemaking camp all at once.

They are still wondering what it means to not be thinking toward Southeast Mennonite Conference. They've had a long relationship and have good friends there. They don't feel like they can fit in anymore. They are grateful for the change to make connections with Central District Conference.

Scott Troyer led delegates in singing SJ 27 *God of the Bible*.

**Missional Church Committee Report:** Phil Hart (Columbus), Gladene Hershberger (Oak Grove), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street), Gerald Mast (First Bluffton), Matt Morin (Milwaukee), Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community), John Powell (Shalom Community), and Lois Kaufmann-Hunsberger, MC USA Resource Advocate (Maplewood)

Matt Morin, co-chair of the Missional Church Committee, invited delegates to read the committee's report on p82. The report reflects the rich conversations the committee has had on anti-racism,

immigration, gun violence, military recruitment, Israel-Palestine, church planting, and other missional themes.

As the committee encourages Central District congregations in their missional work, they ask the following:

- \* “Where are the new things happening that we need to be aware of?”
- \*How do we plant seeds for peace, justice, creation care, education, evangelism, and new communities of faith?
- \*How do we help new initiatives grow?”

The committee offered the following skit based on a Frog and Toad story, “The Garden” by Arnold Lobel, as an illustration of the puzzles they sometimes face.

*Kiva:* Frog was in his garden. Toad came walking by.  
*Janeen:* “What a fine garden you have, Frog.”  
*John:* “Yes, it is very nice, but it was hard work.”  
*Janeen:* “I wish I had a garden.”  
*John:* “Here are some flower seeds. Plant them in the ground, and soon you will have a garden.”  
*Janeen:* “How soon?”  
*John:* “Quite soon.”  
*Gerald:* Toad ran home. He planted the flower seeds.  
*Janeen:* “Now seeds, start growing.”  
*Gladene:* Toad walked up and down a few times. The seeds did not start to grow.  
*Lois:* Toad put his head close to the ground and said loudly,  
*Janeen:* “Now seeds, start growing!”  
*Kiva:* The seeds did not start to grow.  
*Gerald:* Toad put his head very close to the ground and shouted,  
*Janeen:* “NOW SEEDS, START GROWING!”  
*Gladene:* Frog came running up the path.  
*John:* “What is all this noise?”  
*Janeen:* “My seeds will not grow.”  
*John:* “You are shouting too much. These poor seeds are afraid to grow.”  
*Janeen:* “My seeds are afraid to grow?”  
*John:* “Of course. Leave them alone for a few days. Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds will start to grow.”  
*Lois:* That night Toad looked out of his window.  
*Janeen:* “Drat! My seeds have not started to grow. They must be afraid of the dark.”  
*Kiva:* Toad went out to his garden with some candles.  
*Janeen:* “I will read the seeds a story. Then they will not be afraid.”  
*Gerald:* Toad read a long story to his seeds.  
*Gladene:* All the next day Toad sang songs to his seeds.  
*Lois:* And all the next day Toad read poems to his seeds.  
*Kiva:* And all the next day Toad played music for his seeds.  
*Gerald:* Toad looked at the ground. The seeds still did not start to grow.  
*Janeen:* “What shall I do? These must be the most frightened seeds in the whole world!”  
*Gladene:* Then Toad felt very tired, and he fell asleep.  
*John:* “Toad, Toad, wake up! Look at your garden!”

*Lois:* Toad looked at his garden. Little green plants were coming up out of the ground.  
*Janeen:* “At last! My seeds have stopped being afraid to grow!”  
*John:* “And now you will have a nice garden too.”  
*Janeen:* “Yes, but you were right, Frog. It was very hard work.”

Phil Hart (Columbus) shared that doing missional work can sometimes feel like very hard work. But sometimes we are just called to plant seeds, nurture them, and be patient. He invited delegates, in their table groups, to share brief examples of ways their congregations have been planting seeds of peace, justice, creation care, education, evangelism, and new communities of faith. How have they nurtured those missional seeds? What kind of help would they like from the Central District Conference? Phil requested that responses be recorded and turned returned to the committee.

### **Word from MC USA [Terry Shue]**

Terry brought greetings from MC USA. He shared that change is inevitable in life. It is felt in the aging process, in families, congregations, businesses, organizations, and in the denomination. As the context around us changes, so do we. Some changes are difficult and some are welcomed, but almost all changes take time to become the new normal. There are many illustrations that highlight what these changes mean for MC USA. On average, MC USA is getting older as people within the denomination. Sunday morning dress is becoming more casual. Congregations are getting smaller, while the debt load of pastors is getting higher. The median income is increasing and the average church attendance is decreasing. On average the years of education is increasing, but the number of Mennonite students in our schools is decreasing. The number attending Mennonite seminaries is decreasing and the number of pastors coming into our congregations is increasing. Congregations are becoming increasingly affinity based rather than geographic based. Some of the most difficult changes we face are when people we know and love part ways. We have felt that pain deeply over the past five years. We’ve seen conferences leaving MC USA, we’ve seen congregations shifting conferences or becoming totally independent. We feel it in our capacity as budgets are reduced and staff is cut. We feel it mostly in the voices that are lost at the table when we pick up the work of the church in discernment.

And yet, as Terry travels across the denomination and hears stories of local congregations, he often catches a vision of a church that moves beyond self preservation into a missional context that calls their community and congregation to join with what God is already doing in the world. These stories bear testimony to the seeds that are scattered and taking root, sprouting as expressions of the kingdom of God around us. Those stories are inspiring. Congregations leaning into what God is doing rather than what was. These stories are living proof that God is alive and well in the church today.

He acknowledged the five agencies and gave examples of things that are being done that give expression to the vision of MC USA.

Terry shared that at Orlando 2017 there will be one major resolution, the Israel-Palestine resolution, on the docket. It has been shaped over the last three years as various groups have worked to create a statement that is more than a knee-jerk reaction and points to healing and hope in that complex world.

Leadership has been working on a new way to listen to the church, Future Church Summit, to find a way to grab the voice of the church while it is gathered in Orlando. For several days the church is going to be asking questions that revolve around the question of how we are going to follow Jesus as Anabaptists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will be pulled together in ways that uses technology, table groups, individuals to

develop themes that come together and are projected on a screen so participants can see and hear where God is calling us through the discernment of the people that are at the tables.

Terry invited prayers and thanked CDC for the people who serve in leadership, finances, and prayer support.

**Introduction of Guests:** Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) welcomed and introduced guests and representatives from Mennonite Church USA Executive leadership and its agencies, Mennonite schools, and from other organizations related to the conference.

## **Lunch, Visiting Displays, Book Signings, Getting Acquainted Time with**

### ***Delegate Session II***

Bradley Kauffman (Cincinnati) led in singing SJ 17 *Halle, halle, hallelujah*.

**Announcing Open Table** vote/presentation of blessing cup: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) announced that the vote to affirm Open Table Mennonite Fellowship for membership in Central district Conference was unanimous (94 delegate votes cast).

**Congregational Story: Mennonite Church of Normal:** Tim Schrag (Mennonite Church of Normal) shared the following story:

At one level I could tell several stories that would have some ‘bling’, some crowd appeal. They would be true stories and be accounts of congregational members being present at “Black Lives Matter” consultations and demonstrations, taking part in tense city council and community meetings around the topic of local discriminatory policing, etc. With embellishment, these could seem rather striking and even impressive.

But the real story, I believe, is how we are working with a deeper and less glamorous reality. Namely, being real. The fact is that MCN is comprised almost exclusively of white people of privilege. For our stories to be ‘true’ at the level of transformation, means our first task, and it is a hard, slow, uncertain task, is to understand this reality, confess it, and work redemptively within that context.

From February-May we held with a Sunday School class on *The New Jim Crow*. Attendance was very high. A crucial fact was that the two teachers of the class were teachers, at the High School level, of English literature and history, and those teaching skills showed. If we were going to study this book and topic, then it was thankfully very well led. First class, first thing. Here’s a card....write down....”what are your fears, your anxieties, your worries? “That I will look dumb and be exposed for being more racist than I think I am.” “That I’ll learn a lot, and not have any more handles on how to do anything.” “That we will confuse thinking about and discussing something, and actually doing something”.

This set the stage for risking honesty and transparency, along with a quest for relevance. All the teaching, the discussion, the guests, the videos, the book...seemed to circle back again and again to these kinds of inquiries: ...what about here? What about our town? What about me? What have I learned about myself that God needs to change, and what I might do? And how would changes become manifest and interwoven into the fabric of my life?

Those answers, to those last questions, are the not-yet-known stories. One might say that at Mennonite Church of Normal we have done some of the necessary work of planting, fertilizing, watering, tending...the timing is such that I would say....ask me in a year what stories have emerged. For now, this is a tale of confession, preparation, and (I hope) beginning.

**Historical Vignette/Camp Friedenswald Highlights** (presentation): Jenna Liechty Martin (Eighth Street) invited anyone who had ever gone to any of the camps at Camp Friedenswald to stand. She shared highlights from a historical vignette about Camp Friedenswald that was presented at the recent regional gatherings and interspersed them with recent happenings at the camp. Through both the history and the present, she sees a conference commitment to formation of youth and adults and a desire to form relationships across congregations and even across conferences. She sees what can happen when people come together around a shared vision and desire to create a place to retreat, renew and connect.

Jenna invited delegates to attend the celebration and dedication to recommit Camp Friedenswald on July 15, 2017.

Scott Troyer (Cincinnati) led delegates in singing SJ 109 *There is more love somewhere*. Evan Miller (Open Table) led a moment of centering, using *Be Still and Know that I Am God*.

**Plenary/Table Group Discussion:** Gerald Mast introduced Dr. Drew Hart, Assistant Professor at Messiah College. Dr. Hart's PhD, focusing on theology and ethics is from Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Before his current position, Dr. Hart was a pastor and brings his experience of the church into his current work as a teacher and writer. He recently published, *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the way the church views racism*, which tells the story of his personal experience with our nation's racialized social and political system. He explains how this system developed during key historical moments and describes the terrible effect of this system on the humanity of both black and white people. He shows how this dehumanization intersects with other forms of dehumanization including sex, gender and class. More profoundly for us he diagnosis the terribly disappointing failure of most of the church, including especially what he refers to as "nice white people" to live out the Gospel of peace in response to this unjust and ugly system. Dr. Hart grasps the promise of our peace church tradition with its nonconformist call to the whole Gospel of reconciliation with God and our enemies. He also sees and calls out the heartbreaking ways that we have failed as a church to proclaim this Gospel in word and deed with respect to racial justice and reconciliation.

Dr. Hart focused on helping the delegates think about how to love in our racialized world. He was first introduced to Anabaptism by the Brethren in Christ at Messiah College. It was then that he began to realize how strange American Christianity really is. He shared stories about two chapels that he attended that caught his attention and started him thinking about the strange way we have been formed in the world.

Racism has distorted the way we perceive others. Race is a way of seeing and being seen by others in the world. It is a filter through which we interact and experience the world. We have to pay attention to not only how we feel inside, but the filters through which we see other people.

Racial gazes not only distorts how we see others but turn people into one dimensional figures. It is knowing people before you "know" them. He shared examples of university studies that were done. The studies showed that the stereotypes of criminality and blackness can be devastating for peoples lives. Race literally makes it harder for us to know how to love black people well because we are deeply

socialized to see blackness as bad, as negative, and to give whiteness a marker of innocence, nice, and all things good in the world.

We have to begin to think of the relationship between living in a racist, white supremacist, hierarchical society and the challenge to love those targeted by the most racial gaze and systems that are in place. The very construction of whiteness goes contrary to what it means to love. The inertia of whiteness is moving in one way and the trajectory of love is moving in a very different direction. If whiteness is a social construct for the purpose of social dominance and if Christianity is the renouncing of social dominance, then whiteness and Christianity are incompatible with one another. We are not talking about the color of your skin, but of whiteness as a way of being in the world as social dominance. It is not helpful when talking about race to talk about skin, not people of European descent, but talk about a way of being in the world. Radical love calls us to identify with the shared humanity of others and to act on behalf of their liberation, well being, and to accept the consequences and costs that come along with that kind of action. Radical love is the antidote to this one dimensional way of viewing people in the world. It calls us to empathize, to see people's humanity, and to radically act in the moment in response to what is going on. It defies the status quo ways that we have been socialized and not only to see others, but to respond and live with others as well. White supremacy and whiteness are deeply incompatible ways of being with the radical kind of love that we see from Jesus.

The history of Anabaptism tracks power dynamics until we get to North American Anabaptists. Anabaptists have assimilated into the whiteness of America with its domination and control. Some Anabaptists rejected the white Anglo Saxon identity, but they did not reject the benefits of the white society. Mennonites were taking the lands from which the Native Americans were rejected. While they may not have had slaves, they benefitted from the economy slavery enabled. Ethnic Mennonite identity and the way that we tell history covers up some of the stuff that happened.

We have to think about the trajectory of European Mennonites in the United States. Mennonites had engaged in segregation even as non-conformity was part of their lives. It is easy to be nice and kind people, but that is not the same as love that empathizes and sees the shared humanity and acts on behalf of the most vulnerable of society and doing so radically and accepting the consequences that comes with that kind of radical action. Our challenge is love those we have been socialized not to love, to love those who are hard to love because of the way that we view others in our society.

Drew gave some examples of what is happening in his hometown of Harrisburg and some of the responses from the Christian community to them. Part of what it means to love our neighbors is to see people's humanity, get to know them and then act on their behalf. He challenged everyone who wants to love people in a racialized society to put on their blue jeans and advocate for them in an effort to be in solidarity with those who are vulnerable.

*Table conversations:* Delegates were invited to respond to the following questions:

- \*How is your church seeing racial minorities beyond one dimensional figures?
- \*Where are the opportunities for unlearning and new learning to occur in your neighborhoods?
- \*Are you willing to follow and learn from the radical love embodied by black people and accept the social cost and consequences that may result from it?

*Open Mic* (Dr. Hart's responses are in italics)

\**Tim Schrag, Mennonite Church of Normal:* At the very beginning of your remarks, you talked about damage being done to all peoples. Is there the equivalent of whiteness ( a paradigm for divisions),

i.e.,blackness that has been accepting of this, is divisive, or has bought into society in a way that creates its own dynamics that would stand in the way of love?

*The issue isn't only that whiteness is a social construct, but the work that it does, the way that it causes us to live into the world. Whiteness is a way of forming people in a way to rule the earth. Blackness does not call itself to rule the earth. There are different ways to think about blackness. It is not necessarily helpful to think about it as parallel problem to whiteness. There are two different ways of being: one is imposing, the other is to be subjected. I often think about blackness in three different ways: 1) from the standpoint of stereotype (this is who white society say black people are). The definition comes from outside the community telling black people who they are. 2) Another way to think about is as archetype (this who white people say black people should be). 3) Blackness as the real, actual lived experience of black people, which is always complex, but is in many ways an anti-type. It is the search for one's own identity in the complexity of one's self and to try to make sense of the history and realities one comes upon. Blackness and the heart of it is a way of resisting the oppression, to try and find one's humanity in a society that denies it. Blackness is not parallel to whiteness. When we talk about white church and black church, we are talking about two very different things. Sometimes we just think about the problem as divisiveness, but that is not my concern per se. It is the top down way the white church became a tool to participate and support the dominant society in all kinds of ways, including theologically and biblically. The white church helped to segregate the world as a way of organizing the world. The black church was not built on segregation but on withdrawal. It was withdrawing from the white supremacist and segregation mentalities and creating alternative spaces in which their humanities could be pursued and protected, believing in a God that is not white supremacist and does not hate us. Withdrawal and segregation are two different things. Throughout history, white people are always allowed into those black churches. The black church has always been a space where white people have been welcomed. Setting up one against the other is not really helpful as we think about the realities of what was going on. Some of the challenges for breaking through that paradigm is that we primarily talk about the divisions and don't talk about the systems and the way that we are organizing the society.*

\*Joel Miller, *Columbus*: One of the important books Joel has read in the last year is *Dear White Christians* by Jennifer Harvey. The focus of the book is moving from a reconciliation model to a reparation model. She feels like the reconciliation model has failed. She retells the civil rights history that we often see as a history of triumph and a coming together of togetherness. She tells the story the Black Manifesto in 1969 of James Forman that called for reparations from white churches across the U.S. The response from the white church was not good and relationships were actually deteriorating post civil rights and not this coming together that we often think of. Reconciliation is so key to us. We say reconciliation is the center of our work. What is your response to a reparation model?

*Reconciliation gets used differently in different spaces. It means something very different for different folks. I don't use the term reconciliation very much when talking about race. The biblical passages to help us think through power dynamics and justice and oppression are much more meaningful categories in talking about race and racism than using reconciliation as a starting point. In most cases, Black theologians are allergic to the word reconciliation because they know how that word gets used as a kind of kumbya, let's come together and do potlucks together and do a joint worship service together, etc, but we're not going to change how we order our lives in society and the injustice that is going on, we're not going to redistribute the wealth and resources that are in denominations and that we have accrued over the years. The world stays as it is, but now we are friends. Reconciliation can mean anything that anybody wants it to mean. Most Black people would not find hope in hearing the reconciliation is the center of our work. How is that going to impact people's everyday lives? Does that mean Mennonites are*



*going to be in solidarity now? Are Mennonites going to be showing up when there is a protest of Black people being killed, that Mennonites will be the first ones there? That's usually not what is meant when people say reconciliation is the center of our work. If reconciliation means solidarity with the most vulnerable, that you're going to show up when it's needed, put your bodies on the line, shut down the city when it's needed, by all means keep reconciliation as the center of our work. We need to ask what we mean by reconciliation as the center of our work. Christina Cleveland, a professor in reconciliation studies, has a vision of reconciliation that is very good. The emphasis on reparations takes seriously our history. While we who are present here today might not have set this thing in motion, we can participate in and contribute to by our daily choices, reaffirming the world as it is. We need to think that we are rebuilding our world as a white world by our actions every day. If we are going to have a theology of reconciliation, might it be a radical one that understands that God's reconciliation is reconciling the world to God's self. What does that kind of shalom look like when things are what they ought to be, when people are flourishing as they ought to be? What is it calling us to be? If peacemaking is moving us toward shalom, all kinds of folks can get behind it. Often the kind of peacemaking that many Mennonites have talked about is not something the vulnerable and poor can get excited about because it does not provide the hope for a new world that they desperately desire and are praying for. We've got to learn from others what radical love can mean. If we do that, it will inevitably shape the kind of language we use and the words that we find meaningful.*

*\*Kerry Strayer, Columbus: I love to go out and do the work, but we need to look at our attitude as we approach the work and maybe take out the cornerstone of humility out of the Anabaptist tradition. As a professor doing service learning out in our communities, I've sent out teams of students. In one case, I had a settlement house say, "We don't need a bunch of 20-year old white kids telling us how to fix our programs." Many times white folks show up to help, but they actually show up to lead. It made me rethink how proud I've always been of the way we approach missions, which is that we don't come out and just totally do our thing, but we ask, "How can we help you?" Are we even presuming there that we have something to offer? When we go out, we need to ask, "What are you learning from the community you are entering, not just what do you think you can bring?"*

*Mennonites like service, but there is a way in which service has been inverted. That humility really isn't there. It's about power dynamics and subverting the power dynamics that are in play. What often happens is that the sense of service comes with a hierarchical status in which we have everything to give. It's not coming in humility, it's coming with everything to give and nothing to receive. Sometimes we need to swap roles where teachers become students and students become teachers, where the first become the last and the last become the first. We need to ask, "How can you free us from ourselves?" When that happens, then we may have gotten somewhere meaningful. When we invert and see that there is something mutual about deliberation that we can experience together. So there are different ways of service. What does it mean when we talk about service and being servants in the world?*

*\*Ron Ropp, Mennonite Church of Normal: As Mennonites, we are very often motivated by guilt than by positive visions. We just sang about how we want to have peace, joy, and love. Is there a way we can put this into a context that makes this a joyful thing that we are doing? Tony Campolo talks about, "It's Friday, but Sunday is coming." Is Sunday coming and how do we put this in a positive message that really excites us?*

*I'm not interested in white guilt. I think lament is something very serious that needs to happen. I'm not interested in terms of how we can spin it and get excited because I don't think we have really come to grips with what has happened in the last 400 years and what has gone on in this land. There needs to be*

*some serious lament before God leading to repentance. Then we can celebrate. All things are possible with God. Resurrection is very possible and it is something that we can believe in and participate in but I don't think we peremptorily celebrate when the trajectory says otherwise. It is not a lament of despair. When we lament, we lament in the hope that God does bring new life. First we have to realize the death. Communities are being crushed right now, are under-resourced, there are children who are hungry, there are people locked up in bars more than anywhere else in the world. We have to come to a point where we really lament the weight of both the history and the present.*

*\*Nina Lanctot, Florence: I was impressed when you talked about your work in Harrisburg using the word "our." In an urban context, you have this common domain and it has black and white people. I would be curious to see the socio-demographics of Central District Conference in terms racial diversity. Do we need to move if we are serious about "our community?" Are there times to choose to move if we want our community, our churches to look a certain way? Do we need to live in our communities if we want to make these our churches?*

*That is a complicated question. White people moving is not always the answer. I think that white churches and white communities are the center of the action. That is ground zero where the work needs to be done. If the first goal is not how to become racially diverse, but how do we recognize our whiteness? How do we come to grips with us as a white way of being? How do we learn our history and identities? What is the story of the neighborhood of the church? Why is it an all white neighborhood? There were some communities that were welcoming and there were some that were not. There were some communities that we sundown towns, redlining, and special deeds. What is the story all the way back to Native Americans? What is the story of our neighborhoods and what they have become today? It didn't happen by accident. When we can take into account that trajectory of history, then we can think about new ways of being in this land and more faithful ways of being in this space. We have to know the story of our place and our role in it so we can repent and live differently.*

## **Break**

### **Seminars at Centennial Hall**

- \*Preparing for Orlando 2017 led by Terry Shue (Rm 109)
- \*Changing the Way the Church Views Racism led by Drew Hart (Marbeck Commons)
- \*Resonate: Shaping a new worship and song collection for MC USA and Mennonite Church Canada led by Bradley Kauffman (Rm 113)
- \*Christian formation for children led by Carrie Mast/Louise Matthews (Lion and Lamb)
- \*Women, Dig In: Exploring Bible Study for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century led by Marlene Bogard (Rm 110)

## **Transition**

### **Dinner**

Mennonite Women Dinner at Bluffton University in the Kreider Room  
Mennonite Men Dinner at Bluffton University in Bob's Place

## **Free Time**

### **WORSHIP II at Yoder Recital Hall**

Theme - Abide in me as I abide in you

Speakers: Doug Luginbill, Jorge Vielman, and Lefuarn Harvey  
Text: John 15:1-9  
Offering

**Informal gatherings** with Berea Mennonite Church, Raleigh Mennonite Church, and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship following the worship service in Bob's Place.

### **Saturday, June 24**

WORSHIP III at Yoder Recital Hall:

Theme - That we love one another  
Speakers: Anita Rediger and Emily Hedrick  
Text: John 15:9-17  
Communion: Anita Rediger and Emily Hedrick

### **Break**

*Delegate Session III* at Marbeck Center dining hall

Bradley Kauffman (Cincinnati) and Trevor Bechtel (Shalom Community) led delegates in singing SJ5 *Come and be light for our eyes*. Sally Weaver Glick led a period of centering.

**Congregational Story: Hively Avenue/Eighth Street:** Julia Gingrich (Eighth Street) and Jake Hess (Hively Avenue) shared the following story:

*Hively Avenue Mennonite Church and Eighth Street Mennonite Church received a Reign of God Grant from CDC's Missional Church Committee in order to bring Prof. Danny Carroll Rodas to the area to speak on immigration and the Bible. Danny is a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, and author of the book Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible. We hoped that Danny would equip area CDC church members to make a biblical case for hospitality to immigrants in our communities.*

*Danny first spoke to a gathering of youth from various CDC churches on March 19th. The event, held at 8<sup>th</sup> Street, also featured input from Dara Marquez, a graduate student and community organizer with Indiana Undocumented Youth Alliance. Dara told her own story of challenges faced as an undocumented student in Elkhart and later at Purdue. She also provided an overview of the legal situation nationally and in Indiana. Danny followed Dara by sharing a few Bible stories that related to immigration, stressing that all of this is close to the heart of God. Hively member Jake Hess then led the youth in small group discussions on the presented material. At the event's conclusion, each of the presenters spoke a blessing for youth.*

*Danny then gave a lecture for adults, also at 8<sup>th</sup> Street, on immigration and the Bible. He again told several stories in order to illustrate how migration is a pervasive biblical theme and reality. He also discussed the nature of biblical law, and how it might inform our understanding of US immigration law today. After a lively question and answer time, Danny interacted at length with attendees at a reception.*

*While in the area, Danny gave a Spanish-language version of his talk on immigration and the Bible at Comunidad Cristiana Adulam, in Goshen, to a group of Latino pastors. This event was organized by Goshen College, and also featured area law enforcement discussing their approach to undocumented immigrants in our communities. Danny also joined in several activities at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical*

*Seminary, including a faculty research discussion, a class, and chapel.*

*Danny's presence in the Goshen-Elkhart area provided a significant boost to the ongoing work by churches to organize in solidarity with immigrants. Many churches and church members have been encouraged to join the Elkhart-Goshen Sanctuary Coalition and to support the Elkhart HOPE Network and other organizations. Members of the Sanctuary Coalition continue to do education work around immigration in area churches, and find that Danny's scholarship is a touchstone for understanding why Christians must see immigrant justice as a core Christian practice.*

**CLC Report:** Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) shared the following report:

*In October Lisa Weaver, Arman Habegger, Ron Adams and I attended the Constituency Leaders Council or CLC. We met at Hesston Mennonite Church in Hesston, KS. In March Lisa, Arman and I attended the CLC gathering hosted on the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary campus in Elkhart. Approximately 70 representatives of conference and constituent groups met each time.*

*So what is the CLC? The Mission and Vision of CLC is described this way:*

*CLC is a convocation for conferences and recognized constituent groups: to worship and pray together, to encourage faithfulness, to share ideas and resources, to process concerns, and to provide discernment and give counsel to Mennonite Church USA Executive Board and to each other on issues of life and faith in Mennonite Church USA. The relationships nurtured at CLC strengthen the life of the denomination.*

*At the October meeting there was significant emphasis on CLC serving as elders for the denomination. We were encouraged to reflect on the reports, questions, and processes from the perspective of (quote) a council of denominational "elders," discerning and advising denominational leadership bodies on issues confronting each of them relative to faith and life.*

*While the CLC does not serve formal accreditation, supervisory or judicial roles for the denomination, it does serve as a forum that works to identify and work through important issues of life and faith.*

*One of the issues of life and faith that was presented for discernment was how Central District leadership processed our decision to license toward ordination an openly gay man. The way that the CLC chose to address this issue of faith and life was through the Peer Review process which was set in place at the MC USA Biannual Assembly in Kansas City in 2015. It was because of this Peer Review that Ron Adams, chair of our Ministerial Committee, attended the October CLC meeting. Ron will report briefly on the Peer Review process during the Ministerial Committee report.*

*Other items on the October CLC agenda included hearing from Willard Metzger, Executive Director of MC Canada about the major restructuring process going on in our sister denomination to the north. In short, the role of the Denomination is being diminished and the role of the area churches (our version of conferences) will take on more significant roles in leadership development, resourcing and decision making. They also affirmed greater autonomy of area churches to make credentialing decisions while affirming the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.*

*We also spent time reflecting on and providing feedback regarding the role of the MC USA Executive Board. There was encouragement for the Executive Board to prioritize mission and vision for the denomination as their primary work. This feedback seems to have been honored by the Executive Board. In a report this spring, Ervin Stutzman, MC USA Executive Director stated, "we clarified that the focus of the board should be on visionary resourcing rather than regulation, and acknowledged that credentialing*

*issues belong to area conferences.”*

*We also heard stories of how two congregations, Living Water Community Church near Chicago and Journey Mennonite in central Kansas were living into the call to be missional congregations. Both congregations have experienced significant growth over the past several years.*

*Finally, we had opportunity to hear from and provide feedback to the task force that has worked hard to bring a revised resolution on Israel/Palestine to the delegates at Orlando.*

*In March, the agenda was much more straightforward. After a time of worship centered on trust-building and some reporting, we walked over to the MC USA offices for a mortgage-burning celebration. It is wonderful and freeing to know that the debt has been paid by the generosity of many people and that resources otherwise going toward mortgage payments can now be used for other ministries and purposes of the denomination.*

*Most of our remaining time together in March was experiencing a process similar to The Future Church Summit which delegates in Orlando will engage in a couple weeks. In Orlando, the summit will include generating a timeline of key events, turning points and developments in the Mennonite Church — to name and reflect on the denomination’s historical legacies, taking stock of where the church is now and the direction it is heading. Conversation at table groups will include appreciative inquiry interviews and the World Café model of collaborative dialogue.*

*For our purposes as CLC, we developed four questions that will guide CLC into the future:*

- *How can the CLC enable us to equip and resource each other with practical issues as we face the future realities of the organizational church (such as finances, immigration, sexual abuse prevention, creation care....)*
- *How can we build a culture of trust at CLC?*
- *How can we promote diversity and equitable representation at CLC meetings (race/ethnicity, gender, age....)*
- *How can we ground our work in the movement of the Holy Spirit?*

*These were my first two experiences with CLC. The worship was rich. Relationships are being built across conferences and between constituency groups. Trust is building so that we can agree and disagree in love. I was especially encouraged after we provided our response to the Peer Review when a representative of another conference said to me something like, “While I’m not at the same place you are on this issue, I greatly appreciated hearing the process you used to discern your decision.”*

*In the midst of significant change in the denomination, I am hopeful about our future. My prayer is that the Future Church Summit in two weeks will offer Spirit-led wisdom and vision for the next season of our lives together as Mennonite Church USA. The Anabaptist way of knowing and understanding God’s message of healing and hope for the world is a gift we must share.*

**Table Sharing:** Lisa invited delegates to share feedback to be shared with the delegates who will be attending the Future Church Summit at Orlando 2017.

**Ministerial Committee Report:** Ron Adams (Madison), Ardean Friesen (Silverwood), Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street), Kay Bontrager-Singer (Faith), Ray Person (First Bluffton), Renee Kanagy (Cincinnati)

Ron Adams (Madison) introduced the members of the committee. He shared a summary of what the Ministerial Committee does. He noted that CDC was the first conference of MC USA to participate in a peer review. Ron summarized the peer review process. The committee hopes to begin using the annual clergy report form later this year. The hope is that it will be a helpful resource to the credentialed leaders of CDC and that it will assist the committee in providing encouragement and support to those leaders. In May of this year, Doug Luginbill, Laurel Neufeld Weaver, and Ron received training in the Healthy Boundaries curriculum, which qualifies them to offer similar training to credentialed leaders within the conference. The goal is to have every credentialed leader within CDC receive that training. Details of how that will take place are still in process. The hope is that the training will assist leaders to take better care of themselves while maintaining the healthy boundaries that are necessary for our congregations and work settings to be safe places for all.

Ron invited delegates to make a correction to the committee report on p81 of the report book. Since the report was written, LGBTQ members can now access the MLI system and there is no longer a need for an alternate MLI.

*Recognition of new pastors/credentialed leaders:* Ray Person (First Bluffton) and Ardean Friesen (Silverwood) recognized those who were ordained, licensed and installed in the past year.

Ordinations: Diane Schmidt (Grace) and Charles Bontrager (First Wadsworth)

Licensed Toward Ordination: Michael Gehman (First Sugarcreek), Emily Hedrick (Lima), Caitlin Desjardins (Cincinnati), Valerie Showalter (Shalom Mennonite Congregation)

Licensed for Specific Ministry: Jon Weishaupt (Silverwood)

Installations: Emily Hedrick (Lima), Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton), Russell Jensen (Maplewood), Steve Thomas (Shalom Community), Donna Mast (Silverwood), Valerie Showalter (Shalom Mennonite Congregation), Aimee Weishaupt (Silverwood), Tom Kauffman (Assembly), Tim Stair (Hively Avenue), Matthew Yoder (Grace)

Doug offered prayer.

*Remembering pastors who have died:* Kay Bontrager-Singer (Faith) recognized Elsie Miller (Oak Grove) and Mamie Burke (First Chicago)

**Journey Program Recognition:** Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton), Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), and Missy Kauffman Schrock (AMBS), recognized Marci Frederick (Shalom Mennonite Congregation) who graduated from the Journey Program. She was presented with a certificate and a Journey lamp, a free registration to AMBS pastors week, and a year's subscription to Vision. Marci thanked Orlando Redekop and Brian Bolton for serving as her mentors. She also thanked Doug and CDC for their part in the important work of forming new leaders for the Mennonite Church.

**MCC Great Lakes Report:** Jorge Vielman (Hively Avenue) directed delegates to the MCC Great Lakes report on p113 of the report book. He shared that he was sad to hear of the death of Willis Sommer, who was serving as the CDC representative on the MCC Great Lakes board. Jorge shared about a number of resources that are available from MCC Great Lakes.

**ACTION: 2017-2018 Spending Plan:** On behalf of the Board of Directors and Stewardship Committee, Roger Nafziger (Eighth Street) moved to adopt the proposed 2017-2018 spending plan. It was affirmed by the delegates.

**Listening Committee Report:** Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community), Brian Bolton (Shalom Mennonite Congregation), David Moser (Southside)

Kiva shared the following report:

We are a snapshot of Central District Conference – the conference with a landscape that just keeps

growing. We have eaten together and shared conversations with each other at the table and on walks to and from events, laughed together, lamented together, and given heartfelt high fives.

Lisa Weaver (Madison) invited us in as co-reporters on the State of the Conference – groundedness in the midst of growth, and love in the midst of change, are the themes of this year’s report. We welcomed new congregations and learned about new journeys with existing congregations. Thank you’s and affirmations are in order for what we have heard:

- Open Table – for helping us ground ourselves in a weekend full of words with contemplative silence.
- Raleigh, NC – returning Raleigh’s “hey y’all” and filing away good practices like pray grounds and a quilt of forgiveness after conflict for our own congregations
- Chapel Hill, NC – for reminding us that being a congregation is so often about who is going to move the chairs, but moving the chairs each week anyway because “to see you is to see the face of God”
- Berea, Atlanta – for sharing the importance of preserving our history as it happens, and for the tale of four boys who were told to take out their car radio and not go cruising in the car and seven women who were able to keep a congregation going. Send us pictures of this year’s Peace and Carrots camp!
- Allegheny Mennonite Conference – wisdom of discernment in the midst of excitement about exploring several possible relationships with these conferences and affirmation for the network team. We look forward to continuing to get to know you!

From long-standing CDC congregations:

- First Mennonite, Bluffton – for sharing how the death of a long-time member has led to the rebirth of a commitment to discern how to love neighbors well, starting with literally keeping their doors open, always, to those who need shelter.
- Hively Avenue and Eighth Street – for stories of engaging persons of various ages in reflections and learning about immigration and the Bible.
- Mennonite Church of Normal – we will ask you again in five years what fruit your work on unlearning and dismantling racism has born. We challenge CDC to do the same in five years.
- Camp Friedenswald – renewal of new cabins, chapel, and Sandhill Lodge – new names and new buildings that keep the old spirit of the camp alive (and for giving us an example of a time of committees doing good, valuable work – saving Camp Friedenswald from questionable name choices...)

Overall, what we heard was vulnerability from old and new congregations. We heard new ways of being Mennonite, an identity that is both grounded and changing here in Central District Conference.

We heard excitement about new congregations – and that having a whole stream of congregations coming in feels different than having a whole stream of congregations pulling out.

We also heard concern that we be able to form truly supportive and loving relationships with each other as our geographical bounds continue to stretch, concerns about being truly known.

We heard from Terry Shue about denominational changes and that he has hope in the Church but does not wish to tie that hope to the Mennonite Church USA denomination.

We heard from Doug about the CLC and send our support to those going to the Future Church Summit.

What we didn’t hear: open controversy about denominational politics, long discussions about sexuality, or much open disagreement in the big discussion groups. Nearly every time Lisa opened us up for

discussion, we did not hear much. What this means remains open to the wisdom of the group, but these things were not as present among us this year.

From our business and relationships, this is what we heard.

Brian Bolton shared reflections of worship:

Matthew Yoder asked – “what do we do when guns are cheaper and more available than mental health care? We worship.”

We heard that worship is one of the RAW Tools we have –

To “carve a stone of hope out of a mountain of despair” as Dr. King said;

To forge new life out of death;

And to “turn the nation -- one person and one gun at a time.”

It was in worship

Where we were reminded that, though our collective “vine may be sagging under the weight of privilege,” we have the blessing, the gift, and the responsibility

to lament and to ask for forgiveness,

to “change the way we walk ... and change the way we talk,”

To love in such a way that “all selfish claims deny so that each one for the other we will not hesitate to die;”

where we re-learned to pray and sing the words we’ve been taught,

that even as many of us find ourselves blown by the winds of doubt, those same winds may carry the fermenting seeds of faith;

That if we have any doubts, or “don’t think [that] God is listening and responding to the needs in our community,” that we should “think again.”

And it was in worship, where we learned by experience that

If we are to be forged in the crucible of holy transformation, then air conditioning will not be available;

That if we are to be pollinated by the winds that blow through the garden, then there will be some days when we’ll need some very large fans;

And finally, it was in worship where we learned that our new conference minister will surely fill the role of conference “dad” – the kind who makes certain to embarrass you with cheap puns, and who will gladly join you, as our worship leader said this morning, to both abide and imbibe in the Spirit that is flowing among us.

David Moser (Southside) shared:

Drew Hart asked us to ponder the question:

How do we love in a racialized world?

We heard the truth spoken in love:

“Whiteness, as a construct of dominance, is incompatible with Christianity.

We heard a prophetic invitation to embrace a transformative place of discomfort when Drew answered a question about where we might begin in addressing issues of white privilege and racism with a smile, laughter and the word, “It’s a good thing when a room full of white people don’t know what to do and don’t have the answers.”

We were invited to learn more of the breadth of racism’s history and the depths of racism’s grip on our



lives and our society.

We heard a clarion call to a repentance that demands much of us – to do the work of confronting white privilege and racism. In Drew’s words, “Being kind and nice people is not the same as love. Love demands more of us – it demands actions.”

Kiva shared the following words of thanks:

Thanks to:

- Bluffton University Conference Staff (for hosting us and helping us get into our rooms)
- Food prep persons and providers of SNACKS!
- The local host congregations (The Planning Committee and Worship Leaders)
- Drew – for speaking the truth in love and prophetically challenging the white members among us to examine our complicity in racism
- Lisa – for gracious leadership over the past few years
- Doug – for reminding us that pruning is a good thing, a BERRY good thing and for taking on an “over-flowing, bountiful cup of responsibility” as our conference minister
- Emma – for dealing with all of our paperwork and money, even when we don’t register on time!
- Everyone with displays, everyone who was our guest from outside the conference, everyone who traveled more than an hour to get here, and everyone who hosted us in their home state of Ohio.

**Evaluations/Committee Nominations:** Lisa Weaver (Madison) invited delegates to fill out the evaluations and share suggestions for committee nominations.

**Close of Delegate Sessions:** With the sounding of the gavel, Lisa Weaver (Madison) closed the 61<sup>st</sup> delegate sessions and passed the gavel to Arman Habegger (Grace). Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) thanked Lisa and welcomed Arman.

Scott Troyer (Cincinnati) led delegates in singing SJ 61 *How can we be silent*. Jorge Vielman (Hively Avenue) read John 15:4, 9, 12. Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite) led in prayer. The annual session ended with singing SJ 73 *The Lord lift you up*.

Emma Hartman  
Recorder