



Conference Minister's Report 2020 CDC Annual Meeting

Spirit, bless our souls with yearning!

This theme has captured the interest and imagination of many throughout the year. It has inspired a song and art. It has invited deep reflection and contemplation. It has engaged lively conversation around tables at Regional Gatherings. It was a centering theme as eight CDC representatives experienced a SEMILLA Learning Tour in January. God's Spirit does indeed bless/stir/move our souls with yearning as we witness both the incompleteness of God's Shalom and the many ways God's presence is visible today.

Yearning took on a new focus as we faced the COVID-19 pandemic. We yearned for protection from the virus for ourselves and our world. We yearned to sing and worship again in person. We yearned for the assurance of our financial wellbeing and that of our churches and church institutions. We yearned for flattened curves, enough PPE, social (physical) distancing and clear leadership. We yearned for a return to "normal."

Yet, as I observed the creativity and persistent love of our pastors and church leaders, I also heard a yearning NOT to return to normal. COVID-19 was "apocalyptic" in revealing more clearly the disparities between the rich and poor, the greater vulnerabilities of minority groups to be affected by the disease (many of them essential workers), and the extent to which our healthcare system is on life support. Our environment was able to take a deep, cleansing breath as air pollution levels fell. Crises also have a way of breaking down barriers and building coalitions across boundaries.

What have we learned about our yearnings during this prolonged Holy Saturday caused of COVID-19? How will our yearnings be transformed into practical, loving actions?

It has been a blessing getting to know the friends of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship and I look forward to building this relationship as, together, we discern membership with CDC. They will be introduced to us "virtually" during our altered Annual Meeting. If you find yourself in Grand Rapids on a Sunday morning, look them up!

The spring Constituency Leaders Council meeting was cancelled. The main agenda item for the meeting was discernment regarding the recommendations of the MC USA Advisory Group on the Membership Guidelines. As I write this report, there is no clear plan forward regarding their recommendations or the guidelines.

I remain grateful for the strong financial support from congregations over the years. Because of strong giving in the past, our financial reserve allows us to continue providing the ministries and resources to fulfill our mission. Contingency plans are in place should this situation change. This is a time to practice whole-hearted generosity as we share our resources with one another!

In early April, as COVID-19 deaths were peaking in many communities, I was reminded of the prayer of Julian of Norwich that "all will be well." Likely written during an outbreak of the plague to which she succumbed, Julian was assured, through an appearance of Christ, that "all manner of things shall be well." Speaking or singing these hopeful words is paradoxical in the midst of so much death and unknown. Yet it remains the center of our faith. May the God of hope bless our spirits with an unending yearning that all will be well.