

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE

Minutes

June 27, 2020 (via Zoom)

Spirit, bless our souls with yearning!

Worship service was shared as a [pre-recorded video](#)

Delegate Session I

Welcome

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly), president of the CDC board, welcomed delegates to the 64th delegate session with the sounding of the gavel. She thanked those who participated in the pre-recorded worship service:

- Kay Bontrager-Singer (Faith), Anita Lehman (First Bluffton), Rachel Horst Lehman (First Urbana), and Eugene Stutzman (Covenant), who created pieces focused on the theme,
- Glen Guyton, MC USA executive director, speaker,
- and to all who shared music videos.

Anna thanked Jewel Gingerich Longknecker, who served as the Zoom host for the meeting.

Anna welcomed guest Heidi Regier Krieder, conference minister of Western District.

State of the Conference Address: Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly Mennonite Church) shared the following:

One year ago we gathered in Milwaukee at the beautiful Martin Luther Lutheran Church. We enjoyed meaningful worship, beautiful singing, engaging seminars, and most of all, being together.

But because of the pandemic, we have had to adapt and pivot as a conference. Here we are on Zoom. Looking at a screen. And yet, it is good to be with you, even in this less-than-satisfying way. And of course we know that God's spirit is with us, filling the spaces between us, from St. Paul to Sarasota, from Bluffton to Chapel Hill, from Goshen to Grand Rapids, from Atlanta to Champaign-Urbana. God's spirit is always with us, blessing our souls with yearning. These days, that yearning is for connection, for wisdom, for justice, for predictability, for singing together.

Each of our congregations has had to adapt and pivot in surprising ways. What does worship look like in a pandemic? How do we screen share on Zoom? How do we provide pastoral care? How shall we respond to the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor? How shall we join our voices with the chorus of voices calling for racial justice, defunding the police, taking a hard look at our past. This is not business as usual. What is the state of our conference? How are we living out Christ's ongoing invitation to make manifest the reign of God?

Last August the Board and others met for our annual visioning day and developed our two-year theme, "Spirit, Bless our Souls with Yearning." In the fall, our Leadership Council met at Camp Friedenswald

committed to completing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). We also saw Camp Friedenswald's new solar panels and learned about the innovative ways the camp is reducing waste and developing native habitats.

In the fall, Doug traveled many miles to install and ordain pastors. In October, the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) met in Tucson, Arizona, and some of us traveled afterwards on an abbreviated immigration learning tour to better understand immigration and the organizations that are working to support migrants and refugees.

Then in December, an MC USA Advisory Group met in Chicago to discuss the MC USA membership guidelines. Their recommendations, published in January, called for:

**Retiring the membership guidelines,*

**Including guidelines to be sure LGBTQ people are at the table when policies are made that affect them, representation on the CLC and truth telling about the harm done.*

It felt like there might have been some real momentum for change, except that the Spring CLC meetings were cancelled, and so that forward momentum regarding the membership guidelines has come to a halt.

In January, eight of us from the Central District Conference traveled to Guatemala to visit SEMILLA, the Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala City. We did this as a way to learn about how Anabaptists in Central America live out their faith, to learn about immigration and to build a friendship with SEMILLA. It was a wonderful trip! We learned a lot about Guatemala and met some wonderful people, and were able to build relationships with each other across the conference. We hope that you join us for a webinar on Aug. 26 at 7:30 p.m., where we will share our experiences and you all have a chance to meet Willi Hugo, President of SEMILLA. Willi was a wonderful and gracious host for our time there.

In February, we celebrated with Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship as they learned that Rosa Cruz, a woman who had sought sanctuary in their church for almost two years, had the deportation orders against her lifted. Many of us also gathered in February with Raleigh Mennonite Church to hear Dr. Malinda Berry speak about communion, identity and ritual. It was a wonderful gathering.

And, of course, March arrived and with it a global pandemic, which altered the course of all our work. Throughout this year, the Spirit has been at work among us. Each of us in our contexts are discerning how to follow the spirit's surprising and unpredictable stirrings. And if you love the Holy Spirit, then let me just take a moment to highlight another webinar opportunity that will be happening in September. Jamie Pitts, associate professor of Anabaptist studies at AMBS, will be leading a webinar on Anabaptism as a Spiritual Tradition. This webinar introduces Anabaptist history as a Spirit-oriented tradition and discusses the difference that might make for our lives and congregations.

In spite of the disruption of the pandemic, Central District Conference's finances continue to be strong. After ten months of activity, our balances are similar to—perhaps slightly stronger than—April balances in recent years. In part this is because our expenditures reflect reduced activity and travel expenses, but to date our congregational giving remains on track. As always, we are grateful for continued faithful congregational and individual giving.

It has been a challenge for our staff and board of directors to discern a responsible financial plan for the coming year in light of the global health crisis. We realize every member congregation is facing new

needs and opportunities for community engagement, and none of us knows what the coming year will bring for our congregations and our conference.

The spending plan before the delegates for 2020-2021 is very similar to last year's plan. Staff have also prepared a contingency spending plan reflecting a 20-25% across-the-board reduction. Given ongoing uncertainty, the CDC Board of Directors has taken the following steps:

- In the event of reduced contributions, the conference will spend down its reserve fund.*
- If the reserve fund is reduced below \$60,000 we will consider adopting the contingency spending plan for 2020/2021. A contingency plan reflecting a 20-25% across the board reduction has already been prepared by staff. The current amount in the reserve fund is \$117,000.*
- We will consider using the Sabbatical Escrow funds for the Conference Minister salary before reducing time.*
- We will consider using Leadership Development and Missional Activity funds to assist congregations if needed. Specific questions about the contingency plan should be directed to Tim Lind, who is our treasurer.)*

Introduction of Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly Mennonite Church) introduced Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (GRMF), who have expressed a desire to join Central District Conference. In keeping with the conference bylaws, GRMF is being introduced and we will learn to know them this year, and next year delegates will vote to receive them. Delegates viewed a five minute video created to help them learn about GRMF. [Introduction of GRMF pre-recorded video](#)

Summary Review of 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes: Jamie Pitts (Hively Avenue) summarized the minutes of the 2019 annual meeting. Anna invited delegates to share any corrections to the minutes. Janeen Bertsche Johnson (Eighth Street) noted that Burton Yost's name was spelled incorrectly in the Ministerial Committee report. The minutes were approved as revised.

Highlight Actions in 2020 Agenda: Jamie Pitts (Hively Avenue) reviewed the agenda and highlighted actions and agenda for the delegate session.

Treasurer's Report and Presentation of 2020-2021 Spending Plan: Tim Lind (Florence Church of the Brethren - Mennonite) shared the following report:

One of many things that we have to be grateful for in Central District Conference is that for a number of years it has not been necessary to allocate much of our meeting time to the Treasurer's report. There are two reasons for this: first, the consistent strong support from our member congregations, and second, the care exercised by our administrative staff in implementing our annual spending plans. It is a testimony to both member congregations and staff that even this year, in which our congregations have been without in-place Sunday morning services for a full quarter, it is still the case that I can do this report in well under five minutes.

The report on income and expenditure for the 2019-2020 year, as of 30 April, shows that there is little to draw attention to here; our contributions are close to the spending plan projections and our expenses are well under budget. We can look forward to another balanced budget for this fiscal year, which ends in just a few days.

For 2020-2021 (page 36-37), we have put before you a plan that differs very little from the 2019-2020

plan. It proposes increases of about \$3000 in both income and expenses, accounted for primarily by mandated increases in staff salaries and benefits. The Stewardship Committee recommends this plan to you for adoption.

As you heard earlier, the staff have prepared a contingency spending plan that would guide us in reducing our program in the event it becomes necessary during the coming year.

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly Mennonite Church) opened the floor for discussion of the spending plan. As there was no discussion, Anna called for a vote to adopt the 2020-2021 Spending Plan. It was affirmed by a show of hands.

Presentation of 2020-2021 Slate: On behalf of the Gifts Discernment Committee, Peter Eash-Scott (Milwaukee Mennonite Church) presented the 2020-2021 Slate of Nominees. Anna Yoder Schlabach opened the floor for discussion. As there was no discussion, Anna called for a vote to adopt the 2020-2021 slate. The slate was affirmed by a show of hands.

Commissioning Prayer: Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) led the commissioning prayer.

Missional Church Committee Report: The Missional Church Committee shared a pre-recorded video available here [Missional Church Committee Report Video](#)

Webinars: The following webinars will be presented over the summer in place of the seminars that are usually held during the delegate sessions:

- *Taking Each Next Step: Anti-racism in Our Homes, Churches, and Conference - July 16 (Missional Church Committee)
- *Climate and Community, July 30, (Amy Huser)
- *SEMILLA, Aug 26, (SEMILLA Learning Tour Group)
- *Anabaptism as Spiritual Practice, Sept 16, (Jamie Pitts)

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly) encouraged delegates to read the reports provided from Mennonite schools, churchwide agencies and ministries that are posted on the CDC website in the 2020 Report Book. She expressed gratitude for the work they are doing.

Camp Friedenswald Report: Jenna Liechty Martin (Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship) shared that life at Camp Friedenswald has been hard during this pandemic. They have said goodbye to two staff members, cancelled summer camp, and felt the disappointment and loss over what the 70th summer at Camp Friedenswald might have been. They have felt financial pressure from three months of being closed.

In spite of that the camp staff and board are encouraged because:

- *Eight families from Eighth Street Mennonite Church are currently at the camp for a camp getaway experience. This is the first of eight planned getaway days at camp.
- *There as been an outpouring of support from churches and individuals from across CDC.

*Camp Friedenswald is being held by the community that is CDC.

Camp Friedenswald will continue to rely on their bond with the conference during this time when they must find new ways of creatively living into their mission. Jenna shared four ways individuals and congregations can support camp right now:

*Consider an additional gift to Camp Friedenswald this year, perhaps giving money that would have typically be given as camper scholarships,

*When it is safe to do so, consider using camp to gather with your small group or family for a camp getaway or consider gifting a camp getaway to someone who needs it,

*Attend the webinar that will be led by Amy Huser, sustainability director, to learn more about what has been happening at camp and about how you might take some of the camp's learning and apply it in your congregation or community,

*Continue to hold the camp staff and board in your prayers.

Ministerial Committee Report: Ardean Friesen (Silverwood) reported that in the past year the committee has

*Worked on a new document outlining roles and responsibilities of the conference minister. The purpose of the document is to assist in times of transition, sabbatical, or other unexpected absences.

*Assisted Doug Luginbill in planning for his sabbatical,

*Conducted the annual clergy renewal. We appreciated the high percentage of persons who returned the forms.

*Assisted Doug in his responsibilities as needed as we monitor his work load and make sure he has an outlet for his busy schedule.

Ardean highlighted the Journey Program that is part of the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in collaboration with Central District Conference, Ohio Conference, and Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. He encouraged delegates to let people know about the Journey Program if they are interested in church leadership.

Ardean remembered former pastors and others connected to CDC who died in this past year:

*John Richard (J.R.) Burkholder died on December 20, 2019. He was a member of Assembly Mennonite Church. J.R. was an educator and held many roles within the Mennonite Church.

*Ann Neufeld Rupp died on December 23, 2019. Ann wrote the hymn *Holy Spirit, Come with power*. She was ordained in 1976 and she was first woman ordained in Central District Conference.

*David Habegger died on March 30, 2020. He was a member at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church and served 42 years as a pastor in various locations, including Hively Avenue.

*Jacob T (Jake) Friesen died June 6, 2020 at the age of 100.

*Gilberto Guytan died in 2015. He was the pastor of the former Grace Community Church in Chicago.

*Eileen June Kehler died July 31, 2019. Eileen worked as office manager for 21 years for Central District Conference.

He led in prayer.

Ardean closed the report by introducing the members of the Ministerial Committee: Robin Walton (Columbus), Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street), Kay Bontrager-Singer (Faith), Michael Crosby (First Mennonite Urbana), and Ray Person (First Mennonite Bluffton).

Announcements: Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly Mennonite Church) invited delegates to donate to the conference and to send suggestions of people to serve on conferences committees using the online form on the conference website.

Communion: Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) led delegates in the following Communion service:

Creator God, thank you for your constant presence with us. Thank you for each person gathered across our conference. We know love because you loved us first. We flourish in your love, as we express your love among ourselves and with our neighbors. We find safety and peace in the beloved community of faith. Loving God, we give you thanks.

Too often we have concealed our sorrow, anger and pain. Too often we have neglected to offer prayers of kindness, and to give words of hope and signs of care. Too often we have spoken or kept silence in ways that hurt ourselves or another. Loving God, forgive us.

Prepare us now to receive the wonderful gift of Christ's presence among us. Amen.

**Anticipating that he would be killed for offering life and liberation;*

**Anticipating that his crucifixion would be an attempt to silence and discourage his followers, to erase his name from their lips;*

**Anticipating that those who had him crucified expected to demonstrate their strength by taking control of his body and the divine energy pulsing in the blood of his veins;*

**Anticipating this, on the night when he was betrayed Jesus took a loaf of bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body for you. When you share bread together, remember me."*

In the same way, he took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; when you drink it together, remember me." In choosing to entrust his body to those who loved him, Jesus denied crucifixion the ability to destroy him fully. In giving the energy of his veins to many, Jesus denied crucifixion the ability to drain that energy from the world. The presence of his body and the energy in his veins lives on in the relationships of those who share bread and cup together. Christ lives in you! The powers of destruction failed to erase Christ's message of love, for as often as you share this bread and cup you proclaim that message until he comes.

I invite you to hold your bread and then we will eat together.

Doug sang Sing the Journey #84, v. 1

Jesus, offered up as bread,

Jesus, on this table spread,

In our empty hands we take you,

Broken as the bread.

Let us eat together and be glad.

I invite you to hold your cup and then we will drink together.

Doug sang Sing the Journey #84, v. 2

*Jesus, offered up as wine,
Jesus, from the heavy vine,
On our thirsting tongues we take you,
Poured out as the wine.*

Let us drink together and remember.

Doug sang Sing the Journey #84, v. 3

*Jesus, maker of this feast,
Jesus, lover of the least,
At your table, no one hungers;
Thank you for this feast.*

Prayer: God of the feast, we give you thanks for the simple, everyday, life-giving elements that remind us of your unending love. We are a broken people made whole in you. Pour us out from your chalice of grace, that by our very lives we might be drink for the thirsty. May this celebration, this commemoration of Jesus, draw us together in spirit, and send us out as disciples of Christ's reconciling mission throughout your broken and beautiful world. Amen.

Break

Delegate Session II

Welcome/Song: [Holy Spirit, bless us with a yearning](#)

Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) thanked Adam Tice (Faith Mennonite), Katie Graber (Columbus) for the text and music for this song and Dr. Maria Eugenia Cornou for the Spanish translation. He also thanked all the musicians across CDC who their your voices to create the video of the song.

Q&A with Glen Guyton

Doug Luginbill (First Mennonite Church Bluffton) welcomed Glen Guyton, Executive Director of MC USA. He thanked him for his message to CDC as part of the worship service. Doug expressed appreciation for Glen's leadership of Mennonite Church USA, his continued call to #bringthepeace in our communities, and his courage to address important justice issues of our day including the environment, racial injustice, and economic inequality. Doug thanked Glen for pointing us back to scripture and to Christ as the one who calls us to greater discipleship.

Doug invited Glen to share some of his yearnings for MC USA and how he imagines the church changing given the last three months.

After Glen shared his thoughts, participants were invited to share questions with Glen.

Breakout Session: Delegates were placed in breakout rooms and asked to focus on the following question: As you reflect on the events of the past three months brought about by COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd, and the systemic racism that both of these events have highlighted, what have you learned about yourself and your church that you hope will guide us toward greater faithfulness?

Participants were invited to record their responses and send them to the conference office

Closing Prayer/Blessing

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly Mennonite Church) closed the delegate session with the following words from Rosemarie Freeney Harding:

“There is no scarcity. There is no shortage. No lack of love, of compassion, of joy in the world.

There is enough. There is more than enough.

Only fear and greed make us think otherwise.

No one need starve. There is enough land and enough food. No one need die of thirst. There is enough water. No one need live without mercy. There is no end to grace. And we are all instruments of grace. The more we give it, the more we share it, the more we use it, the more God makes. There is no scarcity of love. There is plenty and always more.”

Anna officially closed the 2020 annual meeting with the sounding of the gavel.

Emma Hartman
Recorder