

**“Adopted: Peril & Promise in the Household of God”**  
*Delegate Session*  
**MINUTES**  
**July 21-23, 2016**

1. **Call to Order.** A total of 124 credentialed and congregational delegates (a quorum is 80) signed attendance sheets at Summer Delegate Session 2016, held July 22 and 23, 2016 in the fellowship hall of Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, VA. Including observers, total attendance was 176.

Elroy Miller, Moderator, called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m., and introduced fraternal and special guests.

**MISSIONAL STORY.** After a welcome and announcements by host pastor Phil Kniss, Melissa Florer-Bixler, a member of L’Arche, shared a missional story. L’Arche is an international community for people with and without development disabilities who share daily life as an alternative model to a group home.

Kevin Gasser, assistant moderator, introduced the 2016 Summer Assembly theme, “Adopted: Peril & Promise in the Household of God”, and the members of the Listening Committee (Leroy Kauffman, chair, Maren Tyedemers Hange, David Lehman, and MaryBeth Heatwole Moore). He then asked delegates to stand by District.

2. **Minutes of Winter Delegate Session.** Kevin reported on the highlights of the actions taken during the February 6, 2016 Winter Delegate Session, and at Conference Council since that date.

**ACTION.** On motion the minutes of the February 6, 2016 Winter Delegate Session of Virginia Mennonite Conference were approved as submitted. **PASSED**

3. **Report from Executive Conference Minister.** Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister, reported on his work (see report book). He informed delegates of his goal to continue visits to congregations during worship time and with congregational leadership teams, and work with the vision and mission task force.

Challenges over the past year have included the matter involving Luke Hartman, EMU, and Lindale Mennonite Church. The Conference also continues to wrestle with the issue of same gender marriage and relationships.

Clyde is also raising the needed funding for the following projects:

- the VMC Lilly Grant (the goal is \$60,000)
- fall Missional Leadership Partnership with Scot McKnight

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- initiating a VMC STEP program in partnership with EMU STEP Director Mark Wenger
- a Youth Workers’ Summit on October 8 with Deb Hirsch
- a Credentialed Leaders Consultation on November 16 with Willard Swartley, and
- a Lay Leadership Resource Event in April.

Clyde asked for counsel as VMC aligns with MC USA’s purposeful plan, continues relationship building with leaders beyond the office, equips leadership for congregational vitality, and as the Conference restructures and reorganizes in order to be the people of God in the future.

Delegates, by table, then discussed two generative questions: 1) How will a centered set approach to congregational life strengthen the mission of your congregation? 2) How will a centered set approach for VMC support the mission of your congregation?

**MISSIONAL STORY.** Steve & Laura Campbell, missionaries to Montenegro, shared about their work.

4. **Report of the Faith & Life Commission.** Patsy Seitz, Chair of the Faith and Life Commission (FLC) reported.
5. **Report & Recommendations from Gifts Discernment Committee.** Miriam “Mim” Mumaw, Chair of the Gifts Discernment Committee, reported and asked delegates to vote on nominees (see attached ballot).
6. **Treasurer’s Report.** Scott Beachy, treasurer, reported (see report book and handout). Donors giving at the \$500 level and above are added to a Philippians donor list, in honor of a group of generous early Christians that Paul wrote about.

Scott reported that it has been a rough year for endowments. With a deficit of \$7,900 for the 2015-2016 year, VMC needs to make up a total of \$34,000 by the end of this fiscal year (August 31, 2016).

7. **Report from the Congregational Life Commission.** Clyde reported on behalf of the Congregational Life Commission (see report). This Commission provides resources to lay leaders on a range of topics affecting congregational life.

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8. **Report from Conference Council.** Elroy updated delegates on the actions of Conference Council (see report book). Elroy reviewed the current conference structure, and emphasized the grassroots approach used for leadership. Issues come from the district level and historically have included women in leadership, divorce, and women in ministry. In keeping with that history James Åkerson, chair of the Task Force on VMC’s Vision and Mission used to a grassroots approach to drafting a revisions to the current vision, mission, and values statements. Once the Vision and Mission statement is approached, Council members will revise the structure.

Elroy also reported that Conference Council has invited Clyde Kratz to remain as executive conference minister for a second three-year term.

**RECESS:** At noon delegates recessed for lunch provided by area food trucks.

9. **Report from Gifts Discernment Committee.** Mim reported that 111 ballots were cast, and that all strongly affirmed the nominations:

**Conference Officers**

- Scott Beachy is reappointed to the office of treasurer for a three year term (September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2019).
- Edith Shenk Kuhns is reappointed to the office of secretary for a three year term (September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2019).

**Congregational Life Commission**

- Alicia Manning is appointed to the Congregational Life Commission for a three year term (September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2019).

**VMissions Board** (members at large, all elected for a two-year term from September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2018)

- Margaret Keeler
- Sarah Yoder
- Terry Witmer

**PASSED**

10. **Greetings and Report from Jamaica Mennonite Conference.** William and Joan Broughton brought greetings and reported on the work of the Jamaica Mennonite Conference. The Jamaica Conference is planning a TranSend program.

11. **STEP (Study & Training for Effective Pastoral Ministry).** Mark Wenger, director of the EMU STEP brought greetings, and explained the program. Planning is underway for the first VMC cohort in the fall. Participants earn ten college

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credits per year, and attend one Saturday per month program. The STEP program is co-owned by EMU and Lancaster Conference. The program appeals particularly to rural, traditional missions or congregations, racial minorities, and recent immigrants.

12. **Report from the Vision & Mission Task Force.** James Åkerson, chair of the Vision and Mission Task Force, reported (see handout). Table groups then discussed the question: What strategic questions should VMC engage in the future that reflects our revised mission and vision?

**ACTION. On motion the delegates of the Virginia Mennonite Conference approved the revised Vision and Mission statements (see attached). PASSED**

13. **Report from MC USA:** MC USA Executive Director Ervin Stutzman and Terry Shue, Director of Leadership Development for MC US, brought greetings and reports from MC USA. In keeping with the SENT 2016 initiative, MC USA is gathering and training leaders to plant new churches. Other initiatives include the Transitioning into Ministry (TIM) program, and revising the Sexual Misconduct Policy. It is hoped that the revised Misconduct Policy will raise the voice of the victim above the voice of the abuser.

Speaking to the challenges of the days, Ervin reported that five people are planning an investigation into the Luke Hartman matter using an outside agency experienced in handling highly complex matters such as this one. He said that MC USA is hoping to make an announcement by the first week in August.

Ervin then asked table groups to discuss and report on the question: What does VMC need from MC USA right now?

14. **Report from Historical Committee.** Elwood Yoder reported on behalf of the historical committee. He stated that VMC has raised \$23,000 toward the cost of updating the VMC history. Steve Nolt, recently accepted as a Young Center Senior Scholar at Elizabethen College (PA) is scheduled to begin that work in 2017. A total of \$33,971 toward the estimated \$50,000 cost has been raised.
15. **Report from Eastern Mennonite School.** Development Director Mary Golden Hughes reported on behalf of Eastern Mennonite School, and showed a video of the plans toward a new elementary school.

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**RECESS.** Delegates recessed to attend workshops at 3:15, and resumed Session on Saturday, July 23 at 9:30 a.m.

**MISSIONAL STORIES.** Elwood Yoder shared a slide presentation of three generations of missions work, “From Generation to Generation”.

Alfonso Alvarado, with interpreter Lizzette Hernandez, shared of his church planting efforts in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Alfonso moved from his home in El Salvador to New York City in hopes of planting a church, and is now partnering with Grace Mennonite Fellowship in making contacts on the east side of Harrisonburg in response to an “urgent call to share Christ and build communities of disciples.”

**16. Report from VM Missions.** VM Mission President Aaron Kauffman incurred an eye injury during the first day of Assembly, and thanked delegates for the call to prayer on his behalf and his ability to participate in Assembly during part of the Friday session and today. He said he has new appreciation for the difficulty of removing a speck from one’s eye.

He, board member Phyllis Miller, and staff members Lynn Suter, and Steve Leaman, provided a multi-media report on the work of VM Missions. New initiatives include partners for new congregations such as Alfonso’s work in Harrisonburg, and an email version of the printed monthly prayer calendar. On November 19 VM Missions will hold a prayer partner banquet. At present VM Missions congregational and individual giving are behind last year’s benchmark at end of fiscal year (August 31).

Aaron also reported that the target date for TranSend Jamaica is January 2017. He also shared stories of God’s missional work at home and abroad: in Waynesboro through a Celebrate Recovery program that works at healing, by replacing a team member in Thailand, and a ministry that begun out of a milk processing plant in Kosovo. What else might God want to do?

Lynn Suter, director of operations, emphasized that “each culture is uniquely thirsty for the Gospel”. The work is incarnational, and seemingly inefficient. It takes years of hard, costly work building relationships with little evidence of fruit. But the work has to start here.

**17. Report from the Listening Committee.** Leroy Kauffman, chair, reported on behalf of the Listening Committee. The Committee affirmed the missional

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stories, Patricia Shelly’s Bible studies on Ephesians, table discussions, the discussions outside of the formal meeting times, and the presence of water pitchers and glasses on the tables. The Committee grieved the absence of the Calvary District, missed open mic time, and felt the conversation on the Vision and Mission statement was rushed. A full written report will be available for the 2017 planning team.

**18. Conference Council Discussion Question.** Groups then discussed the question, “What issues/activities should VMC engage in that would be life giving to our conference and congregations?”

**19. Closing Prayer and Adjournment.** Elroy closed the meeting with prayer, and Summer Delegate Session adjourned at noon.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Gasser,  
Assistant Moderator & Secretary Pro Tem