

Winter Delegate Session 2017
Virginia Mennonite Conference
MINUTES

February 4, 2017 – 8:30 am - 3:00 pm
Waynesboro Mennonite Church
1801 Monroe St, Waynesboro, VA

1. **Call to Order & Welcome.** Elroy Miller, Moderator, called the Winter 2017 Delegate Session of Virginia Mennonite Conference to order at 8:30 a.m. Of 152 registered delegates and observers, 135 delegates and 12 observers signed in for a total attendance of 147. A quorum of at least 80 members was reached.
 - Clyde Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, introduced Steve Carpenter, from Menno Media.
 - Host pastor Howard Miller, lead pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church, welcomed those gathered. Waynesboro pastor Phil Lehman led delegates in a time of worship.
2. **Presentation on the Missional Church.** Art McPhee, retired pastor with membership in VMC, shared a presentation on the missional church. Art emphasized that leaders don't cast vision but discern vision. Delegates gathered at tables after the presentation to discuss themes and application. He summed up his presentation with a quote by Emil Brunner: "Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian church; mission is its cause and its life. The church exists by mission, just as fire exist by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church; and where there is neither church nor mission, there is no faith."
3. **Approval of minutes.** Edith Shenk Kuhns, secretary, shared highlights from the minutes of the July 2016 Summer Delegate Session.

Action. The minutes of the July 2016 Summer Delegate Session were approved with one correction. The action on page 4, #12 was revised to:

"On motion the delegates of the Virginia Mennonite Conference approved the revised Vision and Mission Statements."

PASSED

4. **Conference Council Report.** Elroy Miller, moderator, shared highlights from the work Conference Council completed since Summer Delegate Session, and provided proposed revisions to the Conference's vision statements (see handout).

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DISCUSSION

- VMC should share MC USA's vision statement, or at least one very similar.
- To the statement about bringing the "good news to the world in which we live", it was noted that "in which we live" is redundant.
- In light of Art McPhee's presentation, the statements should reflect that our task is to join God's work, not work for God or on His behalf.

After a poll to determine the level of affirmation for and angst about the Vision & Mission statement, it was decided to bring the Statements back to Conference Council for review.

ACTION. Delegates tabled action on the Vision and Mission Statements; Conference Council will review the document before Summer Delegate Session in July.

5. **Report from Executive Conference Minister.** Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister, reported on his work since the July 2016 Delegate Session.
 - a. **Update on D. Stafford & Associates Investigation.** Clyde reported that in May, VMC invited MC USA to lead an outside investigation into VMC and Lindale's response to allegations that Lauren Shifflett made against Luke Hartman, former vice president at EMU. Mennonite Education Agency oversees Eastern Mennonite University, and conducted its own investigation. Lindale Mennonite Church (Lindale) and VMC contracted with D. Stafford & Associates (DSA) to investigate and report on the following:
 - 1) *To what extent, if at all, was the staff or board of Virginia Mennonite Conference or Lindale Mennonite Church responsible for malfeasance in the way they handled the allegations that were made against Luke Hartman?*
 - 2) *How, if at all, might these two entities improve the way they handle allegations of sexual abuse in the future?*
 - 3) *What recommendations would DSA make for best practices in managing allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior, or misconduct of a sexual nature, that could also be a criminal offense, particularly when that conduct involves high profile individuals who do not carry ministerial credentials?"*

The initial report in November 25, 2016 contained factual errors and legal questions surrounding the report, which prevented its release. On January 19, 2017 VMC submitted a news release to *The Mennonite*, including the January 13 final public report. The official report, letter from MC USA to VMC, and news release are on the Conference web site.

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DSA found no evidence that VMC committed any wrongdoing. Both VMC and Northern District will follow up on DSA's recommendations.

Duane Yoder, lead pastor at Lindale Mennonite Church, has been on administrative leave since January. Though Duane has announced his intention to retire, VMC will investigate a charge of "abuse of power", and other charges as warranted, filed against him. This matter will be on the Faith & Life Commission agenda in February and on the Conference Council agenda in March.

Lonnie Yoder and Teresa Boshart-Yoder have agreed to being trained on the topic of "boundary formation". Once they have completed that training, provided by FaithTrust, they will then train credentialed and congregational leaders.

Clyde emphasized this has been a difficult journey for VMC leaders, Northern District, Duane, Lindale, and all involved. He asked that delegates remember in prayer all those involved.

- b. **Task Force on Polity.** At MC USA Convention, delegates approved statements on both membership and forbearance, and created tension and further questions. VMC has formed a Task Force on Polity to look at the questions: Where does authority lie? How shall we structure our life together?

Phil Kniss, lead pastor of Park View Mennonite Church, will chair the Task Force. David Brubaker will serve as coach. Other members are: Ryan Ahglrim, lead pastor at First Mennonite Church of Richmond; EMU/Eastern Mennonite Seminary professor Nancy Heisey; Alicia Horst, executive director of NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center; Wendy Malvaez, co-pastor at Manantial de Vida; and Craig Maven, lead pastor at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

Phil stated that, although young people and districts outside of Harrisonburg are underrepresented, the Task Force will find a way to draw them into the discussion.

Clyde prayed for Phil and the Task Force members.

- c. **MC USA Convention.** MC USA has asked each member conference to send three high school aged youth. Within the next month, Clyde will invite

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each pastor to identify and recommend a youth. VMC youth representatives will be chosen from those recommendations.

- d. **Task Force of Biblical Scholars.** Clyde invited a representative sample of VMC leaders to a meeting to discern next steps for VMC on the matter of same gender attraction and/or same gender relationships. At that meeting, held after the November 2016 Credentialed Leaders Consultation on healing ministries, a participant recommended that a group of biblical scholars study the question: How do we reconcile the prohibition texts with the grace and mercy of Jesus? Clyde is working to form a Task Force of Biblical Scholars to work on that question and report back to both clergy and credentialed leaders.

Dayna Olson-Getty led in prayer.

6. Reports.

- a. **Treasurer's Report.** Scott Beachy, treasurer, presented the financial report (see attached). Congregational giving remains behind, but individual giving is increasing. VMC ended the 2015-2016 fiscal year with a \$5,000 deficit. All current operating expenses, however, were covered. The deficit, however, did not allow VMC to set aside a portion of an anticipated 2017 expense. Scott also reported a \$163,000 estate gift.
- b. **Everence.** Beryl Jantzi reported on behalf of Everence. A Lilly grant of \$1 million and the MRT funding will be depleted at the end of March. Eighteen VMC pastors, more than from any other Conference, were recipients of those funds. Fourteen VMC pastors have signed up for assistance with financial planning.
- c. **Gifts Discernment Committee Report.** Mim Mumaw, chair of the Gifts Discernment Committee, presented a ballot(see page 6, Report on Ballot). for delegate vote.
- d. **Congregational Life Commission.** James Musser, interim chair of the Congregational Life Commission reported (see attached). He highlighted the April 22, 2017 "Celebration of Congregational Life." Art McPhee will be the featured speaker, and several workshops are planned for both congregational and credentialed leaders. The CLC is also working to form a youth council, to be composed of youth, and credentialed and congregational youth leaders.

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- e. **Historical Committee.** Tim Jost, chair of the History Committee, provided a written report (see attached).

7. **Mtn. View Mennonite Church's Request to Withdraw.** Kevin Gasser, assistant moderator and chair of Southern District, reported that Mountain View Mennonite Church of Lyndhurst, Virginia has voted to withdraw from the Conference. A large majority of congregants voted in favor of the request, and of those, the vote was affirmed by 98%. The basis for withdrawal is theological dissonance, especially on interpretation of scripture. Conference Council officers, with regret, approved the withdrawal. The matter now, in keeping with *VMC Bylaws*, needs approval from VMC delegates.

Discussion.

- Dissenting votes cannot change Mountain View's decision or prevent the withdrawal, but do provide a way to express a desire for all to stay together.
- While we cannot bless the withdrawal, we can bless the ongoing work of the Mountain View congregation, and Southern District will continue to reach out to them.
- Lead Pastor Earl Monroe has worked hard to stay engaged with District Minister Beryl Jantzi, and with Executive Conference Minister Clyde Kratz.

ACTION NEEDED: Upon the approval of Southern District and a request from Mountain View (Lyndhurst, Virginia) Mennonite Church, Conference Council officers, with regret, recommend that the Virginia Mennonite Conference Council release Mountain View Mennonite Church located in Lyndhurst VA from membership within Virginia Mennonite Conference. **PASSED**

8. **Resolutions, petition, and correspondence.** Elroy received a resolution requesting reinstatement of credentials for a pastor who is in a disciplinary process. VMC Bylaws allow delegates to bring a recommendation to Delegate Session. These are then forwarded to Conference Council for action. Delegates, at the next Session act on Conference Council recommendations. Resolution signees are Steve Shenk, Park View Mennonite Church; Sam Showalter, Harrisonburg Mennonite Church; and Rachel Taylor, Chapel Hill Mennonite Church.

Elroy also received a recommendation affirming Faith & Life Commission's vision to provide pastoral care for all people but within alignment of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*. This resolution was signed by

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eight credentialed leaders: Peter Eberly and Matthew Schwartz of Eastside, Seth Hankee of Greenmonte, Lowell Haarer of Zion Hill, Southern District Minister Beryl Jantzi, Howard Miller of Waynesboro, Harold Miller of Trissels, and Central District minister Robert Wenger.

Elroy received a petition signed by over 270 people asking for a suspended pastor's credentials to be restored.

The Conference also received a letter from a prominent member requesting that membership guidelines be upheld until a proper discernment process determines the guidelines should be changed. This leader emphasized the importance of discernment by the whole.

Elroy requested patience as VMC works through these conversations, and that work will begin at the March 2017 meeting of Conference Council.

Recess for Lunch. Delegates recessed for lunch at noon and reconvened at 1 p.m. Phil led in worship.

Report on Ballot. Elroy reported that the Gifts Discernment Committee recommendations were affirmed.

ACTIONS.

- **James Musser was elected chair of the Congregational Life Commission. PASSED**
- **Gloria Diener was elected to serve as member-at-large on the Faith & Life Commission. PASSED**

9. **Introduction of Susan Schultz Huxman, EMU President.** Clyde introduced Susan Schultz Huxman, president of Eastern Mennonite University since January 2017. Susan greeted delegates and reported on her listening and learning process, and transition to EMU. Delegates then asked questions. EMU celebrates its 100th anniversary this fall, and homecoming is October 13-15. EMU has also begun an engineering program this year, and will begin a doctorate in nursing program.

Susan reported that she met with the Cabinet after EMU received their report from DSA. While EMU was not found to have committed any violations, a task force will work at DSA recommendations.

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10. **VMMissions Report & Discussion on Strategic Initiatives.** Aaron Kauffman, President of VMMissions reported on the strategic initiatives for VMMissions. Phyllis Miller, chair, brought greetings, and Steve Leaman, director of public relations, also reported. Delegates then were provided opportunity to discuss VMMissions strategic initiatives at their tables.
11. **Table Discussion: Affirmations of & Areas of Discernment for VMC.** Delegates at tables were asked to create a list for VMC of affirmations and areas for discernment. These were reported by email and paper reports provided to the VMC office.
12. **Prayer and Adjourn.** After a reminder of the need for volunteers to serve on the Conference Gifts Discernment Committee and a few housekeeping announcements, Winter Delegate Session 2017 adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Edith Shenk Kuhns
Secretary

Delegate Calendar

VMC Assembly 2017 -- July 20-22, 2017 at Park View Mennonite Church,
Harrisonburg VA

Winter 2018 Delegate Session: February 3, 2017. Location: TBD

Summer Delegate Session 2018 --July 19-21 at Calvary Community Church (C3),
2311 Tower Place, Hampton VA