

“God’s Kingdom: The 3D Experience”
Virginia Mennonite Conference Summer Delegate Session
Minutes
July 19-21, 2018
C3 Hampton (Calvary Community Church)

1. **Gathering & Introductions.** Moderator Elroy Miller welcomed observers and delegates to the 107th Annual VMC Assembly and Summer 2018 Delegate Session at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, June 20, at 8:30 a.m. Attendees read the Mission and Vision statements (“Program & Report Book 2017-2018”, p.1).
2. **Quorum.** The quorum requirement of 89 delegates was met: 103 delegates signed in. Total attendance was about 150 (140 registered).

Team Building & Group Dynamics. Chekesha White, a member of C3 Hampton led team building and group dynamic exercises. Attendees responded during open mic, and discussed in table groups what they learned.

3. **Announcements & introduction of Listening Committee.** Kevin Gasser, assistant moderator, introduced the assembly theme, “God’s Kingdom: The 3D Experience”. Kevin also introduced the 2018 listening committee members: Johnnie Gnanamanickam, Mt. Pleasant; Anna S. Janzen, Huntington; and Andy Powell, Powhatan.
4. **Minutes.** Kevin reviewed highlights from Conference Council actions taken since Winter Delegate Session 2018 in February and from the minutes of the Winter 2018 Delegate Session.

He noted that a couple errors in the Winter 2018 Delegate Session minutes on the topic of the VM Missions Report (number 13, page 7):

- Under staff changes, pearl 3 should read, “Mindy Schwartz is serving as event coordinator and MST coach”.
- VM Missions mission is “VM Missions equips the church to share new life in Jesus Christ with neighbors near and far” (p. 8, paragraph 2).

ACTION. On motion the minutes from the 2018 Winter Delegate Session are approved as corrected above. **PASSED**

VM Missional Story: Seth Hankee, lead pastor at Greenmonte, shared that his congregation, a daughter of Springdale Mennonite Church, is just 10% ethnic Mennonite. The congregation, which began in the 1950s, has equipped several leaders for missional projects beyond the congregation. “Reach out. Follow God. He will touch the nations.”

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5. **Report from Executive Conference Minister.** Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister, provided highlights from and updates to his written report (*Program and Report Book 2017*, pages 10 & 11), and a summary of misconduct process (see attachment “Navigating Misconduct”).

Conference Council, and the Faith & Life Commission will be working with VMC members on intercultural relationships. To help prepare for those conversations, Clyde recommended members review “Family Tree: A Guide to African American Heritage Sites in Hampton, Virginia”, which the Hampton Convention and Visitor Bureau provided.

Clyde has visited 2/3 of VMC’s member congregations, and will host a breakfast on the topic “Navigating Misconduct” with conference related ministries yet this summer or early fall.

Clyde thanked Lonnie Yoder and Teresa Boshart Yoder for facilitating Healthy Boundaries ethics trainings throughout the Conference; 87 credentialed leaders, 58 lay leaders, and FLC members have attended, a total of 162.

Through the partnership of JMU, EMU, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, VMC, VM Missions, and the Church of the Incarnation, N.T. Wright will be presenting at various venues in the Harrisonburg area on November 13 and 14. The theme of those gatherings is “Discerning the Dawn”.

Clyde also reported that more than 60,000 deaths have occurred because of the opioid crisis. Huntington and Charleston, West Virginia, are at the heart of the crisis, and within the VMC geographic area. Pastors, he said, are the first responders and often do not discover the addicted until a crisis occurs. Clyde, working with the police department and FLC, is working at an appropriate response to this crisis.

Clyde compiled misconduct processes from a variety of sources (MC USA protocols, VMC’s protocols, the complaint process, and public disclosure policies) into one document, “Navigating Misconduct.” He asked delegates to discuss the document at their next district meeting, and then provide a report of the feedback to the Conference. He encouraged district leaders to role play from different lenses—i.e. the one accused, the one complaining of harm, the pastor, the response team. The objective of this project is to work toward the best possible outcome for any future misconduct.

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Bishop Lesley Francisco, oversight leader for Calvary District and lead pastor of C3 Hampton, led in prayer for Clyde.

6. **Report from Gifts Discernment Committee.** There was no gifts discernment report.
7. **Faith & Life Commission Report.** Roy M. Hange, vice-chair of FLC, reported (*Program and Report Book 2018*, page 23). FLC member Gloria Diener read Aldine Musser’s paper on moral distress, a topic FLC discussed this year. In the medical field, the goal is to do more good than harm. Moral distress occurs when people do not have the power to act in alignment with their ethical view. Thirteen ethical guidelines are listed in *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*, pages 55-71. In these times is the church experiencing moral distress, feeling powerless to act in alignment with Conference and personal ethics?

Roy and other leaders in Charlottesville, Virginia, in response to the August 12, 2017 incident that made news headlines, have felt moral distress but “look to Christ to find hope”.

8. **Congregational Life Commission.** Gloria Lehman reported on behalf of the Congregational Life Commission *Program and Report Book 2018*, page 38 and 47). The CLC is working at revitalizing Mennonite Men, and forming a youth Council under Micah Hurst & Moriah Hurst’s leadership. Micah requested contact information from each congregation so that youth news can be passed along. He announced an upcoming youth retreat.

Gloria also announced the annual Mennonite Women of Virginia retreat at the end of October.

9. **Report from Historical Committee.** Historical Committee member Paul Yoder reported (see *Program and Report Book 2018*, page 25). Stephen Nolt, who is researching VMC’s history, is conducting interviews during Assembly. The archives has been moved to EMU, and are available by contacting Simone Horst at EMU. The *Voices of Conscience* exhibit is coming to EMU this fall, and more information on that project is coming.

Referring to Gloria Diener’s book, Paul stated that Glen Guyton, Friday evening’s speaker, came to Calvary initially offended by the peace stance. Then a member of the Air Force, he eventually withdrew from military service and now, as Executive Director for MC USA, speaks boldly on our behalf.

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10. **Treasurer’s Report:** Clyde reported a deficit of \$41,000 at the end of June 30, 2018 (from September 1, 2017, a ten-month period). Scott Beachy, CPA, is the Conference volunteer treasurer, and Pramila Robinson is the ¼ time staff bookkeeper.

11. **Moderator’s report.** Elroy Miller, moderator, expressed deep appreciation for Gordon Zook’s work as interim conference minister while Clyde was on sabbatical (October 1, 2018 through December 31, 2018). Delegates responded in loud applause.

Elroy also reported that two investigations are now complete, and the outcome will be reported in the next issue of *Pathways*. The misconduct policy and complaint process is on the website.

Some buzz words to pay attention to:

- “Abuse of power” is assumed to have occurred any time a leader crosses an ethical boundary; “consent” is not present if a leader crosses a boundary with a congregant or a staff member under the leader’s authority
- “Dual relationship” occurs whenever a leader has more than one role; i.e. an oversight leader who is also a friend, oversight leader and pastor. We need to pay attention to the different hats we wear. In this situation, what role am I playing?
- Confidentiality and secrecy are two separate issues. Some matters, told in confidence, must be passed along to appropriate authorities; i.e. criminal matters, child abuse, or a violation of the “Code of Sexual Ethics for Ministers”.

LUNCH. At 11:30 a.m. delegates recessed for lunch at local restaurants; delegate session resumed at 1:00 p.m.

12. **Introduction of Guests.** Clyde introduced fraternal guests:

- Roy Bergey, Bergey Financial
- Teresa Boshart Yoder, Everence
- Bruce Campbell-Janz, Mennonite Central Committee
- Sue Cockley, Eastern Mennonite Seminary
- Ross Erb, The Collins Center
- Glen Guyton, MC USA
- Ann Jacobs, Mennonite Mission Network
- James Miller, Corinthian Plan
- Lana Miller, Everence

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- Sandy Miller, Mennonite Missions Network
- Steve Nolt, History Book Project
- Dillion and Esther Sinclair, Jamaica Mennonite Conference
- Jim Wiegner, Mennonite Central Committee
- Bob Yoder, Anabaptist Mennonite Seminary

Dillion brought greetings from Jamaica, and thanked Eldie & Lynn Suter, and Floyd and Janet Blosser, for their hospitality.

Missional Story. Lynne Eggert, a nurse practitioner at the Free Clinic, led a VMissions E3 Collective team of seven to Amman, Jordan. E3 seeks to “embark, encourage, and engage” other cultures. The Jordan trip’s purpose was to work with the refugee crisis. For the refugee, their identity has filtered down to just “refugee”.

13. Report from MC USA Sexual Abuse Panel. Ross Erb, a member of MC USA’s Sexual Abuse Panel, reported on its work and document, “Prevention and Response: Sexual Misconduct and Non-credentialed Leaders” (Link: [Prevention & Response: Sexual Misconduct & Non-credentialed Leaders](#)). NOTE: Given legal concerns about the document, VMC has not fully adopted the document and is not distributing copies.

Ross Erb is employed at The Collins Center, a response center, and was a member of the sexual abuse panel. The panel’s document recommends 14 actions. Ross emphasized good communication and transparency. Leaders known for boundary crossing tend to move from one institution to another, and repeat past patterns in each place. Communication and transparency, and congruent documents at MC USA and conference level help prevent boundary crossers from hiding.

He also stated that this is a complex issue. Because of that, someone is always harmed; there are not completely correct set of responses that covers all situations. Prevention, therefore, is critical.

If a minor is harmed, it must be reported to the authorities and Conference informed.

When an adult is harmed, first ask what is most important to the harmed. Provide resources such as the local crisis center. Remember that an adult has the right to refuse to file charges. If they do so, it is imperative that the refusal is documented.

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If an adult chooses to report, provide support. If requested to go along, ask another person to go along with you and the complainant. Immediately relieve the accused of their duties until an investigation is complete. Doing so makes it clear that we are working at creating a safe congregation. False reports are rare. Ross noted that there are attorneys with significant concerns about the document.

Forgiveness should not be rushed. Ross stated that hurried forgiveness harms both the victim and the perpetrator. If a perpetrator is forgiven too easily, the ability for them to recognize the severity of the harm committed is lessened.

What if the harmed does not complain? What about the person that “everyone knows does...”? In these situations it is important to talk with the person, and that leaders help the perpetrator by putting boundaries in place. State you are doing so because “your boundaries appear to be lacking”. Emphasize this is done out of caring and love for the whole congregation.

It is important also to look at our structures, culture; do everything possible to prevent harm.

VMC Missional Story: Randy Smith, lead pastor at Mountain View, Hickory NC shared that he is a northerner transferred to an Appalachian community in the south, a significant cross-culture challenge. His congregation formed Blood, Sweat, & Tears, a youth group that has grown from five to fifteen. “Blood” refers to the blood of Christ, “sweat” to the work projects youth undertake, and “tears” to the times when they play games and laugh till they cry. .

14. Restructure for Mission. Elroy, chair of this committee, reported on the work of the Restructure for Mission Committee. Members are: Ryan Ahlgrim, pastor at First Mennonite Church of Richmond; Pearl Hartman, FLC member; Beryl Jantzi, district minister, Southern District; Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister; and Joe Longacher, chair of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee. Because survey respondents expressed such a high value on the district model, the Committee began its work there. Elroy provided a paper outlining a Plan A and Plan B for restructuring Districts, a topic for a table group discussion on Saturday morning, July 21.

Break. At 3:25 p.m. Clyde introduced afternoon workshop leaders, and each leader highlighted the context of their workshop:

- “Evangelism Aversion Recovery”: Skip & Carol Tobin
- “Perils of the Legacy Church”: Ryan Ahlgrim

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- “Prayer”: Johnnie Gnanamickan
- “Altering the 3-D Experience: Impact of Digital Screen Technology on our Faith”: Chris Riddle

RECESS. Delegates recessed for workshops, and the evening meal and worship. Delegate Session resumed on Saturday, July 22 at 9:30 a.m. after Dillion and Esther Sinclair led a Bible study from Isaiah 6:1-8. Three dimensions of God’s Kingdom are D1-His Kingdom; D2-His gift, and D3-our earthly life and human cultures.

Missional Story. Janet Blosser interviewed Norma Teles about her work among the Roma in Albania.

15. **Report from VM Missions** (see “Program & Report Book 2017-2018”, pages 28 & 29). Aaron Kauffman, president of VM Missions, shared several stories of God’s work near and far.

16. **Discussion Groups:** Delegates, at their tables, discussed the following:

The Restructuring for Mission Task Force welcomes your feedback about the strengths and concerns of each model. It will be most helpful to the Task Force if you think in terms of the big picture of how a district shall provide ministry to pastors and congregational leaders in terms of leadership resourcing and collegiality. The new vision and mission statements are provided [in the front of the Report Book] for the purpose of framing a district structure within the scope of these new commitments.

17. **Report from MC USA.** Glen Guyton, executive director of MC USA, reported on MC USA’s Journey Forward process, and asked leaders to review the website for updates.

Asked about MC USA’s losses, Glen stated that “he doesn’t focus on dead things” (one theme from his Friday evening message). Instead he focuses on what we can do together, how we can be stronger together. Church planting is one effort, which Glen and Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality & Engagement Michael Danner, are working on. Maintaining and promoting the historic peace witness, and equipping and resourcing leaders are a couple other emphases. That being said, Glen does maintain relationships with conferences and congregations that have left. Lancaster Conference has been given approval to remain a part of Mennonite World Conference even though no longer a member of MC USA. Glen also works with those who have aligned with EVANA.

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MC USA needs to focus on the center, to move toward setting mutually defined levels of accountability and boundaries, and then live out our faith from there. MC USA is designed around an ecclesiology of dispersed authority and networking, not a bounded set. Each member conference and congregation may be at various places around the circle, but the goal is for each to move closer to the center.

Asked about the membership guidelines, Glen stated that mission needs to come first. Then we can work on membership in a healthier way.

18. **Recognition & Commissioning.** Outgoing assistant moderator Kevin Gasser was recognized for six years of service. Kevin stated he values his time as an officer, especially the relationships made and the people with whom he has had the pleasure of working alongside.

While expressing a strong sense of emotion, he also stated that challenging times have required saying good-by to some very close friends.

“Please stay together. Please stay together.”

Clyde then introduced Deb Horst, pastor at Lindale Mennonite Church, who, in February at Winter Delegate Session 2018, was affirmed for the role of VMC Assistant Moderator (term: September 1, 2018-August 31, 2021). Clyde prayed for her in her new role, and she stated she is committed to listening to the Spirit.

19. **Thank you resolution.** Delegates resolved "that we, the Virginia Mennonite Conference delegates, thank Bishop Francisco and C3 Hampton for hosting our 107th Annual Assembly (2018), and for doing so in a generous and outstanding manner."

PASSED WITH LOUD APPLAUSE & CHEERS

20. **Other matters:**

- Eastern Mennonite School is celebrating its 100 year anniversary, said Paul Leaman. “God is much more than a 3D God; we just can’t see it all.”
- Harvey Yoder asked for contributions to SOS, “Sharing Our Surplus”, a division of the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale.
- Elwood Yoder announced the passing of C. Edwin Miller who died this week, 4 ½ weeks after being diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer. He has served for many years as a delegate representing Zion Mennonite Church.
- Anna Janzen, lead pastor at Huntington, asked for prayer for the family of Susie Bailey who died this week following a fall and head injury.

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21. **Closing prayer and adjourn.** Bishop Francisco led in prayer. He also prayed for Glen Guyton, Executive Director of MC USA, whom God has “laid the mantle on his shoulders....and who has been called for such a time as this. Delegate Session adjourned at 12:00 p.m. Winter Delegate Session 2019 is February 2, 2019, location to be decided

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Gasser,
Secretary Pro-Tem