



RENUEVO

Beauty From Ashes

2021 Summer Assembly — June 12, 2021

Agenda

- 7:45 Prelude
- 8:00 Welcome Richard Early
- 8:05 Worship
- 8:10 Approve Minutes: *Action #1* Jim Hershberger
- 8:20 Gifts Committee Steve Carpenter
- Action #2 – Moderator Elect – Sara Wenger Shenk*
- Action #3 – Treasurer - TBD*
- Action #4 – Faith and Life Commission Member at Large – Jean Oswald*
- Action #5 – VM Missions board appointments and reappointments*
- Luz Contreras*
- Reuben Horst*
- Liz Driver*
- Juan Carlos Malvaez*
- Contact giftscommittee@virginiaconference.org with any questions or concerns.
- 8:25 Worship
- 8:30 Meditation Andrew Cheung: Isaiah 61:1-3
- 8:45 Release of 3 Congregations Richard Early and Deb Horst
- Action #6 - 3:16 Community Church*
- Action #7 – Gospel Hill*
- Action #8 – The Table*
- Contact moderator@virginiaconference.org with any questions or concerns.
- 9:00 Racial Justice Report with Breakout Groups
- Task Force Report Maren Hange and Vivian Stevens Lyons
- Breakout Groups
- 10:00 Break**
- 10:30 Worship
- 10:35 Meditation Pablo Hernandez: Isaiah 61:4-9
- 10:45 Receive Mosaic of Grace Richard Early Introduction
- Mike & Risha Metzler – Vision and Mission
- Action #9 – Receive Mosaic of Grace congregation into full membership*
- 11:00 VM Missions Report Aaron Kauffman
- 11:45 Commissioning James Akerson and Aaron Kauffman: Isaiah 61:10-11
- 11:55 Recognition of Deb Horst Richard Early
- 12:00 Sending Song / Benediction

February 6, 2021

**Virginia Mennonite Conference
Winter Delegate Assembly Agenda
Called to Racial Justice**

Zoom Meeting

Attendance: Quorum of Delegates of VMC, invited guests

Executive committee of VMC: Richard Early, Moderator; Deb Horst, Assistant Moderator; Jim Hershberger, Secretary

VMC Executive Minister; Clyde Kratz

7:45 a.m. Prelude

The following selections from the new hymnal, Voices Together, were played: Let's Walk Together, Praise to the Living God, Rain Come Down, Enviados Somos de Dios, Total Praise.

8:00 a.m. Welcome: Moderator Richard Early welcomed each person and led in a prayer asking God to open our hearts to joy and hope for God's work among us.

8:05 a.m. Worship: The following selections from the new Hymnal were played: Touch the Earth Lightly, I will Sing, All Who are Thirsty, Could It Be that God Is Singing, How Can We Worship Caesar's Cross and Seeds.

8:30 a.m. Devotion by Sarah Bixler – "From Servant to Friends". Sarah shared from John 13:1-20, Jesus' teaching on foot washing. This passage shows Jesus in a pivotal moment when he is facing the evil opposition to His ministry. Jesus teaches the disciples they should do the same, "Servants are not greater than the Master". Then Jesus gives the new commandment that we love one another, not as master/servant but as friend. Foot washing is how we are to live out love for each other. Jesus' love includes obligation, charity, and equality/mutuality among servants. Early Christian churches modeled friendship and servanthood among various social and class groups. We today need to model Jesus' friendship among racial and class identities in friendship/mutual ways.

8:45 a.m. Conference Business – Richard Early, Administrative Assistant June Miller reviewed the procedures for voting using Zoom technology.

8:50 a.m. Summer Assembly Minutes: Jim Hershberger reviewed the motions in the 2020 summer assembly.

Motion 1: That we approve the minutes to the Summer 2020 assembly: Passed by unanimous vote.

8:55 a.m. Gifts Committee Action: Steve Carpenter, Chair of the Gifts Discernment committee introduced the candidate for VM Missions board member, Chris Johnson.

Motion 2: That we approve the VM Missions board member, Chris Johnson. Passed by unanimous vote.

9:00 a.m. Introduction of Recommended Changes to Conference By-laws: Joe Longacher explained the changes and called for the motion.

Motion 3: That delegates approve the recommended changes to Conference by-laws. Passed by majority vote

9:15 a.m. Strategic Plan Introduction and Updates: Richard reviewed the process of the Strategic Plan beginning in District discussions, subsequent changes and introduced the proposed final copy.

9:20 a.m. Breakout Groups Discuss Strategic Plan: Richard explained the process for the breakout room discussions of the Strategic Plan. The purpose is to discuss initial ideas on how to prioritize and implement the plan. Each group is led by a member of the Conference Council who will report to the main session.

10:00 Breakout Group Reporting: See the written report in addition to the following notes on the discussion reporting in the main session.

Group 1: Goal 1 Discussion focused on God's Creation, using the book *God's Good Earth*, reading scripture together, Dwelling in the Word practice, Sibling congregations, Strategic Plan is both guidance from VMC and also encourages congregations to move forward.

Group 2: Goal 1 Sibling congregations and building trust and relationships in the Covid pandemic, feeling of tiredness in the pandemic and the loss of loved ones and ability to gather together, Strategic plan is very comprehensive and congregations need to focus on the specific things they can do and will not be able to live into all of it.

Group 3: Goal 2 Challenge of congregations implementing this goal. Is it a map or a plan? Document does not acknowledge the pandemic.

Group 4: Goal 2 What is missional activity now? This has changed from years past when VM Missions was responsible for missional work. Many congregations are already living into missional culture, entering the neighborhood, every member sees themselves are missionaries

Group 5: Goal 3 Professionalized ministry hinders from developing new leaders, need to call young members to leadership, not just pastoral leadership but in all ministries. Resourcing is key,

Group 6: Goal 3 Broad goals need to be made specific by districts and congregations. Need to build trust between congregations and VMC leadership, sometimes newer Anabaptists can bring new energy, should focus on evangelism more.

Group 7: Goal 4 Affirm noble language of racial equity, how can rural ethnic congregations live into this goal? How will equipping happen? Desire to be intentional about relationships as congregations and individuals. Interest in mentoring relationships between older and younger leaders. Challenges of pandemic and using technology for relationships. How are women included in this goal? Change of how power is used in the conference and hear voices of women. Legacy of patterns of not hearing the voices of women and persons of color.

Group 8: Goal 5 Affirmation of overall Strategic Plan. Need to share both weaknesses and strengths in our congregational relationships. Challenges of the Covid pandemic as we come out of this challenge to share resources, how to hear small congregations' needs, how to ask for mutual aid. Cultivate the attitude of seeing from another cultural point of view.

10:25 Action to approve Strategic Plan and report next steps. Assistant Moderator, Deb asked for the motion and second.

Motion 4: That delegates approve the Strategic Plan. Passed by majority vote.

Moderator Richard noted The Strategic Plan will need to be prioritized and put into practice by districts and congregations.

10:30 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m. Welcome Back – Moderator

10:50 a.m. Introduction of Racial Justice initiative Introduction of mandate: Clyde introduced the Racial Justice Initiative. VMC has faced this issue in its past but is doing this again because of the need in our church and society. He reflected on the need again to deliberately recognize and root out patterns of racism in our organizations, churches and districts in leadership and fellowship. He also reviewed VMC's mixed history of race relations.

- Introduction of Task Force: Clyde introduced the 8 persons on the Task Force.
- 3 stories Deanna Reed shared her story of racism in Harrisonburg. Her grandmother cleaned houses for white people and raised the family, her grandfather was janitor and musician and started the first marching band. She shared incidents she watched as mayor of Harrisonburg in recent years in the march in Charlottesville, killing of black persons by white policemen, and as well as President Trump's statements approving of the Charlottesville march and insurrection in the Capitol building in Washington DC. Prior generation saw NE Harrisonburg destroyed by urban renewal and was called Newtown at that time. Now some white people are putting up black lives matter in their yards and places of worship. But the hope is that there are more black elected officials, and academic institutions are working for racial harmony. It is heartening to see white leaders bring this theme forward and move forward together.
- Cedric Moore shared his story of how he teaches his son to act if he is stopped by the police to make sure the police does not think he is going to do something violent. His words for moving forward: Acknowledge white privilege, don't have just token black or Hispanic friends; judge on the basis of character not superficial things such as hair, skin color, clothes; Acknowledge white power and biases.

- Bishop Leslie Francisco shared his story of growing up black in the Mennonite Church. Majority culture is blind to racism. In early years he attended a racially mixed church on Sunday but during the week his parents went to the back door of restaurants instead of the front door. In his youth the leadership of his racially integrated church changed to black members and the white people left. Later when he was pastoring Calvary Community Fellowship the church acquired a former Mennonite church property but one trustee of the former church refused to allow the church to pass into the hands of black ownership. The church has come a long way but still there are awkward moments in meetings when white people gather together at breaks excluding people of melanated people. Quote from Francis Schaffer, “If we do not show love the world has the right to question whether Christianity is true.”
- Introduction of Racial Justice Staff Position. This will be a quarter time position. Clyde reviewed the job description of this new staff position.

11:20 a.m. Reflection in Silence

11:30 a.m. Guided Lament and Confession: Paula Stoltzfus, pastor at Park View Mennonite Church led a time of lament using the theme of *Created in the Image of God*, living into renewal ways of remembering, hoping, looking, seeing.

11:40 a.m. Statement of Hope: Lesley Francisco McClendon, lead pastor from C3 Hampton gave a challenge to speak from Jesus’ teaching on peace in a continued and resilient path to build a unified church, based on Jesus the Christ rather than ethnic boundaries.

11:45 a.m. Closing Worship: Selections from *Voices Together* hymnal

12:10 Richard led in a closing prayer for the assembly.

VMC NOMINEES

CONFERENCE MODERATOR-ELECT



Sara Wenger Shenk is currently retired after serving in theological education as teacher and administrator, most recently as president of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, 2010-2019 and earlier at Eastern Mennonite Seminary as Associate Professor of Christian Practices and Associate Dean from 1995-2010. While living in Harrisonburg, Sara and her husband Gerald helped to launch two new congregations in VMC, which she pastored, and she also served on the FLC. Sara writes extensively and speaks widely in church circles in the US and Canada on topics related to how we come to know God and give voice to our experience of the sacred in daily life. She has authored seven books, including *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing* (Cascadia, 2003) and *Thank you for Asking: Conversing with Young Adults about the Future Church* (Herald Press, 2005). Her newest book is called *Tongue-Tied: Learning the Lost Art of Talking about Faith* (HP, 2021). Sara and Gerald are parents of three children and five (soon-to-be six) grandchildren who bring immeasurable joy. She lives near Waynesboro, Virginia, and is pursuing membership at Springdale Mennonite Church.

FAITH AND LIFE COMMISSION MEMBER-AT-LARGE



Having grown up in Newport News, **Jean Oswald** is rooted in Virginia. She attended Huntington Avenue Church, graduated from Eastern Mennonite College, and is now living in Richmond, where she attends First Mennonite Church. With a career in education, her commitments at FMC have involved working with children and families through Sunday school, peace camp and most recently serving on the leadership council.

CONFERENCE TREASURER



Leroy Kauffman has completed 43 years of teaching/administration in higher education. During that time, he spent time as a faculty member, department head, Associate dean and Dean of the College of Business. He is still active in the classroom and looks forward to beginning his 44th year this fall teaching accounting. He maintains an active CPA license in N.C.

He and his wife Judy attend Asheville Mennonite Church, and he has served in a wide variety of roles at AMC, as well as the following church related bodies: Mennonite Board of Missions, Mennonite Mission Network, Church Extension Services, Everence Community Investments, Choice Books LLC, and the TCK District of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

“I look forward to this opportunity to further utilize my skill set for the work of the church,” he writes.



BOARD APPOINTMENTS AND REAPPOINTMENTS



Luz Contreras is being appointed for a two-year term as a member-at-large, July 2021 to June 2023. Luz is completing an MA in bioscience at EMU this summer and is an active member of Manantial de Vida.



Reuben Horst is being appointed to one more two-year term as a member-at-large, July 2021 to June 2023. With this term, Reuben will complete a full 12 years on the board and term out. He continues as a member of New Beginnings Church.



Liz Driver (outgoing Potomac District representative) is being appointed for a one-year term as a member-at-large to fill Johnnie Gnanamanickam's unexpired term, July 2021 to June 2022. Johnnie passed away suddenly on April 13. Liz is a member of Washington Community Fellowship.



Juan Carlos Malvaez is being reappointed to another 2-year term as a member-at-large on the VMMissions Board of Directors, July 2021 to June 2023. Juan Carlos is the pastor of Manantial de Vida in Harrisonburg, Virginia.



May 28, 2021

Virginia Mennonite Conference and 3:16 Christian Community Church Statement to Delegates

The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference received a request from Tennessee Carolina District (TCK District) to release 3:16 Christian Community Church from membership in our Conference. 3:16 Christian Community Church was formerly known as Hickory Mennonite Church and began in 1958. The congregation meets at 720 23rd Street Northwest, Hickory, NC.

The Vision Council of the congregation presented a letter to the TCK District on February 15, 2021. The letter was a request to withdraw from “Mennonite Church USA, and by default, leave Virginia Mennonite Conference, and the TCK District.” The letter included the awareness that the congregation is pursuing alignment with the Conservative Mennonite Conference, “as they better represent the theological understandings and convictions of 3:16 CCC.” The TCK District approved their request with regrets.

Conference Council in their meeting on April 15, 2021, reviewed 3:16 Christian Community Church letter of request to realign and TCK District’s process of recommending the congregation’s release. While Conference Council members expressed regret and lamented the congregation’s decision to realign with the Conservative Mennonite Conference, Conference Council approved the following recommendation for delegate action on June 12, 2021:

We the delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference acknowledge with regret the withdraw of 3:16 Christian Community Church from formal membership in VMC. We are grateful for its ministry, and pray that God bless and guide the congregation in its new affiliation.

The Vision Council’s letter to TCK District included the following statement of goodwill towards the Conference:

May God grant each leader within the TCK District with wisdom and discernment as you navigate the future of each church that God has made you overseers, shepherds, and teachers of. The Lord be with all of you.

As 3:16 Christian Community Church realigns with Conservative Mennonite Conference, it is our commitment to value our friendships and speak well of each other in our community.

Sincerely
Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister



May 28, 2021

Virginia Mennonite Conference and Gospel Hill Church Statement to Delegates

The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference received a request from Central District to release Gospel Hill Church from membership in our Conference. Gospel Hill Church was formed in 1900. The congregation meets at 6179 Hopkins Gap Rd., Fulks Run, VA.

Dan Horning, pastor of Gospel Hill Church, presented an email correspondence to District Minister James Akerson on March 27, 2021. The correspondence indicated the members of the congregation affirmed their desire to withdraw from Virginia Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA by a vote of 100%. The correspondence included the statement “Over the last number of years the concern with the direction of our conference has grown to the point where we no longer desired to remain part of it.” Pastor Horning identified the specific issues as a “survey of VMC pastors a number of years ago I was informed that 50% of the pastors were supportive of the homosexual agenda,” and “the conference following society’s lead in [it’s approach] dealing with racism, and pastors willing to cast votes in support of abortion.”

Central District met on May 13th 2021 to review the request presented by Pastor Dan Horning. The decision of the Council was stated “with regret and loss, we release Gospel Hill from membership in Central District.” Conference Council in their meeting on May 20, 2021, reviewed Gospel Hill Church letter of request to withdraw as well as the Central District process. While Conference Council members expressed regret and lamented the congregation’s decision to withdraw, Conference Council approved the following recommendation for delegate action on June 12, 2021:

We the delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference acknowledge with regret the withdraw of Gospel Hill Mennonite Church from formal membership in VMC. We are grateful for its ministry, and pray that God bless and guide the congregation in its new affiliation.

- Central District Council also provided a statement of blessing on Gospel Hill Church: “*We pray God’s blessing, guidance and peace on the Gospel Hill congregation as they go forward.*”

As Gospel Hill Church withdraws from our Conference, it is our commitment to value our friendships and speak well of each other in our community.

Sincerely
Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister



May 28, 2021

Virginia Mennonite Conference and The Table Statement to Delegates

The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference received a request from Harrisonburg District to release The Table from membership in our Conference at their April 15, 2021 meeting. The Table became a congregation in our Conference in 2008 and continues to meet at 110 Old South High Street Harrisonburg Virginia.

The leaders of the Table's sent a letter on January 2021 to Harrisonburg District seeking a release from Virginia Mennonite Conference to realign with Allegheny Mennonite Conference. The letter was signed by the Leadership Team of the Table: Kimberly Copeland, Alicia Horst, Daniel Miller, Kris Shank Zehr. Their letter provided the following information concerning their desire to realign with Allegheny Mennonite Conference:

We believe that the reconciling work of Jesus and the church (an embodiment of the imperfect followers of The Way) includes:

- *Affirmation of people as created in the image of God, a non-gendered being*
- *Affirmation and encouragement of leadership gifts in all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity*
- *Good news that people are created for intimate relationship, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity*
- *Proactive and courageous leadership to fight for racial justice and reparations in the church and in our communities*
- *Care and advocacy for the natural world*

Because we desire to belong to a conference within which these priorities and beliefs are fully affirmed and nurtured, The Table has decided to join Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

Harrisonburg District Council met on March 4, 2021 to process the Table's request to realign with Allegheny Mennonite Conference. During the Council meeting, representatives from the Table provided a witness to the ministries of the congregation. District Minister Roy Hange, provided an overview of the congregation's formation and history. While members of the District Council expressed regret and lament concerning the Table's request, the District Council approved their request to realign.

Conference Council in their meeting on April 15, 2021, reviewed the Table's letter of request to realign and Harrisonburg District's process of recommending the Table's release. While Conference Council members expressed regret and lamented the Table's decision to realign, Conference Council approved the following recommendation for delegate action on June 12, 2021:

We the delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference acknowledge with regret the withdrawal of The Table from formal membership in VMC. We are grateful for its ministry, and pray that God bless and guide the congregation in its new affiliation.

The Table's letter to Harrisonburg District included the following statement of goodwill towards the Conference:

Even as we seek to change our relationship with Virginia Mennonite Conference, we will continue to value our friendships in the Conference and to wish you God's peace.

As the Table realigns with Allegheny Mennonite Conference, it is our commitment to value our friendships and speak well of each other in our community.

Sincerely

Clyde G. Kratz

Executive Conference Minister



May 28, 2021

Virginia Mennonite Conference and Mosaic of Grace

The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference received a request from Harrisonburg District on April 15, 2021 to receive Mosaic of Grace Church as a congregation in our Conference associated with Harrisonburg District. Prior to this request, Mosaic of Grace held the status of a Congregation in Formation in Harrisonburg District and our Conference.

On December 4, 2020, Mike Metzler writing on behalf of the Mosaic Elder Team (Hahns & Suzy Kanode, Aaron Kauffman, Risha Metzler, and Jason Rhodes Showalter) made a request to the Harrisonburg District for congregational status within the District. He reported that the group has grown to 10 households participating in the ministry. In his letter he acknowledged the embrace of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, the Constitution and By-Laws of Virginia Mennonite Conference, and the Constitution and By-laws of Mennonite Church USA. Mike and Risha serve as the church planter/pastors of Mosaic.

At the April 15, 2021 Conference Council meeting, Harrisonburg District co-chair Craig Maven reported on the Harrisonburg District discernment and action to receive Mosaic of Grace as a full congregation on January 28, 2021. Conference Council having received the recommendation from Harrisonburg District and Mosaic's Constitution and By-laws, took an action to recommend Mosaic of Grace as a congregation within Virginia Mennonite Conference. The Delegate Action is:

As Delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference, we welcome Mosaic of Grace as a congregation in our Conference.

I am grateful to Mike and Risha for their leadership in developing this new ministry in the Harrisonburg area. May they experience God's blessing as they lead and serve in our community and Conference.

Blessings,

Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister