



Delegate Packet

Saturday, February 5, 2022

Hybrid Gathering

Powhatan Mennonite Church, Powhatan, Va
and online via Zoom



**Virginia
Mennonite
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Table of Contents

Moderator's Invitation to VMC Winter Assembly

Assembly Agenda

2021 Summer Assembly Minutes

Emerging Principles by Sara Wenger Shenk

Executive Conference Minister Report

Bylaw Revisions, a proposal

Racial Justice Task Force Report

Moderator's Invitation to VMC Winter Assembly

January 6, 2022

Dear VMC family,

I was invited to offer a letter of **invitation** to our Winter Delegate Assembly. The greeting we sometimes give in a perfunctory way, I give now with a full heart: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.* We're all living in limbo. The pandemic's shifting wave upon wave is requiring a kind of fortitude, patience and ability to flex that has many of us considerably stressed. Every day the grace, love and fellowship of our triune God anchor me, and I hope, all of us.

As of this moment, we are still planning to **meet in person**, assembling together on February 5 at Powhatan Mennonite Church (with a virtual option also available). This may change, so stay posted. However, I hear more and more people talk about how we must learn to live with the virus as an ongoing reality—using caution—but also figuring out how to responsibly be together in person. Our social isolation from each other is harming both our physical and mental health, and is in danger of beating back “one public health crisis only to allow another to grow in its place,” to quote the surgeon general. This is true for society at large, but also for our congregations and for us as a Conference.

As I listen to voices across the Conference, I hear resilience, strength, creativity, good humor and courage. I also hear much weariness, hurt, mistrust and fear about the future. Pastors, about whom I care deeply, seem particularly vulnerable to burn out, for all kinds of reasons. The world around us is changing so rapidly and often feels unsafe. We don't know who's on our side, and who's not, who can be trusted and who can't be, who's telling the truth and who's not telling the truth. Right now, much of the angst I pick up on in VMC revolves around relationships within the conference and with MC USA. My primary commitment as I serve in leadership of VMC is to the health and well-being of pastors. With the addresses I've been invited to give at this Assembly, I hope to offer some of what I see, and to invite shared deliberation about how we can move toward healing, rebuilding of trust and robust community life in VMC.

Take time to look over the agenda. Feel free to check in with me or Clyde Kratz, conference minister, if you have questions or concerns regarding the Assembly. I look forward to seeing most of you in Powhatan on February 5.

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ,

Sara Wenger Shenk
Virginia Conference Moderator

**Winter Delegate Assembly
Agenda
February 5, 2022**

In Person “Study” Assembly – 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

9:00 AM **Call to Order & Welcome:** Sara Wenger Shenk
 Introduction of Guests – Clyde G. Kratz
 Powhatan Mennonite Church Welcome - John Engle
 Review and Approval of Minutes – Jim Hershberger

Worship & Equipping

9:15 AM **Worship by Worship Team of Powhatan Mennonite Church**
9:30 AM **Presentation #1: Sara Wenger Shenk** (A Vision for Church: Not like the Gentiles
 who lord it over you)
10:00 AM **Table Discussion and Reporting in**

10:45 AM **Break**

Discernment

11:15 AM **Presentation #2 Sara Wenger Shenk** (Compassionate Leadership: Let the
 children come to me)
11:45 AM **Table Discussion and Reporting in**
12:20 AM **Gifts Committee Report and Balloting** – Steve Carpenter

12:30 Recess for Lunch

Equipping & Discernment

1:30 PM **Report from Executive Conference Minister: Clyde G. Kratz**
 - By-laws Report
 - Release Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church
1:45 PM **Treasurer Report - Leroy Kauffman**
1:55 PM **MC USA Special Delegate Assembly overview to prepare pastors and
 interpret resolutions, with Q&A for clarification - Leslie Francisco**
2:25 PM **Racial Justice Task Force Report - Caleb Schrock-Hurst**
2:55 PM **C3 Mission report - Lesley Francisco McClendon**
3:15 PM **Moderator comments**
3:20 PM **Worship by Worship Team of Powhatan Mennonite Church**
3:45 PM **Prayer and Adjourn**

**2021 Summer Assembly Via Zoom
Virginia Mennonite Conference
June 12, 2021**

Minutes

7:45 Prelude

8:00 Welcome: Richard Early welcomed the assembly, reviewing the agenda and procedural process of the meeting. He noted the first goal of the Strategic Plan is to renew our relationships. He led in prayer to open the meeting.

8:05 Worship: The beginning worship song was a video led by Ben Luna and Seth Chrissman, *Open the Eyes of my heart Lord.*

8:10 Approve Minutes: Jim Hershberger reviewed the minutes from the Feb, 2021 Winter Delegate session.

Motion 1: That we approve the minutes to the Feb, 2021 Winter Assembly as presented. Passed by unanimous vote.

8:20 Gifts Committee: Steve Carpenter presented the following actions

Action #2 – Moderator Elect: Sara Wenger Shenk was presented as the Moderator Elect for a 2 year term beginning in September, 2021. She will become Moderator for a 2 year term in 2023.

Motion 2: That we approve the nomination of Sara Wenger Shenk for the position of Moderator Elect for a 3 year term beginning in September, 2021. Passed (77) 95%, (3) 4% with reservations and (1) 1% not approve.

Action #3 – Treasurer: Leroy Kauffman

Motion 3: That we approve the nomination of Leroy Kauffman for treasurer for a 3 year term beginning in September, 2021. Passed unanimously.

Action #4- Faith and Life Commission Member at Large – Jean Oswald

Motion 4: That we approve the nomination of Jean Oswald for a 3 year term beginning in September, 2021. Passed (78) 96%; (2) 2 % with reservations; (1)1% not approve

Action #5 - VMM Missions board appointments and reappointments

Luz Contreras

Reuben Horst

Liz Driver

Juan Carlos Malvaez

Motion 5: That we affirm the VMM Missions board appointments and reappointments as given for 3 year terms beginning in September, 2021. Passed by (80) 99% vote with (1) 1% not affirm.

8:25 Worship

8:30 Meditation: Andrew Cheung read Isaiah 61:1-3 and used the metaphor of winning and losing as a way of looking at our church experience. Winning and losing reflects the pull of American culture on us and masks the deeper reality of our history especially around multicultural processes. For instance we use Isaiah texts and make us out to be the winners who offer freedom to others. But perhaps we are the losers and need to admit our failures and name our losses honestly. Isaiah points to Jesus who was a loser to the culture around him. But Jesus in the midst of his apparent loser position on the cross actually is a winner because even in his death he comforts those around him and then wins by conquering sin, death and in his resurrection over sin and death.

8:45 Release of 3 Congregations Richard Early

Action #6 - 3:16 Community Christian Church: Vernon Moyer reviewed the process of their withdrawal from TCK district.

Action #7 – The Table: Roy Hange reviewed the process of their withdrawal from Harrisonburg District.

Action #8 – Gospel Hill: Dale Hartzler reviewed the process of their withdrawal from Central District.

Motion 6: That we the delegates approve with regret the release of 3:16 Community Church, The Table and Gospel Hill Mennonite Church from membership in VMC. We pray God guide these congregations in their new affiliations. Aldine Musser led us in a prayer of lament naming the loss these three churches represent for VMC. Each passed with about (85) 89 % with (9) 11 % abstaining.

9:00 Racial Justice Report with Breakout Groups

Deb Horst, Assistant moderator, introduced the effort to seek greater racial justice and inclusion in the VMC and invited Maren Hange and Vivian Stevens Lyons.

Task Force Report Maren Hange & Vivian Stevens Lyons reviewed the beginning of the work of the Task Force. They invited delegates to the breakout rooms for discussion of the specific items.

10:00 Break

10:30 Worship

10:35 Meditation: Deb Horst introduced Pablo Hernandez as pastor of Iglesia de Esperanza who spoke from Isaiah 61:4-9. The prophet Isaiah lived in a time of great difficulty of exile and other difficulties. In this time God gave these great promises that God will work to bring redemption to the people. Even in the midst of the captivity and exile God will bring them into safety. Jesus quoted this passage and used it to start his ministry. Jesus's teaching, ministry and atonement is an example to God's salvation for us. In the same way we see the great sins of our day; corruption, injustice of all kinds. These verses still describe what God does through the church in our world; healing wounds, freeing prisoners, restoring the lost, bringing beauty from ashes.

10:45 Receive Mosaic of Grace: Richard Early introduced Mike & Risha Metzler who shared their vision of the Mosaic of Grace church plant. They described Mosaic as a group that invites their neighbors to come together to share food and fellowship. Their worship together includes an active anointing and prayer ministry to support each other and give testimony of God's work in their lives. Roy Hange described that Harrisonburg District has approved this motion and recommends this new church to the delegate body for approval as a new church in VMC.

Action #9 receive Mosaic of Grace Congregation as a new church among VMC.

Motion9: That we receive Mosaic of Grace as a member church in VMC. Affirmed by (70) 90%, cannot affirm(3) 4% and abstain (5) 6%.

11:00 VMissions Report: Aaron Kauffman reflected on the meaning of the Spanish word 'renuevo' as both a new sprout and a renewal. David Gingerich shared the good fruits of the relationship among Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah, and Grace Mennonite as they share the Lord's Supper and other worship services, and share other resources. Lydia Musselman from Eastside Church described her work in college ministries leading weekly Bible and prayer groups, counseling students and developing the next generation of missional leaders. Hannah Shultz shared a prayer for these ministries. Jason Showalter shared various ways that VMissions is building networks of work and employment opportunities for persons around the world. These networks create relationships, jobs and other holistic opportunities for living out and sharing the Gospel. Aaron described VMissions budget for the last years as well as the Church of Many Cultures fundraising campaign.

11:45 Commissioning: James Akerson chair of the credentials committee led us in a blessing for those who are commissioned by VMC and VMissions. He read the names of those commissioned as new or continuing church leaders. James and Aaron Kauffman and the newly commissioned led the delegates in a litany reading of prayer and blessing for these new leaders based on Isaiah 61:10-11.

11:55 Recognition of Service: Richard Early described Deb Horst's strong and faithful service among us as assistant moderator of VMC for the last 3 years.

12:00 Deb Horst led a benediction prayer. The song *Lord You are Awesome* was led by the worship team from Calvary Community Church C3.

Jim Hershberger
Secretary

Emerging principles that coalesce in my spirit for guiding our shared Conference Council work
(I share these as a window into my current reflection, and to welcome counsel and feedback)

Sara Wenger Shenk, October 11, 2021

I commit to, and hope that we all will commit to:

1. Ground any decision we encourage or facilitate in a robust theology of the church. While in many ways, the church hasn't lived up to its noble calling and continues to fall short and fragment, we will seek to live into the expansive biblical vision for a people of God that proclaims in word and action a message of healing and hope for all creation.
2. Embrace the power of Christ's death and resurrection to break down dividing walls of hostility so the church in its life and witness will be both a sign and an instrument of reconciliation—in the spirit and body life envisioned by Paul in Ephesians 2, 4 and beyond.
3. Put aside unhelpful labels and commit to call each other “brother” or “sister” or “friend in Christ” as one significant step toward welcoming diverse perspectives for building up the body of Christ. Resist using partisan categories such as conservative, progressive, innovationist, creedal/orthodox, liberal or confessing as these “worldly” (to use a traditional Mennonite term) culture war labels make “my faction” look good while discrediting others, thus weakening the witness of the church.
4. Call each other to offer appreciative and discerning critique to the broader household of faith with whom we partner (in the conference, denomination and beyond) rather than caving to the simplistic assumption that MC USA is “the problem” or VMC is “the problem.” While every church organization, including MC USA, VMC, and our local congregation is far from perfect, we are all made stronger, wiser and spiritually richer through collaborative partnerships, both with MC USA and with other Christian groups, as stated in the Strategic Plan.
5. Rather than let anxiety or fear drive the agenda, invite persons to grow in spiritual maturity by becoming circumspect and even confessional about why certain issues seem to take on a life of their own, beyond what is supported theologically or biblically. We do well to ask ourselves, for example, “What is it about any rule or guideline that prompts us to cling tightly to it? In what ways do rules or guidelines marginalize or silence children of God? In what ways do they help to build up the Body?”
6. Pursue a life giving vision for the church that is winsome, hospitable, beautiful, holy and alive through the power of the Holy Spirit. Rather than be hijacked by energy draining controversies that detract from the mission of VMC to equip each other for worship and service in order to “bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far,” we are called to animate processes that give wings to the recently adopted Strategic Plan: 1) to renew relationships with God, each other and creation, 2) to engage in missional outreach; 3) to support leaders and multiple modes of ministry while adapting to new realities; 4) to hear the voices and welcome the leadership of people of color, the differently-abled, women and youth; 5) to provide mutual aid or counsel to struggling congregations.

Executive Conference Minister Report
Winter Delegate Assembly
February 5, 2022

Gratitude. I am grateful to John Engle, Pastor of Powhatan Mennonite Church, for his leadership in securing the facility and personnel within the congregation to host our 2022 Winter Delegate Assembly. Conference Council believed it was important to have a facility that could accommodate an in-person event for 125 people with adequate elbow room for our participants. The venue also needed to have the ability to provide a Zoom option for those that sought a different type of safety. The gym of Powhatan Mennonite provides us with this opportunity.

Safety Concerns. Due to the rise in Covid variants, participants attending in person will be expected to wear masks. Hand sanitizers will be on each table. The noon meal is a time of concern, but there is a plan to spread participants out throughout the building to provide more space for the mealtime. The speakers at the microphone will be unmasked for their presentations. A Zoom option is also available for anyone that decides not to attend the in-person event. Online participants will have access to “table” discussions, voting and translation.

Keynote Addresses. Sara Wenger Shenk, Moderator, is invited to make two keynote addresses at the Winter Delegate Assembly. Her first presentation is titled *A Vision for Church: Not like the Gentiles who lord it over you*. This presentation reflects and expands on the six core commitments that Sara developed and shared with leaders of our Conference. Her second presentation is titled *Compassionate Leadership: Let the Children Come to Me*. This presentation will focus on contemporary challenges facing our conference and denomination.

Conference Council members discussed and encouraged these two presentations for the health of our Conference. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the primary expectation for the role of moderator is not keynote addresses. Sara’s gifting in terms of skill, knowledge, and wisdom was a variable in inviting her to make these presentations. In short, the material she is presenting is within the scope of her expertise. I am looking forward to these two presentations as we continue to navigate the turbulence of culture and denomination.

Following each of Sara’s presentations there will be table group conversations with specific questions that will focus discussion on contemporary challenges facing VMC congregations and pastoral leaders. There will also be reporting opportunities from groups to provide a sampling of conversations at tables.

By-Laws Update Proposed. In the February 18, 2021 meeting of Conference Council, members discussed the importance of adapting the composition of Conference Council to become more inclusive of gender and ethnicity. Conference Council took the action to invite the By-Laws Committee to present a proposed By-Law change for Conference Council consideration. Ryan Ahlgrim, chair of the By-Laws Committee, provided three reasons, along with the recommended changes, for making these adaptations:

1. This revision helps to fulfill Priority Goal number 4 from the Strategic Plan: “*To hear the voices and welcome the leadership of people of color, the differently-abled, women, and youth.*”

2. This revision clarifies the duties of the Conference Council.
3. This revision enables the Conference Council to recruit not only greater diversity in gender and race, but also select for specific skill sets while maintaining representation from each of the districts.

In the April and May 2021 meeting of Conference Council, discussion and edits occurred on the By-laws Committee recommendation. In the May meeting, the By-law revisions were approved by Conference Council for review and approval by the Delegate Assembly.

These By-Law Revision for Conference Council are now being presented to the delegate body. No action will be taken on the By-Law Revision in this Delegate Assembly. Rather, Conference Council encourages Districts to engage these revisions over the next number of months and forward concerns and affirmations to Conference Council through the District Chair. Conference Council will review the concerns and affirmations and make a decision about whether to take action to recommend approval of the By-Law Revisions in the Summer Assembly 2022.

Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church Departure. Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church meetinghouse was first utilized in May 1910 located in Chesapeake Virginia. Mennonites migrated to Southeastern Virginia looking for land at the turn of the century. In Harry Brunk's history of Virginia Mennonite Conference he identifies the following families that came into the area: John O. Miller, Elias Miller, Jacob Eby, Joseph D. Wert, Amos D. Wenger, A.A. Landis, A.W. Shaddinger, A.S. Detwiler, and Clayton Bergy. They came from Maryland, as well as Lancaster County and Bucks County in Pennsylvania. With an emphasis on mission and education, the community of Mennonites developed Mt Pleasant Mennonite School which opened on January 3, 1949.

As Nevin Mast, the current pastor, began his ministry, he guided the congregation through various conversations about the unsettledness of members' perception that Mennonite Church USA was moving to normalize same gender marriage in ways that offend them. As Executive Conference Minister, I met with the congregation November 15, 2015. At a second meeting, I was joined by Elroy Miller, Moderator, and Carl Mericle, District Minister in January 13-14, 2019 with specific discussions focusing on concerns about same gender marriage. With additional actions by MC USA that gave Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church members a sense that the denomination was no longer upholding the traditional view of marriage, they took steps to dissociate from Mennonite Church USA and subsequently Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Eastern District received and processed the request from Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church to withdraw from Virginia Mennonite Conference. The District action is included below:

It is with heavy hearts, that we the delegates of Eastern District of Virginia Mennonite Conference, accept Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church's written request to terminate their membership in Eastern District, Virginia Mennonite Conference, and Mennonite Church USA dated September 14, 2021. As we release Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church from membership, we pray God's blessings be with them as they continue their corporate journey of faith in new associations.

John Dey, chair of Eastern District, brought the District recommendation to Conference Council on October 21, 2021. Conference Council approved this recommendation:

Motion 6: Conference Council recommends to the Delegates the following statement:
We the delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference acknowledge with regret the withdrawal of Mount Pleasant 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.

The motion approved with 1 dissenting vote. In the subsequent Conference Council meeting, we determined that we will invite the delegates to join in a prayer of blessing as a shared action of release. It has been customary to vote to release but we noted that a vote to release when a congregation chooses to withdraw on its own volition carries ambiguous and sometimes confusing meaning, and is not required by VMC By-Laws.

Mennonite Church USA Presentation. Mennonite Church USA is holding a Special Delegate Assembly on May 27-30, 2022 in Kansas City, MO. There are several resolutions that will be placed before the Delegates for action. Conference Council believed there was significant value in having additional input from an Executive Board member concerning the process of placing these resolutions before the MC USA delegate body. Bishop Leslie Francisco of the Calvary District and a member of the MC USA Executive Board will join us by zoom to provide background information concerning the pending resolutions and will be available for questions.

Mission Report. C3 Community Church located in Hampton Virginia has been adapting to the new realities that include a leadership transition from Bishop Leslie & Natalie Francisco to the next generations lead pastor couple Lesley and Caleb McClendon. The congregational leaders have adapted to the changing dynamics responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and are providing meaningful worship and ministry to their constituency and the community. Lesley and Caleb will provide a mission report highlighting the dynamic ministries of C3, including multiple local and international congregations.

Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister

VMC Conference Council Bylaws *REVISION*

Approved by Conference Council 5/20/21

ARTICLE IV: CONFERENCE COUNCIL

Section 1. Composition

Conference Council shall consist of:

- 1.1 The elected Conference officers;
- 1.2 One representative from each district ~~council-executive committee~~ (which may include officers);
- ~~1.3 The chair and secretary from each commission. Exceptions to having these officers serve in this capacity require specific action of the commission;~~
- ~~1.4 Virginia Conference representatives to the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA;~~
- ~~1.5 A substitute when a member is unable to attend;~~
- ~~1.6~~ 3 Staff officers **The Executive Conference Minister** serving as a non-voting participants participant;
- ~~1.7 Heads of Conference Ministries invited as non-voting participants.~~
- 1.4 An Oversight Leader selected by the Faith and Life Commission.

Section 2. Selection

District representative members of Conference Council shall be:

- 2.1 Nominated by a Governance Committee consisting of the Executive Conference Minister, the Moderator, and three Conference Council members approved by Conference Council;
- 2.2 Selected through consultation with and approval by their respective district councils;
- 2.3 Selected for specific skills desired for the Conference Council;
- 2.4 Selected for diversity with a goal of: 50% representation by gender, 25% persons of color, 25% under 40 years of age.
- 2.5 Conference Council shall approve nominations provided by the Governance Committee.

Section ~~2~~ 3. Personal Qualifications

Conference Council members shall be:

- ~~2~~3.1 Fully committed to Jesus Christ, the church and congregational life;
- ~~2~~3.2 Persons of vision, spiritual discernment, maturity and leadership;
- ~~2~~3.3 Knowledgeable of their district, its congregations and programs;
- ~~2~~3.4 Positive in attitude toward the Mennonite Church, Virginia Mennonite Conference, and their districts;
- ~~2~~3.5 Willing to devote the time required by the assignment including attendance at meetings;
- ~~2~~3.6 Able to work effectively with ~~bishops~~ **district ministers**, ~~overseers~~ **oversight leaders**, ~~district chairpersons~~, ~~congregational leadership~~ and their colleagues;
- ~~2~~7 ~~Able to contribute creatively and productively to the work of Conference Council;~~
- ~~2~~8 ~~Skillful in communication;~~
- ~~2~~9 **3.7** Able to work in contexts of diversity.

Section 4. Terms

District representative members of Conference Council shall serve:

- 4.1 Three-year terms with a maximum of two consecutive terms.**

Section ~~3~~ 5. Corporate Duties

Conference Council as a corporate unit shall:

- ~~3~~5.1 Serve as the ~~executive body~~ **governing board** of Conference, **holding legal and fiduciary responsibilities;**
- ~~3~~5.2 Act as the “operational body” for VMC personnel and VMC property/real estate acquisition and disposition;
- ~~3~~5.3 Project vision, define direction and promote unity in coordinating the work of Conference;
- ~~3~~5.4 Decide what issues shall be brought to Conference Assembly;
- ~~3~~5.5 Define the functions, responsibilities and lines of accountability of conference officers, commissions and conference committees;
- 5.6 Approve policies of the Conference;**
- 5.7 Develop task forces to achieve ministry objectives;**
- ~~3~~6 **5.8** Provide for staffing of Conference;
- 5.9 In consultation with Faith and Life Commission, hire, support, and terminate the Executive Conference Minister;**

5.10 Following the triennial performance review of the Executive Conference Minister (initiated by the Executive Committee and led by the Chair of the Faith and Life Commission), provide an Executive Summary to the delegates.

~~3-7~~ 5.11 Facilitate the work of Conference Assembly between sessions;

~~3-8~~ 5.12 Arrange for an inspirational component of Conference Assembly;

~~3-9~~ 5.13 Prepare the agenda for business meetings of Conference Assembly;

~~3-10~~ 5.14 Receive reports from commissions, **Conference-related ministries**, and agencies;

~~3-11~~ 5.15 Evaluate the work of Conference commissions and agencies annually;

~~3-12~~ 5.16 Develop plans to meet the financial needs of Conference, including adoption and supervision of the annual budget;

~~3-13~~ 5.17 Prepare minutes for Conference Assembly delegates to review and approve;

~~3-14~~ 5.18 Commission three **representatives (typically including the Moderator and Executive Conference Minister)** to the Constituency Leaders Council of Mennonite Church USA as provided in the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.

~~3-15~~ 5.19 Appoint Conference based delegates and alternates to the Delegate Assembly of Mennonite Church USA as provided in the bylaws of Mennonite Church USA.

Section ~~4~~ 6. Meetings

Conference Council shall meet quarterly, **at least one of those meetings being in-person**. Additional meetings may be called by the moderator and the secretary. All meetings, except for executive sessions, are open for observation. For participation, prior arrangement shall be made with the ~~conference coordinator~~ **Moderator**.

Section ~~5~~ 7. Quorum

Two-thirds of the voting members of Conference Council shall be present to constitute a quorum. Actions shall require a seventy-five (75%) affirmative vote of members present for implementation.

Section ~~6~~ 8. Appeals

Conference Council shall serve all conference committees, ministries and subsidiary organizations as a final level of appeal. Congregations desiring counsel, assistance or resolution shall first contact their respective district councils. When resolution is not achieved at this level, the congregation may appeal to Conference Council through the officers of Conference Council. Such appeals must be supported by at least five members or ten percent (10%) of the congregation, whichever is greater. The officers of Conference Council will determine further processing of appeals including consultation with appropriate commissions and district councils.

Racial Justice Task Force Report
Winter Delegate Assembly
December 2021

Dear Delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference,

Grace and peace to you Brothers and Sisters in Christ. This report will briefly update you regarding the work of the VMC Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF). The RJTF has no actions that need to be voted on by the delegates at this time; instead, we will be using our time at the assembly to briefly focus on the theme “Creating a Common Memory of Justice.”

Update on the RJTF’s efforts: The RJTF was formed after several leaders of color in the conference voiced their desire for a further focus on Racial Justice in the conference in a June 2020 letter (you can find a copy of that letter [here](#)). The letter pointed out “the pivotal opportunity Virginia Mennonite Conference has to urgently and strategically address the barriers established and maintained by racism, racial injustice, racial insensitivity, and a lack of racial consciousness.” Following overwhelming approval for the formation of a task force in pursuit of overcoming these barriers at VMC Summer Delegate Assembly 2020, the RJTF was formed.

Since convening, the RJTF has begun pursuing the goals enumerated in the June 2020 letter. One of our first major actions was to take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a tool recommended in the June 2020 letter which helps leaders learn their strengths and weaknesses when working in multicultural and multiracial settings and equip them to grow. At this point the RJTF, the Faith and Life Commission, and the Conference Council have all taken the IDI.

Throughout 2022 the IDI will be made available to all credentialed leaders in VMC. The RJTF recommended the hiring of Caleb Schrock-Hurst as it’s Racial Justice and Equality Leader in August of 2020, and Caleb is planning to host IDI training sessions with each VMC district during 2022. Several District training times have already been scheduled; we invite conference chairs and oversight ministers to contact Caleb to schedule a training if they have not done so already.

In addition to working with the IDI, the RJTF has kept the topic of racial justice centered in the conference via sharing at the 2021 Summer Delegate Assembly, a new monthly newsletter (which you can sign up to receive [here](#)), and by providing a list of recommended resources for pastors and churches (available [here](#)). The RJTF also continues to share resources among our own group to continue our learning as a leadership group within the conference. We continue to be available for leading conversations and hope to continue challenging the conference to grow.

The RJTF is also pleased to have received substantial support from the church community. The RJTF received a \$10,000 grant from the Anabaptist Center for Religion and Society – an organization in the Harrisonburg area that encourages retirees to support new Christian initiatives – as well as a few smaller financial gifts from non-VMC churches. These funds will be used to support the RJTF’s various efforts in the coming months and years.

The RJTF is looking forward to launching enrichment activities regarding racial justice including trips to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Richmond Slave Trail, and other pertinent sites; due to the ongoing pandemic we have yet to launch these activities but we hope to do so this year.

Creating a Common Memory of Justice: As all leaders of churches and organizations know, changing the culture of a group is extremely difficult – but also extremely important. One of the most crucial things that binds us together and determines our culture – our attitudes and efforts – is our shared memory; thus, creating shared memories of acting together for justice is a core goal of the RJTF.

Much more important than always saying or doing the right thing is being willing to learn from both mistakes and successes and being able to fit those efforts into a common understanding of our past and future – of our direction towards wholeness. Our goal as an RJTF is to help VMC become an anti-racist organization committed to speaking out against injustice and we know this will take time.



The RJTF hopes to move beyond merely ticking surface-level boxes regarding trainings and presentations – we hope to continue challenging congregations and individuals to engage with the topic of racial justice and equip congregations to sit with discomfort and occasionally conflict as we change to becoming more active in our support of our brothers and sisters in the faith.

What do you, pastors and leaders of VMC, want to see from the RJTF? Please feel free to reach out to Caleb at caleb.schrock-hurst@vmconf.org with any questions or comments. All of the resources highlighted in this report are available on the Virginia Conference website.

Report prepared by Caleb Schrock-Hurst,
VMC Racial Justice and Equality Leader,
on behalf of the VMC Racial Justice Task Force.

Racial Justice Task Force:

Vivian Steven-Lyons, Co-Chair, Pastoral Care Minister at C3 Hampton

Maren Hange, Co-Chair, Co-Pastor of Charlottesville Mennonite Church and Co-District Minister for Harrisonburg District

Andrew Cheung, Senior Pastor Washington Community Fellowship

Chris Cox, Pastor of Youth and Young Adults at C3 Hampton

Andrew Fairfield, Pastor Christiansburg Mennonite Fellowship

Aldine Musser, District Minister for Northern District

Armando Sanchez, Pastor of Shalom-Nuevo Comienzo and Cristiana Enciende una Luz

Tami Nice, Co-Leader Outlet 10.27

Further information on the RJTF's members can be found [here](#) on the VMC website.