

RENUUEVO

Beauty From Ashes

2021 Conference Assembly

- Delegates Vote to Release Three Congregations and Welcome One
- Delegates Approve Moderator Elect Sara Wenger Shenk + Others
- Participants Engage Racial Justice Task Force Questions



Called to Serve

By JUNE MILLER

Without congregations,

Virginia Mennonite Conference cannot exist. Our bottom line is serving the church. In a strategic planning meeting last fall, I was working with Clyde and Jon to understand who and what we are?



One of the duties of Conference Council (by-law Article IV, 3.3) is to project vision, define direction, and promote unity. Rephrasing, Clyde said, "We work for God's purposes to be manifest among us." He emphasized that "unity [is] not uniformity, not of the same mind, but of the same Spirit."

VMC is in a delicate position, holding the tension of nonuniformity and differences of mind. And this is what we are called to be.

Romans 12: 4-5 says, "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (NIV)

Together with Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada, we share a Vision Statement. "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." May it be so.

Clyde's Sabbatical

Since June 1, Clyde has been on a much needed sabbatical with plans to visit key sites to learn more about systemic racism and inequality. He completed the northern leg of his journey at the beginning of June.

However, the southern leg is on hold. Earlier this month, Clyde experienced a mild heart attack. He spent a couple days in the hospital and is now home, taking it a bit easier than he planned.

Your continued prayers for both Clyde and Eunice are appreciated.

June Miller is Office Manager & Strategic Marketing for Virginia Mennonite Conference.



Watch Caleb's video introduction at <https://youtu.be/fLbNCifvx0A>

VMC Hires Caleb Schrock-Hurst as Racial Justice and Equity Leader

In this new quarter-time position, Caleb will support the work of the Racial Justice Task Force as they facilitate the Conference's anti-racism mandates: to equip members, to learn about existing racism, to develop leadership strategies, and to equip Conference leaders. He begins on August 1.

Read more at <https://virginiainconference.org/?p=6338>

Pastoral transitions

APRIL TO JULY 2021

Kathy Yoder, transferred from Eastern District Conference, moved to retired status.

Marvin Lorenzana withdrawn. Now serving with Eastern Mennonite Missions.

Mark Kimmet withdrawn alongside 3:16 Community Church withdrawal.

Matthew Cubbage withdrawn alongside 3:16 Community Church withdrawal.

Dan Horning withdrawn alongside Gospel Hill Church withdrawal

Barbara Lehman, transfer to Central District Conference.

John Lehman, transfer to Central District Conference.

Pablo Hernandez withdrawn. Left pastorate at Esperanza de Vida.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber left the pastorate at Harrisonburg Mennonite.

Curt Stutzman, license to ordination for Weavers Mennonite Church.

Lee Martin moved to retired status.

Ben Risser moved to retired status.

Sanford Yoder ordination withdrawn.

Maren Hange appointed co-District Minister by Harrisonburg District.

Roy Hange reappointed as co-District Minister by Harrisonburg District.

VIDEOS FROM ASSEMBLY



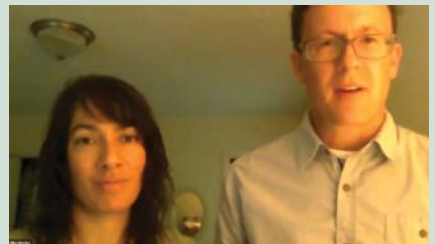
Racial Justice Task Force report to Conference Assembly:
https://youtu.be/Ed4_fhXkjZQ



Andrew Cheung meditation on Isaiah 61: <https://youtu.be/6MbdDDU3OzI>



Pablo Hernandez meditation on Isaiah 61: <https://youtu.be/3J5Gc7uaOrU>



Mosaic of Grace joins VMC:
<https://youtu.be/JVzzXbZsjX4>

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Editor & Designer: Jon Trotter

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info@virginiainconference.org
Website: virginiainconference.org

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Renuevo: Beauty From Ashes

By JON TROTTER

Virginia Mennonite Conference said goodbye to three congregations at its annual Conference Assembly held virtually on June 12, 2021, and welcomed a new congregation into full membership. Delegates also approved the nomination of Sara Wenger Shenk as Moderator Elect, beginning September 1, and several other leadership roles.

The congregations choosing to leave Virginia Mennonite Conference were Gospel Hill Mennonite Church and 3:16 Christian Community Church, both of which are now affiliating with Conservative Mennonite Conference, and The Table, which became part of Allegheny Mennonite Conference. Representatives from these congregations' districts shared about the process, and Aldine Musser, Northern District Minister, led a prayer of lament. Delegates affirmed these departures with regret.

Mosaic of Grace, a recent church plant and congregation-in-information pastored by Mike and Risha Metzler, was welcomed into full Conference membership by delegate vote. Mike and Risha shared about their ministry and the ways they have seen God working through church and neighborhood connections.

Besides approving Sara Wenger Shenk as Moderator Elect, delegates also approved the nominations of Leroy Kauffman as Treasurer and Jean Oswald as Faith & Life Commission Member-at-Large. Delegates also affirmed VMissions Board Members Juan Carlos Malvaez, Luz Contreras, Reuben Horst, and Liz Driver.

The Assembly theme was "Renuevo: Beauty From Ashes." Renuevo is a Spanish word that has two meanings, a shoot of a plant, and renewal. Two Virginia Mennonite Conference leaders engaged passages from Isaiah 61. Andrew Cheung, senior pastor of Washington Community Fellowship, reflected on verses 1-3, and Pablo Hernandez, pastor of Iglesia Esperanza de Vida, shared a meditation on verses 4-9.

A current Conference priority is to examine and adjust policies, frameworks, and decision-making processes that have excluded persons of color and non-dominant cultures from full participation. As racial justice and inclusion is a priority

for Virginia Conference, a Racial Justice Task Force was approved by Conference Council in September 2020 and formed with eight persons, representing a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds and different geographic regions. The Task Force is co-chaired by Vivian Stevens-Lyons of Hampton, Va., and Maren Hange of Charlottesville, Va. Through the work of the Task Force, the Conference seeks to equip leaders and members of its congregations to deeply listen to stories from non-White voices without defensive postures, and to include those who have been shut out of power structures by understanding the history and making room for other seats at the table.

During the Assembly, Caleb Schrock-Hurst was introduced to delegates via pre-recorded video. He is the new quarter-time Racial Justice and Equity Leader for the Conference. In this role, Caleb will support the work of the Racial Justice Task Force as they facilitate the Conference's anti-racism mandates: to equip members, to learn about existing racism, to develop leadership strategies, and to equip Conference leaders. He will begin on August 1, 2021.

The Task Force reported to delegates and they engaged in breakout room discussions with a series of questions. Some groups reported discussion themes back to the full delegate body. Each group had a recorder and provided the group feedback to the Task Force.

After a break, Virginia Mennonite Missions reported to delegates. After an introduction by President Aaron Kauffman, the report detailed three strategic priorities of the agency in a series of presentations followed by prayer format.

David Gingerich, a pastor and VMissions board member, talked about renewal and partnership. Veronica Sanchez, pastor at Iglesia Shalom, followed with a prayer in Spanish. Lydia Musselman, VMissions worker in college ministry and staff member, shared about the strategic priority of reaching the next generation, which was followed with a prayer by Hannah Shultz, a VMissions worker serving in music and discipleship ministries with several Spanish-language VMC congregations. Jason Showalter, VMissions Global

BY THE NUMBERS Conference Assembly June 12, 2021

ATTENDANCE

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| # Total registered | 113 |
| # Total attended | 103 |
| # Delegates attended | 85 |
| # Total known delegates | 183 |
| 40% needed for quorum | 74 |

DELEGATE ACTIONS

| |
|--|
| 2021 Winter Delegate Session minutes passed at 100% (78 yes) |
| Sara Wenger Shenk as Moderator-Elect, approved at 95% (80 y, 1 no) |
| Leroy Kauffman as Treasurer approved at 100% (81 yes) |
| Jean Oswald to FLC approved at 96% (80 yes, 1 no) |
| VMission Board Appointees affirmed at 99% (80 yes, 1 no) |
| Release of Congregations: 3:16 Christian Community Church, The Table, Gospel Hill Mennonite Church—all approved with regret at 89% (85 yes, 11 no) |
| Welcoming of Mosaic of Grace church to full membership affirmed at 90% (70 yes, 3 no, 5 ab.) |

Ministries Director, shared via video about the priority of work as witness and multiplication. Following this, Thailand-based worker Steve Horst recorded a song prayer via video which included slides of VMissions workers and partners.

Aaron Kauffman concluded the report with updates on current projects, board and staff, finances, and the ongoing fundraising efforts of a VMissions capital campaign called "A Church of Many Cultures."

The VMissions report was followed by a time of commissioning for credentialed leaders and new or reappointed VMissions workers. A commissioning litany was read by representatives from the Conference and VMissions.

Jon Trotter is Communication Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Delegates Approve Nominees for Leadership Positions at Summer Conference Assembly



Sara Wenger Shenk
CONFERENCE
MODERATOR-ELECT

"I would love for the conference to be known for our open-hearted hospitality, trustworthy communication and non-anxious, courageous faith," Sara Wenger Shenk writes. She 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.

Sara and Gerald are parents of three children and six grandchildren who bring immeasurable joy. She lives near Waynesboro, Virginia, and is pursuing membership at Springdale Mennonite Church.



Leroy Kauffman
CONFERENCE
TREASURER

"I look forward to this opportunity to further utilize my skill set for the work of the church," **Leroy Kauffman** writes. He 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 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.



Jean Oswald
FAITH & 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.

What If We Are The Losers?

By ANDREW CHEUNG

Some of you may know that though I was born in America, I spent most of my life in Canada. So a return to America has offered somewhat of an outsider's view into our nation. I don't think this will come as a surprise to you, but I've noticed that we Americans *really* love to celebrate wins. We love to boast about our successes.



And as far as I can tell, even though Mennonites in America are not particularly bombastic in our style and dispositions, I think some of us can certainly be bombastic about our favorite sports teams, especially when they win.

America is for winners... or at least that's what we've been told to believe. We want to be seen as successful, or "blessed" if we are to use Christian lingo.

But the corollary to winning, is that often, someone loses. And as the past year has highlighted, there continues to be a narrative of someone winning at the expense of those that lose, whether it's about an election, or a virus, or vaccinations, or immigration, or the tragic disease of racism. On this last point, I find it a privilege to serve alongside other members of the Racial Justice Task Force commissioned by the VMC to truthfully look at ways that the conference has upheld racism or discrimination in our history and institutions.

In what ways have we, the VMC, won, at the silent expense of those that lose? A significant part of the work of the task force is to have the VMC say, "Silence no more."

Within VMC, each time we gather together for an assembly, we often take time to acknowledge wins and losses as a conference. We can celebrate the birth of new congregations, but we can also acknowledge the loss of congregations.

It's the reality of life as a diverse community of congregations that we feel deeply both the wins and losses. And as Americans, the losses often sting a little bit harder.

We don't have to be afraid of either of these, despite our tendency to gloss over the latter.

I know that when I come to texts like Isaiah 61, I'm inclined to identify with the wins. I identify with the "wins" of the Lord's favor, and being sent as the proclaimer of good news, of freedom, and of comfort. I want to be the one who gets to tell others of God's favor upon them. I want to be the one who bestows beauty and joy upon those who are disturbed and distraught. In wanting to identify with the winning in this passage, I wonder if that is perhaps more of an American instinct, rather than a particularly Christian one. And isn't it quite presumptuous (and perhaps just as American) of us to read ourselves into a text that clearly points to a specific Anointed One?

What might it look like for us to hear and embrace these words of Isaiah as the apparent "losers"? What if we were the poor? The broken-hearted. The captive. The prisoners. The ones who mourn and grieve. The ones who sit in ashes. Does that change how you hear these words?

At worst, our American ethos defiantly denies the possibility that we might actually be the losers. At best, our American ethos loses so badly to be lifted from those ashes.

But the words of Isaiah offer us incredible hope. The Living God offers hope—not just beyond the loss, but in the midst of the loss. You see, when we understand just who it is that the Spirit has come upon, and who it is that has been anointed to proclaim the good news, we find that the losses and the ashes and the mourning do not have to scare us. They don't have to overwhelm us. They don't define us. We can name our losses honestly. We can take our disturbed and distraught emotions and call them for what they are. We might even come to be OK being called losers in the eyes of those around us. Because of who the Spirit of God has first been poured out upon, we can name these losses and lament with hope.

Isaiah's words pointed to the One to come who, though was a winner in all respects, yet loses not only in the eyes of those who condemn him, but he loses in the eyes of those who worshipped and followed him. And the one who should be a winner in all respects because He is God, we find, loses by hanging on the ugliest and

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. —Isaiah 61:1-3

most brutal form of suffering known at the time—the cross. We have come to know this winner who becomes a loser, as Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

Yet even in the moment of his apparent losing, we find something incredible. As Jesus hangs on the cross with the very last threads of life dwindling from him, he still fulfills the words of Isaiah! On the cross, he has the wherewithal to see the mourning and anxiety of his mother, Mary, at his feet. She's not just mourning the loss of her precious son. She's anxious about what's going to happen next when He's gone. How will she even survive on her own? Yet, Jesus offers comfort to her by ensuring she will be taken care of...even as he apparently loses. Of course, we know the cross is not the end of the story. On the cross, Jesus does ultimately win in an unexpected way by conquering the power of sin and its curse, death. Jesus not only atones for our sin, but resurrects from the grave. Jesus wins by showing us a new future for humanity and for all of creation.

Today, we acknowledge our wins and our losses. But we don't do this alone. We stand on privileged ground compared to Isaiah because we stand on this side of the cross in history.

Someone has been anointed by the Spirit. Someone has been sent to us by the Sovereign God of all Creation. His name is Jesus and he stands at the center of it all. All of our wins...and all of our losses So be comforted. The losses don't define us, but neither do the wins.

The ashes are not meant to be our state forever. In Christ, beauty will surely rise.

Andrew Cheung is Senior Pastor of Washington Community Fellowship, Washington, DC.

God Still Promises to Restore

By PABLO HERNANDEZ

This passage contains, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful restoration promises in all of scripture. Faced with the reality of the ashes, ruin and discouragement, God raises his voice and announces a new time for his people. A time of renewal



and encouragement. These five verses show us powerful affirmations of what God can do for his children when they face extremely painful, dangerous, and uncertain situations.

During the last few months we have gone through a pandemic that, in one way or another, has affected our lives and in some cases has produced pain and uncertainty. It is good to know that we have the same God as Isaiah. The same God who made these amazing promises is the same God who daily hears our prayers and dwells in our hearts.

Regarding God's promise, I would like to highlight the verbs used here: rebuild, restore, renew, shepherd, work, feed, receive, rejoice, inherit, and acknowledge. This is a wonderful promise that cannot be separated from the beginning of this chapter. The first three verses of this passage have to do with the work of the Spirit of God in his anointed one who is sent to announce that the time of despair had been fulfilled and that, as a product of divine initiative, new times would be fulfilled for the children of God. The extraordinary promise of verses 4-9 must be seen as a result of God's liberating work in announcing Good News of redemption for a disgraced people.

Unfortunately, I have been able to see the havoc it causes on the faith of many when this passage is taken out of context and proclaimed as the opportunity, we must extract the best of God without compromise. A God whose purpose is to see us prosper and free us from the slightest problem in life. Yes, God longs for our good. He promises better times, but he never promised restoration without a certain amount

of suffering. Israel suffered captivity to perhaps realize that God walked with them even when they lived in a strange land, under the oppressive yoke of those who dominated them. God was always there, loving them despite their stubbornness and inviting them to turn to Him with their hearts. At his time, he kept his promise and gave them his best. He gave himself in the person of the promised Messiah.

We all know that Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry on this earth, quoted this passage in his visit to the synagogue, but he not only quoted it, but he also made it his own. He embodied it. Something that no one had dared to do until that moment.

After reading this chapter of Isaiah he said something else that made a great impact: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). It turns out, then, that the centuries-long awaited prophecy was now a reality in the person of a humble carpenter from Galilee. God became man and dwelt among us not to boast of his infinite power but to become one of us and tell us face-to-face that the time of shame has passed. That now, in his person, a new story can be written in our life. It is without a doubt the best news we could have received!

I've lived long enough to realize that even good news are not always welcome. Or perhaps, if they are well received at the beginning but when they are accompanied by a cross, they seem to lose their charm. Jesus came to this world to reflect divine love to fallen humanity and to reach out a restorative hand to hopelessly lost people. If Jesus had not quoted this passage, it is highly likely that many would have thought that it was promises only applicable to Israel. But Jesus came into the world, he came to all, he loved us all, he gave himself as the perfect cure to our disease called sin, from which generational misfortunes such as injustice, oppression, corruption, selfishness, prejudices, racism, lies, and inequality arise.

I have been asked how this passage resonates in my cultural context and my answer is always the same: it resonates in the same way as in any other context. We have broken people everywhere, governments corrupted by loving money, people suffering from lack of housing, food, health, or access to the basic things of life. People who do not want to know anything about God, others who seek to follow Jesus but do it in

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. —Isaiah 61:4-9

their own way, embracing the blessings and refusing to live faithfully to Him.

It resonates the same in my Honduras, a beautiful nation that is facing one of its darkest times in its history due to corruption at all levels, inequality, crime, and injustice, just as it resonates in the United States and anywhere on the planet. Honestly, we will realize that we are all broken by the same evil and we are all offered the same medicine that can heal the soul, change pain for dance, and establish the genuine shalom that God has promised to those who love him. This is the message we urgently must convey. The pandemic eventually is going to finish but we will still be dealing with a spiritual COVID that can kill us subtly, poisoning our being, like in the beginning.

I must also admit that I have found in these verses a more precise definition of what service to God is, or what we call "ministry" is. Both words, gospel and ministry, come together and I think they work together like this:

When the gospel of Christ fills our hearts and changes us, we are reborn to a new hope. We are also driven to see our neighbor as the extension of God's love for us. And God works mightily restoring the destroyed, healing the wounds, providing for the dispossessed. The church has the mission of bringing the words of Isaiah 61 to life. But a mission focused on him, to glorify him to honor him, to obey him, even though we suffer rejection or underestimation. In living like this we will find what a real restoration is.

May the Lord allow us, who by his grace and mercy serve him, to be spokespersons and an example of such a powerful message. That passages like Isaiah 61 and Luke 4 not only serve for theological discussions but also to identify ourselves with the heart of our Messiah and be like Him without fear in the middle of difficult times.

Pablo Hernandez is Pastor of Iglesia Esperanza de Vida, Harrisonburg, Va.

MennoCon21 Equips the Church for Revitalization

By MENNONITE CHURCH USA STAFF

Church revitalization is an important theme at MennoCon21, the biennial convention of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), which is meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, and online, July 6-10. Many of the equipping seminars, of which there are more than 70 in-person and 20 online, focus on various aspects of church renewal.

“Revitalization and equipping leaders are essential for our denomination to thrive, moving into the next decade and beyond,” said Glen Guyton, MC USA executive director. “We have spent the past few years in the storming and norming phases of organizational development. Now we need to begin performing and living into our calling as Mennonite Church USA.” Guyton is the author of “Reawakened: How Your Congregation Can Spark Lasting Change” and led a seminar on this topic at MennoCon.

Michael Danner, MC USA associate executive director, will address the need for this focus in his online equipping seminar, “Practicing Revitalization.”

“Many congregations in the United States are plateauing, meaning they have about the same number of participants they’ve had for many years, or they are declining,” he said. “This is true for many Mennonite congregations as well. Members, of course, love their church, and they have life-giving experiences there, but they are concerned about their future. Some are even asking if they will have a future beyond this current generation.”

Danner provides churches with steps for revitalization that go beyond restructuring plans, new mission statements and attractional models of ministry.

“I believe strongly that congregations need missional decision-making practices that empower the faith community to turn outward, to listen to the community, to dis-

cern resources and create experiments that bring the faith community and the larger community together,” said Danner. “I think when that happens, God’s Shalom is expanded. God’s peace with justice becomes real in tangible ways. And I believe that people want to experience the good news.”

A number of other seminars address revitalization and speak directly to this missional view, such as “Church is Not a Building (and Your Pastor’s Not the Only Minister),” presented by Michele Hershberger, author and professor of Bible at Hesston College, Hesston, Kansas. “Church is not a building and all of us are missionaries,” says the seminar descriptor. “Rediscovering these truths can help breathe new life into our congregations; it can be a conversion experience.”

Sandra Montes Martinez, associate conference minister, Western District Conference, led a roundtable for Spanish-speaking attendees on revitalizing the community of faith, titled “Re-imagine, Revitalize and Be Relevant.”

Mike Sherrill, executive director of Mennonite Mission Network, invited attendees to “discover God’s urgent call for each of us and our church” in his seminar on church planting, “Future Driven Partnership” on July 9.

Building Community

A common thread in these seminars is the need to build community. Leaders and experts from across the church address various aspects of this, with seminars to equip the church to be more diverse and welcoming to all.

“We have to provide opportunities for our youth to use their gifts,” said Jerrell Williams, pastor of Salem Mennonite Church, Salem, Oregon, in his online youth seminar, “Growing Deeper Roots.” He encourages congregations to be multigenerational, saying “I get that we have special ministries

in our churches that are specifically catered toward the needs of the youth and young adults, but that does not mean that the youth are to be separate from the rest of the congregation.”

Jeanne Davies, executive director of Anabaptist Disabilities Network, presented “Worship for All,” on July 7. She shared ideas on how to plan worship services based on universal design — worship that includes all people in planning, leading and worshipping together.

Joseph Manickam, president of Hesston College, presented “The Multicultural Future of the Mennonite Church,” a case study that looks at how new voices in leadership are reshaping the identity of MC USA, on July 9. Other seminars addressed ways that the Mennonite church and its schools can walk alongside marginalized communities.

Several seminars addressed trauma and sexual violence, to empower survivors and equip congregations and ministry leaders to provide a healthy, supportive community. Susannah Larry, assistant professor of biblical studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, will speak on “Reclaiming the Bible With Survivors of Sexualized Violence” on July 8. A team of student educators from Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, provided a youth presentation on “Becoming an Effective Bystander: Sexual Assault Intervention and Prevention.”

“MennoCon21 provides our members with a unique opportunity to gather, worship and learn together,” said Guyton. “When we can come together, when we join in community, we foster a strong sense of identity that will lead to revitalization. Ultimately, this sets the tone for allowing us to be receptive to transformation by the Holy Spirit and our ability to live into our vision of healing and hope.”



Glen Guyton is Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA. MCUSA photo

#MENNO
CON21

Mennonite Church USA Delegates Approve Bylaw Changes

By MENNONITE CHURCH USA STAFF

First published at <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/news/mc-usa-holds-historic-virtual-delegate-assembly-delegates-approve-bylaw-changes/>

Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) held its first virtual Delegate Assembly on Saturday, July 10, the last day of its biennial MennoCon21 convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. The delegates approved changes to the MC USA bylaws, affirmed a slate of nominees for churchwide boards and heard reports from the Resolutions Committee and the denomination's racial ethnic and constituency groups. Executive Director Glen Guyton also provided a State of the Church report.

Three hundred and fifteen delegates attended the online Delegate Assembly via Zoom, representing an estimated 173 of the denomination's 530 congregations and including conference delegates from 15 of the 16 area conferences. South Central Mennonite Conference was not represented at the conference level.

Bylaw changes

The delegates reviewed and approved several changes to the MC USA bylaws. Major policy changes included:

- Allowing for virtual Delegate Assembly meetings
- Clarifying guest inclusion for Constituency Leaders Council meetings (CLC)
- Allowing for virtual CLC meetings
- Aligning the Mennonite Education Agency (MEA) section of the bylaws to align with MEA's updated bylaws
- Clarifying the difference between church agencies and entities
- Allowing for simple corrections, such as punctuation and grammar revisions, without a formal amendment. All revisions are subject to approval by the Executive Board.

The vote also included structural changes to remove *The Mennonite* as an MC USA entity. *The Mennonite* merged with *Mennonite World Review* in September 2020 to form *Anabaptist World*, an independent media organization.

Nominees for churchwide boards

Stan Shantz, chair of the Leadership Discernment Committee (LDC), presented a ballot of nominees for churchwide boards, including Jon Carlson, pastor of Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pennsylvania, as moderator-elect and two first-term Executive Board members, among others. Delegates approved the nominees.

Shantz noted that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was harder than usual for the LDC to identify volunteers who had time and availability to serve. "We are thankful when persons agreed to serve in these important positions that support our denomination and God's good work," he said.

Resolutions Committee

Moderator-elect Linda Dibble, serving as chair of the Resolutions Committee, shared its final recommendations on five proposed resolutions:

"Clarification of Mennonite Church Polity and the Role of the Membership Guidelines of MC USA," submitted by the MC USA Executive Board. Final recommendation: The committee recommended that this be presented for a vote by the delegates at the special in-person session May 27-30, 2022, in Kansas City, Missouri.

"MC USA Accessibility Resolution," submitted by Anabaptist Disabilities Network, Mennonite Health Services and four Mennonite congregations. Final recommendation: The committee recommended that this be presented for a vote by the delegates in May 2022.

"For Justice in the U.S. Criminal Legal System" by Zachariah Begly, Reba Place Church and Elizabeth Reimer, Lombard Mennonite Church, Lombard, Illinois. Final recommendation: The committee recommended that this be designated as a study resolution.

"A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation," submitted by the Inclusive Mennonite Pastors and 30 congregations and organizations. Final recommendation: This resolution is currently at an impasse. Guyton explained: "This resolution was

submitted by the writers for a vote, but the Resolutions Committee recommended it to be studied. In good conscience, we could not continue to move forward without the participation of the writers in an education process."

"Repentance and Transformation' invites MC USA to commit to the well-being of queer people through concrete actions of repair," said Michael Crosby, pastor of First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana, Urbana, Illinois, and one of the writers of the resolution. "We're deeply disappointed that the Resolutions Committee rejected the resolution and is refusing delegates an opportunity to vote. Along with the 30+ MC USA congregations and 500+ individuals who sponsored this resolution, we are still awaiting an explanation as to why and how they came to this decision."

"Church Membership in Virginia Mennonite Conference and MC USA," by Jim Hershberger, lead pastor of Mount Clinton Mennonite Church, Rockingham, Virginia. Final recommendation: This resolution would significantly change the structure between MC USA and conferences. It would take considerable work to make these changes. Therefore, the resolution was not processed and will not move forward.

State of the Church

Guyton reported on the state of the church, saying "We're not as big as we used to be, but we are still connected to the global family of Anabaptists...and that's something that we should celebrate."

He noted that revitalization was an important theme at MennoCon21, saying, "Revitalization and equipping leaders are essential for our denomination to thrive, moving into the next decade and beyond."

"Convention is one of those places where we can continue to mold and shape the next generation of church," he said, adding that, when we join in community, it sets the tone for allowing us to be receptive to transformation by the Holy Spirit and our ability to live into MC USA's Vision of Healing and Hope.

Behind the scenes at Mennonite Church USA's virtual 2021 Delegate Assembly (from left to right): Edward Diller, Parliamentarian; Linda Dibble, Moderator-Elect; Joy Sutter, Moderator; Glen Guyton, Executive Director. MCUSA photo

"We are only as strong as our leaders who inhabit our pews and our conference offices," Guyton said. He challenged attendees to "move out of our silos to realize that we are diverse – geographically, ethnically, politically, racially and culturally – and to understand that if we fail to live into our Renewed Commitments...that we will allow ourselves to be pulled apart." He noted that the first commitment is to Follow Jesus.

"And so, my agenda and my role as leader of Mennonite Church USA is Jesus," said Guyton.

Reporting

The delegates also heard reports from MC USA's racial ethnic and constituency groups.

Mennonite Women USA: Brooke Oyana, administrative assistant, reported on the group's new flat leadership structure, their new annual Bible study, "Sisterhood Decalogue," and their International Women's Fund, which provides support for women seeking higher education.

Mennonite Men: Steve Thomas, U.S. coordinator, reported on the success of the group's three key initiatives: JoinMen (fellowship); JoinHands (financial support for new churches), and JoinTrees (a tree planting project with a goal of one million trees by 2030).



African American Mennonite Association (AAMA): Alicia Manning reported that congregations have been engaged in mission work dealing with violence among youth and also multicultural community building.

Native Mennonite Ministries: Iris de León-Hartshorn, MC USA associate executive director, provided an update on the group's scholarship programs for students attending college and for the treatment of persons coping with addictions, as well as the challenges related to gathering and identifying/equipping potential leaders.

Iglesia Menonita Hispana (IMH): Pastor Fernando Ramos reported that 58 congregations are members of IMH. He

discussed the challenges of the pandemic and the group's partnerships with MC USA (the Grace Fund), Everence (the Chapter Grant program) and MEA (continuing education programs).

Indonesian Mennonite Association (IMA): Pastor Buddy Hannanto, chairman of IMA, reported on the group's work with Mosaic Mennonite Conference to raise awareness of peace and justice initiatives in time of violence, as well as efforts to support a COVID-19 mass vaccination effort in Indonesia.

The meeting concluded with prayers of blessing for incoming Moderator Linda Dibble and Moderator-Elect Jon Carlson.

Guyton Calls for Change; Unveils Theme for Next Biennium

By MENNONITE CHURCH USA STAFF

Glen Guyton, executive director of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), urged the church to "Be Transformed," revealing the denominational theme for the next biennium in his closing message at MennoCon21 on July 10 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"The power of the church lies in transformation," said Guyton. "While transformation will look different in different communities and with different people the church serves, the mission of the church is always to prepare people for

transformation to happen."

As with the previous "Bring the Peace" theme, "Be Transformed" echoes the Renewed Commitments for MC USA, which call for the church to "Follow Jesus, witness to God's peace and experience transformation."

"Our power is to be that symbol of hope, restoration and renewal in the community," he said. Guyton acknowledged that the denomination has had its



challenges since coming together in 2001 and encouraged the church to focus on its common core values and how it can grow and benefit communities. He reminded the combined in-person and online attendees at

MC USA's hybrid convention that God is in control and surrounds and protects us with loving kindness.



Photo: Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale

Back to the Fairgrounds for the 2021 Relief Sale

By TIM JOST

The 2021 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Relief Sale is scheduled for October 1 and 2. After the 2020 virtual Relief Sale, we are hoping to be back at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds this year. The extent the relief sale can be in-person will depend on safety guidelines at the time.

We may, for example, have to move some indoor activities to outdoors and will leave ample space for social distancing. It will also depend on whether volunteers feel comfortable with participating in an in-person sale. The Relief Sale Board hopes to make a feasibility determination soon, subject to future adjustment.

The auction will again be online with online bidding. We may supplement this with a live auction, with online bids. We plan to have a variety of food choices available and possibly meals. Our ability to do so, however, will depend, again, on who is able to prepare and serve the food. We do not expect to have drive-through service alternatives, as we did in 2020. Apple butter boiling will be September 18.

Whatever we do, you are welcome to donate money. In 2020, we sent our largest donation ever to MCC: \$327,556.29. We were able to do this in large part because we received over \$126,000 in donations, more than we raised through the auction.

Donations can be made directly to the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale: <https://varelielsale.com/donate> or mail to 601 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, 22802, or through Sharing our Surplus (SOS).

SOS was formed to help the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale raise additional funds for world relief through having a donation table for cash, check or credit card contributions. The proceeds augment funds the Relief Sale raises through auction and food sales, with all SOS proceeds going directly to MCC for refugee relief needs. You will have an early opportunity to contribute by participating in the SOS walk on August 29.

In light of ongoing and ever more pressing needs, this year's SOS effort hopes to raise even more funds to forward to MCC, in much of the same way as liberal and "cheerful" fundraising for foreign relief was done by believers in the first century.

In Paul's second letter to the churches at Corinth, he urges them to raise much-needed funds for fellow believers experiencing a famine in Judea, some 800 miles away. Given the differences in modes of travel and communication, that would have been a far greater "distance" than the farthest location of any "foreign" needy and displaced persons in our world today.

The Greek word for "cheerful," by the way, is *hilaron*, the root of the English word "hilarious." A world in great need would be blessed by some truly hilarious giving this year on the part of those of us who have been blessed beyond measure.

Tim Jost is a Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale volunteer.



Grants Available to VMC Ministers and Workers

Did you know that various grants are available through Virginia Mennonite Conference to pastors and others?

Ministry Training Trust Funds provide financial assistance for persons who are active members of Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations such as pastors, congregational lay leaders, mission workers, and persons exploring a call to Christian ministry to help with education and training expenses from a qualified and certified institution.

The Church Worker Assistance Program is a grant for licensed counseling services available to eligible church or agency workers, dependent on funding available through an endowment managed by Virginia Mennonite Conference. Prerequisite: Applicants must have membership in a VMC congregation and the approval process must be done in advance of services being rendered.

The Retired Church Worker Aid and Enrichment Fund is a program to provide some financial assistance for eligible retired church, agency or mission workers, or their surviving spouse, due to financial hardship for either aid or enrichment purposes.

Learn more and find applications to all of these grants at <https://virginiaconference.org/resources/> under Grants.



Clockwise from top left: 1) Moriah Hurst, a member of the VMC Youth Council, gives youth instructions for the photo scavenger hunt. 2) Youth enjoy snacks provided by Eastern Mennonite University's Admissions Office on the Discipleship Center hilltop. 3) Youth look for a clue at the EMU water tower. 4) Lucas Yoder shares a personal reflection with the gathered MYF youth. 5) A small scavenger hunt group on the move to find the answer to another question. Photos by Jon Trotter

EMU, VMC Youth Council Hosts MYF Gathering

By JON TROTTER

Mennonite youth from several Harrisonburg, Va., area congregations gathered at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) for a combined youth event and photo scavenger hunt on the evening of July 21. Approximately 40 youth and sponsors attended the gathering hosted by EMU at the Discipleship Center.

The Virginia Mennonite Conference Youth Council coordinated the event, EMU Admissions provided snacks and prizes, and two admissions counselors briefly shared about the university and its Anabaptist values.

Youth were welcomed and given instructions, and then sent out in small teams

to find and photograph objects around the EMU campus. Youth were encouraged to think creatively to find the objects, not just to be focused on speed. The two teams with the most points received prizes of EMU gear. Then the group watched a slideshow comprised of photos from their scavenger hunt adventures.

Lucas Wenger, a college student at EMU, shared a reflection on his journey to unburden himself from too much work and find God and joy in little moments. Sometimes we make the same mistakes, but it is important to trust ourselves and our instincts. He also shared the wisdom of finding blessings in what we may regard as curses, and vice versa, to be able to reflect

and find joy and the presence of God in even difficult situations.

The VMC Youth Council hopes to coordinate future combined opportunities for youth to gather and have fun together.

The Council is represented by Mark Harmon, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, and Moriah Hurst, Nurture and Faith Development Pastor at Park View Mennonite Church, and Deb Horst, Associate Pastor of Christian Formation and Youth.

Jon Trotter is Communication Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.



Event facilitated by
Sara Wenger Shenk
based on her new book.



September 24 & 25, 2021

VMC Enrichment Events

Tongue-Tied

Friday, September 24

9 am to 3 pm

sponsored by Leadership Enrichment Committee

Saturday, September 25

9 am to 12 pm

sponsored by Congregational Leadership

Both events at

Harrisonburg Mennonite Church

Register for both days or separately.

*Learning the **LOST ART**
of Talking about Faith*

The Friday event is geared for credentialed leaders who can bring practical ideas back to congregational settings and other ministries.

The Saturday event is geared for parents, youth ministers, lay leaders, and others passionate about sharing faith.

Registration coming soon!

**“When we vulnerably speak what
we know to be true in our own
bodies, minds, and spirits, we will be
on our way toward fluency.”**

**“A wise, much needed
book offered to Western
Christians who, for
complex reasons, have
become unable and/or
unwilling to speak
openly about the God of
the gospel.”**

**—WALTER BRUEGGEMANN,
Columbia Theological
Seminary**