



M E S S E N G E R

The mission of South Central Conference is to produce healthy, missional congregations by resourcing, connecting and empowering them to be Christ in the world.

God's Family Festival (Annual Conference)

Planning is well underway for the program for God's Family Festival, scheduled for June 25-27 at Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church. Committee members are Tonya Keim Bartel, Kendra Horst, Melissa Unruh, Stephanie Zucconi, and Bill Zuercher (staff), with David Gerber and Marion Bontrager, ex officio (conference moderator and moderator-elect). A separate Worship Planning Committee has been named, to do the detailed planning for the four worship services that will take place. They are Sondra Leatherman, chair; Eric Miller, Tonya Keim Bartel, Todd Lehman, Howard Wagler, and Zach Baumgartner.

Principal speakers for the weekend will be Duane Yoder, lead pastor of Lindale Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia; and Jessica Schrock Ringenberg, associate/youth pastor of Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio. In consultation with them, a theme has been chosen: "The Prodigal Church: Responding to God's Call." Primary texts for their messages will be found in Ephesians 3-5, and Philippians 3:12.

Since this is a Family Festival, there will be infant and toddler childcare, and programs for pre-school through junior high. While there will not be a separate senior high program, the Saturday evening worship service, and one Saturday afternoon workshop, will have a youth focus and emphasis. Congregations are encouraged to consider naming a young adult as one of their delegates.

Negotiations are underway with Hesston College for a dormitory and meal package, with encouragement for a larger number of persons to remain on campus from Friday evening through

Sunday morning. This will enhance the opportunities for informal fellowship, sharing and storytelling.

A feature last year for which a request has come for a repeat performance is the Saturday night talent show. We have yet to name an organizer for that event, so are inviting suggestions from our readers for such a person. In addition, we encourage congregations to begin thinking now of one or more entries, including children and youth. Anything in good taste and suitable for a general audience will be welcome.

There will be some business to be conducted requiring delegate votes. The voting delegate body consists of all pastors and one additional person for every 25 members or fraction thereof. However, since our hope is that this summertime Family Festival will become a tradition to be anticipated by all ages, we encourage many more persons than the delegates to consider attending. The overall goal, as a small area conference in Mennonite Church USA, subdivided into northern and southern regions, is to enable our churches to experience opportunities for acquaintance and fellowship with persons in other congregations. This goal is also being promoted through a history and visioning project involving every congregation (see following article).

To recap: save the dates—June 25-27—for God's Family Festival at Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church!

Congregational History and Vision Project

South Central Conference leaders prepared and submitted an application to the Schwalter Foundation for funding a project described briefly as follows:

“Stimulate congregations to grow in their missional outreach, ministry and service, learning and recording their unique missional stories in the past.” This is one step in a current emphasis to develop and nurture a sense of family, helping congregations understand what it means to “be members one of another.”

Primary objectives of the project are as follows:

1. Stimulate all member congregations to be engaged in their mission, by clarifying their history and identity, moving from that tradition to a new understanding of what it means to be church in today’s social and religious environment.
2. Enable all congregations to learn their histories through storytelling and engaging members with extended institutional and personal memory.

The plan to achieve these objectives is as follows:

1. Engage the services of John Sharp in the northern region, and Felipe Hinojosa in the southern region, to spend time with every congregation, hearing and recording their stories. While there may be some variations, the contacts could include a Sunday morning sermon, informal meetings with members with significant memory to fill the gaps in the stories obtained from congregations’ historical documents, and a meeting with the entire congregation.
2. Prepare a DVD of appropriate length (10+minutes) for each congregation to use and keep permanently, and a second DVD with short vignettes (3-4 minutes) that can be shared among congregations for mutual acquaintance.



The project will begin in early May, during which time John will connect with Spring Valley in Canton, KS, and Whitestone in Hesston, and several other churches during June. A schedule will be worked out with each congregation at a mutually-agreeable time. Before attending the first meeting, John will review the written histories and prepare a synopsis highlighting apparent missional strengths. He will arrange with a congregational contact a meeting time to include those who hold

the corporate memory; such persons to be chosen by the congregation. He will send the synopsis to the congregational contact, to be shared in advance of a meeting with those to be involved.

After the meeting, John will incorporate new information into the synopsis; reshape missional highlights to be posted; send missional highlights and synopsis to congregation for review; incorporate any changes or additions from congregation; and send a final draft with a file of digital photos to congregation, conference and Gary Oyer (audiovisual technician).

Our expectation is to have at least two finished DVDs by the time of the June 25-27 Family Festival at Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church to show to everyone. These will be examples of what the finished product will be, informing congregations of what they can look forward to as recipients of information and material that can assist in the orientation of new members. In addition, they can update current members on the significant aspects of their history that have helped shape who they are and who they want to become as a community of faith in the 21st century.

Northern Regional Reference Council (NRRC) Meeting

The NRRC had its second meeting since being formed in the summer of 2009, on Saturday, March 20 at Spring Valley Mennonite Church near Canton. That being the first day of spring was belied by an overnight snowstorm, creating slick roads that kept several persons from attending. Even so, a respectable number was able to attend and engage in several hours of sharing and fellowship.

Treasurer Laurel Miller reported that after six months of operations, the conference’s financial condition was favorable with income nearly on target and expenses well below budget.

Congregational reports included the following items of interest:

*Whitestone and Faith Mennonite are creating community gardens.

*Hesston Mennonite is searching for a third pastor: Associate Pastor for Youth and Family Ministry.

*Pleasant Valley has an “explosive” youth program with 50-65 youth (Junior and Senior High) attending on Wednesday evenings, ¾ of whom are from the community with other-than-Mennonite or no church background.

*Journey @ Yoder is upgrading its multi-purpose building and inviting community groups to use it; for example, Haven High School using it for basketball practice.

*Both Hesston Mennonite and Whitestone have gone to an Intention to Give system, building their annual spending plans on what has been committed rather than on hopes and guesses.

*Spring Valley has continued a tradition of organizing a Valentine’s Day Dinner, attracting a large number of community folks.

*Pleasant Valley’s adult Sunday School classes have been doing an extended study of spiritual gifts with the goal of having individuals record their own inventory of such gifts available to the church.

*South Hutchinson Mennonite is teaming up with an inner city youth ministry in “The Gardens”, reaching about 50 underprivileged children.

*South Hutchinson Mennonite plans to send 6 persons in April to Orlando, Florida for what has been identified as the world’s largest gathering of current and potential church planters.

*Journey @ Yoder is doing major renovation of the old Yoder church sanctuary, creating suitable space for a children’s theater and other children and youth ministries

*South Hutchinson Mennonite has divided its congregation into neighborhood groups for the purpose of monthly potluck meals and fellowship.

*Spring Valley organized Christmas caroling at the homes of surrounding neighbors, not involved with the church.

*After spirited discussion, the group recommended that all of our churches consider participating in a pulpit exchange, enabling every congregation to have a visiting pastor from another SCC congregation. This would be another step in a conference-wide effort for congregations to get to

know each other. Discussion revealed that this has happened very infrequently in past decades.

Howard Wagler reported on behalf of the Church Growth and Vision Team, which also includes Heidi Unruh and Frank Brenneman. This team has a twofold focus: new church planting, and revitalizing existing congregations. The team is available to provide counsel and support in either of these areas. In the current economic climate with unemployment and underemployment existing in our midst, there is a flip-side opportunity for voluntarism and initiatives for community outreach if we can provide the necessary motivation and opportunities.



Tim Lichti reported on behalf of Hesston College, introducing himself as the newly-appointed Director of the Pastoral Ministries Program. Tim comes from northern Indiana, where most recently he served as a regional conference minister for Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference. He has served as a pastor, and helped create, and for several years manage, Menno-Hof, a Mennonite/Amish heritage and history organization in the Amish area of Shipshewana, Indiana.

Bill Zuercher distributed a document giving detailed information about the project led by John Sharp with northern churches, identifying missional histories and projecting a future vision. See preceding article for details.

The next NRRC meeting will be scheduled in the fall.

Southern Regional Reference Council (UCIM)

The southern region of 8 churches met in Brownsville in early March, in conjunction with a meeting of the national leadership group for the Hispanic Mennonite Church (Iglesia Menonita Hispana). A recent leadership change is

the resignation of Moderator Mario Garza (Church of the Lamb), succeeded by moderator-elect Felipe Almodovar (Prince of Peace), assisted by Secretary Ana Alicia Hinojosa (New Life Christian Center) and treasurer Gracie Tijerina (Church of the Lamb).

Amzie Yoder, regional conference minister who resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico and spends a week each month in south Texas, continues to provide support and encouragement to the southern group of churches. He is giving attention to pastoral leadership development in a variety of ways, including a strengthening of the UCIM organization itself. He will give attention to the functioning of a southern branch of the Ministerial Commission, assisted by Luis Alvarado and Gracie Tijerina, taking responsibility for the interviewing of candidates for pastoral credentials and related tasks.

Under the leadership of Israel Hernandez, a core group from Calvary Mennonite in Mathis, Texas, has re-established the church in Alice, relating to the community surrounding the church building in new ways. Consideration is being given to expanding the efforts in Alice to create a viable congregation, either in its present location or in another. Alice is experiencing some economic vitality in contrast to other south Texas communities.

Contact has been re-established with two persons in the town of Tuleta, Texas, which was a thriving Mennonite community in the early to mid-1900s. The Mennonite cemetery has been maintained throughout all the decades since the church closed as the farming economy dwindled to a virtual standstill.

Rey de Gloria has relocated to a new property in Brownsville. Good News Mennonite Church in San Juan provides space for a garden operation that provides a living income to one or more families. It also is providing support to ministries to impoverished children and families across the border in Reynosa, Mexico. (See the October-December Messenger for a detailed account of the so-called Border Hope Project.)

A new, young leader is emerging in northern Mexico, residing in Matamoros. He is Rodrigo de Avila, a member of the Living Water church, who is assisting Conrado Hinojosa in relating to the

Mexico churches and pastors along the border. He is bilingual and comes from a Quaker background.

Felipe Hinojosa, professor of history at Texas A&M, has self-published his doctoral dissertation, "Making Noise in the Quiet Land," which is a thorough review and critique of the development of the Mennonite Church in south Texas. A copy is available in the Hesston College Library. Felipe serves on the Historical Committee of Mennonite Church USA.

Congregational News

Jesse Blasdel, youth pastor at South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, was licensed and installed on February 7. He is currently enrolled in the Peacemaking and Justice class at Hesston College.

Whitestone Mennonite Church has called Kurt Horst as lead pastor, to begin April 14. Kurt has been a pastor in western Pennsylvania, and more recently served as conference minister for Allegheny Mennonite Conference. He lived in Hesston from first through 12th grades, and attended Hesston College plus a year on the college staff before moving east.



Darwin Hartman was commissioned on February 28 in recognition of a renewal of his call as lead pastor of Pleasant View Mennonite Church near Hydro, Oklahoma.

Bill Eberly, youth pastor at Pleasant View, has resigned that position effective the end of May.

Journey @ Yoder, a satellite of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, has moved from a Sunday evening worship schedule to Sunday morning, with an attendance between 60-80. Jeremy Patterson provides pastoral leadership.

Mennonite Women

Nearly 500 women from South Central and Western District Conference churches met at Eden Mennonite Church for an evening

of fellowship around supper tables and an inspiring message from Gracia Burnham. A vote of thanks goes to Linda Goering, president of Western District Women in Mission, and the Mary Martha Group from Eden, who served a delicious soup supper before the group gathered in the sanctuary for the message and music by the Eden Women's Chorus.



Gracia Burnham, who is from Rose Hill, Kansas, near Wichita, was a missionary in the Philippines nearly ten years ago when she and her husband were held hostage in the jungle for over a year by a terrorist group trying to raise money from ransom. Her husband Martin was killed during their rescue. She is the author of *In the Presence of My Enemies* and *To Fly Again*, and has founded the Martin and Gracia Burnham Foundation, in memory of her husband, to support ministries to Muslims, missionary aviation, the persecuted church, and tribal missions.

In her message, she emphasized the greatness of God in His role as comforter, using Isaiah 40 as a text, as He revealed it to her in the incredibly difficult experiences of surviving in the jungle and in her life since the rescue. In her sharing, she was not dramatic but spoke in a down-to-earth, woman-to-woman way to which her audience related. Forgiveness has been an important spiritual task since her rescue, and she prayed fervently for ways to show forgiveness to her former captors. The way is being opened for her to minister to them through her New Tribes Mission contacts, sending Bibles and other Christian literature, food, and clothing, and helping their families visit them.

The Spring Supper is an annual event sponsored by South Central Mennonite Women and Western District Women in Mission. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the women of SCC who attended, and also to those from all the Mennonite groups in south central Kansas who gathered for 2 days at Journey @ Yoder to create hundreds of comforters for MCC distribution in Haiti and elsewhere.

--Joyce Zuercher, Secretary

A number of important and appealing events for women are coming up this spring and summer. Please note and save the following dates:

April 30 - May 2: Women In Conversation, *Living a Life of Gratitude* is the weekend gathering at Cross Wind Conference Center, Hesston, KS. This gathering is sponsored by Mennonite Women USA. The featured speaker is Megan Ramer from Chicago who will explore with us the satisfying spiritual discipline of grateful living.

June 25-27 God's Family Festival, SCC annual conference. There will be a luncheon meeting for all women Saturday noon at the conference site on the Hesston College campus. Come join us for inspiration and fellowship.

August, 2010 This will be the annual Mennonite Women USA PREP meeting for all officers of Mennonite Women in each area conference, to be held in Nebraska. Date to be determined.

September 10-12, 2010 The Annual Women and Girls Retreat at Camp Mennoscah.

--Nancy Peachey, Vice-Chair

Service Support Subsidy

To encourage voluntary service among our conference young people (18-35 years), South Central Conference will match the amount given by congregations to support short term (1-3 months) voluntary service. Purposes of this subsidy are as follows:

1. To broaden and encourage the awareness of the congregation as senders of mission volunteers.
2. To provide spiritual and financial support for persons entering short-term mission efforts.
3. To partner with congregations in service promotion.

South Central Conference will provide a matching subsidy to that given by congregations up to \$1,000. Applications for this Service Subsidy should be accompanied by a one- to two-paragraph explanation of the goals of the service experience and any circumstances related to the service activity, e.g., college debts, personal financial circumstances, etc. This application should be accompanied by the congregational application or

related information that describes the sending church's role in the service assignment.

Applications for the Service Subsidy will be evaluated by the Church Growth and Vision Team of South Central Conference. Recipients of the Service Subsidy will be asked to give a brief report of their service experiences at the annual conference Family Festival.

College News

Hesston College's nursing program had its reaccreditation visit in early March by a team from the National League for Nursing. In addition to receiving the maximum allowable 8-year reaccreditation status, that happened with no conditions, and with verbal commendation from the reviewers about the quality and effectiveness of its program and staff. The accreditation status of the college is undergoing thorough review and preparation for a site visit in March 2011.

At a recent Hesston College Board of Overseers meeting, approval was given to move ahead with the renovation of Erb Central and West dormitories, beginning in late Spring or early Summer.

A new "traveling road show" has been created by Hesston College for presentation in congregations and area conference programs, entitled "Common Threads". John Sharp and Tony Brown combine their gifts of storytelling and music to bring together the historical connections between African Americans and Mennonites in their centuries-long struggles for religious and personal freedom. For those located in south central Kansas, there will be a performance on Sunday, April 25 at 4 pm in Hesston Mennonite Church, co-sponsored by the college. Those located in other areas are invited to contact the college to schedule a performance. You can call or email Dallas Stutzman, Director of Church Relations at 620-327-8110; DallasS@hesston.edu.

Hesston College will conclude the celebration of its centennial year with its 100th graduation class during Commencement Weekend, May 7-9.

Faculty members Tony Brown and Dustin Galyon, both gifted speakers, will deliver the commencement address, teaming up to develop themes that will honor the graduates and consider hopes and dreams for the future.

Making the Dean's list during the fall semester for academic excellence at Goshen College is Benjamin Wade Baumgartner, a sophomore studying Bible and religion. He attends Whitestone Mennonite Church. Ben plays trumpet in the Goshen College orchestra.

On the Dean's list during the fall semester at Eastern Mennonite University are Elisabeth Aldis, a senior nursing major and member of Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church in Harper, KS; Heidi Boese, a junior accounting major and member of Hesston Mennonite Church; Abby Erb, a junior liberal arts major with an elementary education licensure, and member of Hesston Mennonite Church; and Taylor Stutzman, a senior culture, religion and mission major and member of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church. Taylor is one of 30 students in the Middle East cross-cultural spring semester.

The following students are on the Dean's list from Hesston College for the fall semester:

- From Whitestone Mennonite Church: Megan Leatherman, Alex Roth and Elliot Wilder.
- From Hesston Mennonite Church: Kate Alison, Kendra Alison, Craig Buller, John Murray and Cory Rychener.

Those on the Honor Roll:

- From Whitestone: John Oyer and Caleb Wheeler
- From Hesston Mennonite: Connor Dyck, Jessica Juhnke, Julie Weaver
- From Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church: Kyle Vogt
- From Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Hydro, OK: Kaitlyn Mast

Christian Churches Together

Editor's note: Mennonite Church USA has become a member of a new national ecumenical body, Christian Churches Together. We are privileged to

have in our conference a person who regularly attends the annual meetings: Heidi Unruh, from Faith Mennonite Church in South Hutchinson, KS. She can be contacted at unruhheidi@aol.com.

In January, I had the privilege of again attending the annual gathering of Christian Churches Together (CCT) in Seattle. CCT (www.christianchurchestogether.org) is an ecumenical body founded "to enable churches and national Christian organizations to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen our Christian witness in the world." CCT embraces five major streams of Christianity: Catholic, Orthodox, African American, Evangelical/Pentecostal, and Historic Protestant.

MC USA has been a member of CCT since 2008, along with 42 other participating groups. Member organizations include denominations and other religious bodies, as well as Christian nonprofits such as World Vision, Bread for the World and Habitat for Humanity. I participated as a delegate of Evangelicals for Social Action, along with noted Mennonite author Dr. Ronald J. Sider. Representing MC USA were Ron Byler, former Acting Executive Director; Andre Gingerich Stoner, Director of Church Relations; and seminarian representative Sarah Klaassen.

Evangelism and combating poverty have been priorities of CCT since its inception, as two indispensable elements of Christian mission. One of the first actions undertaken by this diverse fellowship after its formal launch in 2006 was to develop a consensus statement on poverty, declaring: "We are called by God to urge our churches and nation to strengthen and expand efforts to address the scandal of widespread poverty in the United States and around the world." In past meetings, delegates focused on fleshing out this objective. (For a report on these ideas for reducing poverty, see www.christianchurchestogether.org/initiative/jan2009report.html.)

To carry forward this priority, CCT has affirmed a plan for a "Common Day of Action Against Poverty." On April 2, 2011, in selected cities around the nation, Christians representing the diversity of the body of Christ will plan a day of service around the issue of homelessness. This

shared action aims to call attention to the escalating problem of homelessness and poverty in our nation, and hopefully will plant seeds of greater collaboration among local Christian churches and nonprofits. My hometown of Hutchinson, Kansas may be one of these sites.

While continuing to discuss poverty, the focus of this year's gathering was evangelism. One of the founding purposes of CCT is "to foster evangelism faithful to the proclamation of the gospel." A key verse for CCT is Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." Our differing interpretations of "good news" and divergent practices of sharing this gospel have led to religious conflict throughout Christian history.

This challenge was addressed in presentations by theologians and religious historians. A powerful address by the Pentecostal scholar Rev. Dr. Cecil M. Robeck confronted us with our failure to live up to Jesus' prayer for unity as a prerequisite for effective Christian witness. I was challenged by the questions he posed: "Am I willing to free this other religious group to become who God created them to be, rather than try to remake them in my image? Do I sufficiently trust this other group to entrust the evangelization of my children to them?"

Roundtable discussions gave participants the opportunity to talk about evangelism face-to-face with individuals from diverse Christian traditions. In these conversations we developed a better appreciation of one another's traditions, corrected misunderstandings, identified what we had in common and where we remained distinct, and built relationships that transcend religious labels. We also named areas where much ecumenical work remains to be done – such as how to invigorate the faith of people who have lapsed from their original Christian tradition without being guilty of "sheep-stealing."

Of particular interest to Anabaptists at the gathering was an address by NCC General Secretary Michael Kinnamon, who laid out a new ethical framework of "hopeful realism," reflecting a middle ground between the historical realism of just war theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian pacifism. This led to a lively discussion

about how we live in the world as it is, while pursuing the vision of God's "kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

Of particular relevance to our evangelistic focus this year was the setting for our gathering, in the "none zone." Seattle and most of the Pacific Northwest earned this nickname for having the highest percentage of survey respondents who indicate their religious preference as "none." The sociological reality is that all of American culture is increasingly heading in this direction, though this may be less apparent in areas of the country where church participation remains a cultural stronghold. In this context, the call to Christian unity for the sake of Jesus' prayer – "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" takes on added urgency. I am thankful for CCT's role in preparing the body of Christ to answer the call.

For Heidi Unruh's reflections on the conference in the CCT newsletter, see http://www.christianchurchestogether.org/newsletter/pdf/newsletter_vol4no2.pdf.

Do you know?

From the Conference Resource Advocate, Joyce Zuercher

Remember—we have many resources at our fingertips, including books, curriculum, DVDs, videos, and periodicals, and even multiple copies of over 450 anthems —at the Conference Resource Library, located in North Newton, Kansas. More than 12,000 holdings can be viewed in the on-line catalog, and are available for check-out by SCC members.

If you want to preview curriculum items or packets, find a DVD for some occasion or a book for your study group, try the Resource Library! Visit their pleasant surroundings or go on line at www.mennowdc.org.

Marlene Bogard, director of the Resource Library, in the April issue of **Check it Out**, her monthly newsletter, has prepared Ideas for Christian Nurture in the Summertime from the Conference Resource Library. She writes:

Ready to mix it up a bit? Anticipating sporadic attendance? Hoping to find ways of connecting young and old? Then try one of the options suggested in the April, 2010 Check It Out: Dig Into the Bible; Traveling Peace Trunk; Close to Home Series; Book Club / Book Share; Sing Through the Hymnal; Praying in Many Ways; The Thoughtful Christian; Nooma. Access this list at: [www.mennowdc.org /Library.html](http://www.mennowdc.org/Library.html). Need more ideas? Email Marlene at crlib@mennowdc.org.

Those who use the blog for contacts and information can access Marlene's blog to receive reviews of new resources. <http://www.wdcreourcelibrary.blogspot.com/>