SOUTH CENTRAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

April - June 2011
Volume LXIV, No. 2

MESSENGER

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

Exponential Conference 2011: On the Verge

by Cathy Wagler

Reporting on any event is difficult, when one wants to transfer enthusiasm from one's own life to the mind of another, and the Exponential Conference on church planting is no exception. Four persons represented South Central Mennonite Conference on April 27-29 to learn what other churches are finding helpful in the church planting arena: James Wenger, a Regional Conference Minister from Hesston; Howard Wagler, lead pastor from South Hutchinson Mennonite Church; Cathy Wagler, Ministerial Commission chair, also from South Hutchinson; and Mark Horst, a member of Journey @ Yoder campus of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church.

Over 4000 persons attended this year's Exponential Conference. That's a lot of people, and yet we all know that huge doesn't always translate into being the best. However, in this case, the large group of presenters and attendees was very helpful to both encourage and inform anyone who is interested in the missional church…bridging the gap between people in a troubled world and a forgiving God through the transforming power of the love of Christ.

Many of the following thoughts can be applied to any church, whether a church plant, or an established congregation wanting to be missional. Any church wanting to reach people in their culture would gain from these conversations.

In spite of different styles of 'church planting', whether it be a traditional plant, a multi-site, or a house church model, looking at the culture and how we communicate must be central as we strategize to reach people in our neighborhoods, towns and cities. As we are talking about starting new churches in our conference, it seems wise for us to learn from other people's experience.

Many of the speakers gave inspirational messages with a strong missional emphasis and clearly were influenced by Anabaptist thought.

- Michael Frost, a church leader from Australia said that Christians are to be a counter cultural minority who are to serve as salt and light in the post Christian environment in which we find ourselves. He urged us to truly listen to the people and their needs; then be prepared to serve them, all the while living in their neighborhoods with them, with a powerful presence of Christ, who will always be with them.
- One of the seminars focused on simple living, with peacemaking and justice as the calling for faithful Christians.
- One leadership principle that could be a challenge for many of us concerns decision-making. The thought is that leading by consensus allows the slowest decision makers to control the majority, so if a decision is made by consensus and it fails, everyone fails. However, if you lead with permission (as opposed to consensus) decisions can be made quicker, and if you fail the leadership takes the blame and the whole group will not sense failure.
- Pastors are to equip the members who are then the ministers in the community.
- One speaker strongly urged us to use the word "church" as a verb instead of a noun; "I can 'church' at the grocery store, at work, or even when I'm on a run with my dog."
- Church isn't something we bring people to… it's something we bring to people/we do with people. Instead of the church being just another pillar in the community, we have a responsibility to find ways for the church to intersect all the other pillars of life. With this in mind,

the celebration in our large gathering is a small part of who we become in the community, reaching all parts of life. In this way we move from trying to be only an 'attractional' church to an 'incarnational' church. When we serve a city/town, we move into places where people are already gathered: work, school, activities. We can't expect people to come to us; we must go where they are… becoming the church, being a blessing.

- Many of the thoughts expressed centered on the value of listening to those in our communities, really taking time to listen, then serving and caring. Our Anabaptist belief of discipleship, every day living a servant lifestyle, fits very well with these teachings.

A challenge for us as Mennonites would be: Have we been living out what we say we believe? Have we taken our understanding of what Christ calls us to do and applied it only to what we call 'missions', when Christ has called us all to be 'on mission'?

So many more things could be said as we work to apply what we have learned in our specific areas of ministry. As we do, we highly recommend that pastors and other church leaders plan to attend this annual conference.

Any questions or further discussions are encouraged by contacting any of those who attended as mentioned in the opening comments.

Recommended resources for reading: For the City by Darrin Patrick & Matt Carter (Zondervan), and On the Verge by Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson (Zondervan). To register for Exponential 2012, go to www.exponentialregistration.com

God's Family Festival 2011

The Festival theme, "Investing in Hope: Planning Together for a Christ-Centered Future" gained incremental substance with each successive message delivered by Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA. About 130 persons attended some or all of the June 10-12 weekend event at Whitestone Mennonite Church in Hesston.

On Friday evening, Ervin preached on "Hope Nurtured by the Holy Spirit" based on Romans 8:18-28. He defined hope as "trouble plus grace," suggesting that any suffering we undergo now is no comparison to the glory to come. Instead of asking where God is in the midst of calamity (tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, fires), we should focus on the reality that the Holy Spirit is gearing up to meet the needs of those adversely affected.

Lupe Aguilar, pastor of Rey de Gloria Church in Brownsville, TX, was awarded the Peace Mug provided by the Peace and Justice Network of Mennonite Church USA, in recognition of his long-standing ministry to immigrants, both documented and undocumented.

On Saturday evening, Ervin's sermon was "The Hope Encouraged by Scripture" based on Romans 15:1-7. The text refers to the strong and the weak, but it is not always evident who fits which category. We hope for others to become more like us, so as to take less "bearing with." He expressed a worry for our church in the face of increasing polarities arising from commitment to a particular political party and listening to strident, narrowly-focused radio and TV voices instead of declaring our allegiance to the Kingdom of God as people living under the lordship of Christ.

On Sunday morning, Ervin's concluding message was "An Overflow of Hope by the Power of the Holy Spirit" based on Romans 5:1-5; 12:12; and 15:13. A vital part of hope is grace—all of God's initiatives that are given to us to carry out what God asks us to do. Grace always accompanies the mandate to serve and sacrifice. To overflow in hope is to manifest how God works in us in ways that give hope to others. When we as fallible human beings confess our faults and shortcomings, receiving grace and forgiveness, we create the condition in which God's hope overflows to others who are watching and listening.

These three messages are available on DVD. It would be a wise investment for every congregation to have a set and enable the maximum number of their members to listen to the hope-filled messages.

During the Sunday School hour on June 12, Ervin delivered for the first time a message he called "A Turnaround Strategy for Mennonite Church USA," which unfortunately was not recorded. In commenting that "we need a new sense of God's plan for the church," he made reference to a newly-created Purposeful Plan that will be given attention at the upcoming Mennonite Church USA convention in Pittsburgh, July 4-9. It focuses on seven priorities that Ervin proposes to be adopted and implemented in the coming biennium: Christian Formation, Christian Community, Holistic Witness, Stewardship, Leadership Development, Intercultural Transformation, and Church-to-Church Relationships. The Purposeful Plan can be accessed on the Mennonite Church USA website: www.MennoniteUSA.org. From there, click Links to Convention, FAQ, Delegate Material, and a red box "Desiring God's Coming Kingdom: A Missional Vision and Purposeful Plan for Mennonite Church USA."

At the delegate session, a favorable budget report was received for the last complete fiscal year ending August 31, 2010, and also the current year-to-date report as of May 31, 2011. An income budget of $118,900 was adopted, down from $122,500 for the current year. Some revisions to the constitution and bylaws were approved, most of them related to wording needed to conform to Mennonite Church USA's tax determination with the IRS, under which South Central maintains its tax-exempt status. Members of the south Texas Ministerial Sub-commission were introduced, having been recently appointed to carry out credentialing interviews with pastors in that part of the conference. Mennonite Church USA and churchwide agency representatives reported on the ways that they are engaged in serving the needs of area conferences and congregations. Limited table group time was available for delegates to share with each other about ways that God is working in their congregations and communities. An emerging congregation, Fountain of Living Water in Los Fresnos, Texas, was recognized.

Other events during the weekend included a prayer walk, comforter knotting, women's lunch (see separate report), motorcycle ride, pastor and spouse supper with Ervin and Bonnie Stutzman and Terry and Kay Shue, coffeehouse, and talent show.

Dates being explored for next year's Family Festival are June 22-24 or June 29-July 1, 2012, in South Hutchinson or Hesston. Dates and place will be confirmed as soon as they are known.

SCC Mennonite Women

by Nancy Peachey, President

SAVE THE DATE

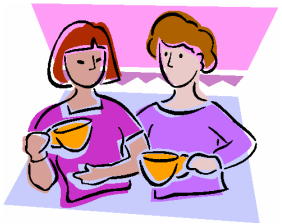
Two events are coming up this Fall for you, the women of South Central Conference:

- September 9-11

A Women and Girl's Retreat in a joint event with the Western District Women in Mission at Camp Mennoscah in Murdock, KS. The speaker is Laurie Oswald Robinson. For more information, contact: Katie Best 620-896-2234 or Jennie Warkentine 316-708-0309 or you can email womengirlsretreat@gmail.com. Check us out on Facebook as well: Women and Girls Retreat

- November 11-12, 2011

Sister Care, Equipping Women for Caring Ministry at Hesston Mennonite Church, Hesston, KS. Presenters are Rhoda Keener and Carolyn Heggen. Sister Care Seminars are a ministry of Mennonite Women USA.



Meet Laura Stoltzfus

The presenter at the annual SCC MW Luncheon on the Family Festival weekend was Laura Stoltzfus, currently of Hesston, KS. Laura served 17 years with a youth mission organization in the Ukraine. She began her years of service a few years after high school, and then the final 10 years was married to Joey Stoltzfus. Presently, Joey is studying in the Disaster Management program at Hesston College, and their family is now concluding a 7-week stay in Mississippi where Joey participated in an internship with his program of study. Laura and Joey are the parents of 4 children ranging in age from 9 years to 2. During the spring semester, the family participated in the life of Whitestone congregation.

Laura spoke of the joy of witnessing and discipling in her years in the Ukraine. She reported the initial welcome to the mission staff by the Ukrainian people who were eager to learn about the Bible, and the life of Jesus. The workers witnessed a great variety of human need, in addition to the eagerness to learn of Christianity.

Laura and Joey expect to return to Kansas later in the summer, 2011, as Joey continues in the Disaster Management program

SCC Executive Committee Meeting

The Conference Executive Committee meets nearly every month to give attention to essential business of the conference. Current members are Marion Bontrager, moderator; Linda Yutzy, moderator-elect; Laurel Miller, treasurer; Cathy Wagler, chair of the Ministerial Commission; Angie Teeter, Administrative Assistant; and Bill Zuercher, Ministry Coordinator. At its most recent meeting on June 16, a decision was made to share a summary of significant discussion and actions with our pastors and congregations. The first of these will appear below. Meetings occurring between quarterly issues of The Messenger will be summarized and sent via email to congregations. Items:

1. **Report and Reflections on God's Family Festival**
   Members' experience, and comments from the evaluation form, revealed a positive outcome for the most part. One regret was that there were very few children present other than those who came 1,000 miles from south Texas. We will continue to look for ways for this experience to be of more interest and appeal to churches in the north.

   Initial discussion was held about dates and place for next year's Family Festival.

2. **Youth Events**
   The moderator plans to meet with congregational youth pastors to see about planning some youth events throughout the year.

3. **Southern Region Focus**
   An updated draft of the Grant/Subsidy Policy was distributed and reviewed. This outlines the procedure by which congregations, primarily in the southern region, can apply for matching grants for facility or program needs. Howard and Cathy Wagler plan to visit several church in the south in September for consultation and teaching. A possible servant leadership class is being considered for January. There is interest in having a number of persons from the northern region go to South Texas for their convention the first weekend in November, at Iglesia del Cordero, in Brownsville.

4. **Treasurer Position**
   Laurel Miller is completing his term; several names were identified as possible replacement.

5. **Prayer calendar**
   Next year's prayer calendar will need more detailed explanations for how South Central Conference intends for it to be used. Linda will do the preliminary preparation for committee review.

6. **Web Site update** Angie has created the website and continues to maintain it. She is looking at ways to update the site so that it is easier to maintain.

7. **Northern Regional Representative Council Meeting**
   Time did not permit discussion of the function and viability of the NRRC at the Family Festival delegate session. We will look for a fall date and promote attendance, with an invitation to congregations to name their delegates for the annual meeting to serve for the entire year between such meetings, with the hope that they would serve as congregational representatives at the NRRC meeting.

8. **Future meetings and date possibility**
   The next meeting was scheduled for August 28, to include outgoing and incoming members of the Executive Committee. Periodically, attendance will be expanded to include a youth representative and Regional Conference

Ministers. The chair of the Church Growth and Visioning Team may also be included as a regular participant.

Pastor, Congregational and Regional News

Spring Valley Mennonite Church, rural Canton, KS, has scheduled a number of summer events to which others are invited:

- On Sunday, June 26 at 10:00 a.m., their morning worship service will be held at Spring Field Park located on HWY 15 - 3 miles south of HWY 56. A basket dinner will follow the service.
- Sunday eve., July 10 at 7:00p.m. - A Hymn Sing at Spring Valley Church
- Sunday eve., July 31 at 7:00p.m. - Spring Valley Annual Summer Musical Program at Spring Field Park. The featured singing group is the Huxman Boys Quartet.

The annual Pastor/Leader/Spouse retreat has been scheduled for January 13-14, 2012 at the Grand Prairie Hotel and Convention Center in Hutchinson, KS. Terry Shue, a Kansas native and now Director of Leadership Development for Mennonite Church USA will be the principal resource person. Pastors and leadership groups are urged to get this on their calendars NOW so that the maximum number of persons can participate.

The south Texas region (UCIM) will be holding its annual convention on November 5-6 at the Church of the Lamb in Brownsville, Texas. José Ortiz, a long-time Hispanic leader, will be the principal speaker. Congregations with sister church relationships, persons who are engaged in issues related to immigration, and other interested persons are encouraged to put this on their calendars. Transportation will be coordinated from the conference office.

A new fellowship, named Fountain of Living Water, is developing in the Brownsville, TX suburb of Los Fresnos, meeting for the time being in the home of Alejo and Alma Solis. Interim leadership is being given by Conrado Hinojosa, along with Rodrigo de Avila, who comes across the border from Matamoros, Mexico.

Alan Stucky, pastor of Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church in Harper, has been appointed to the board of Mennonite Central Committee Central States representing our conference.

Marion Bontrager, Regional Conference Minister, and Frank Brenneman, member of Spring Valley Mennonite Church, attended a church planting consultation in Oklahoma City on May 27-28, sponsored by Western District Conference.

Western District Conference will hold its annual Assembly on July 29-30 at Bethel College and Bethel College Mennonite Church. The theme will be "Make No Excuses, Simply Come to the Banquet!" based on Luke 14:15-24. Sara Wenger Shenk, President of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, will be the principal speaker. The Conference Resource Library will be celebrating its 75th anniversary on Friday afternoon. Detailed information is available on the WDC website: www.mennowdc.org, or by calling 316-283-6300.

College News

Six students from South Central Conference congregations graduated from **Hesston College** on May 8. All attend Whitestone Mennonite Church. They are Megan Leatherman, Andrea McChesney, John Oyer, Alex Roth, Adam Weaver and Elliot Wilder.

Hesston College Resident assistants for the 2011-12 academic year include Zach Baumgartner and Lauren Weaver of Hesston, members of Whitestone Mennonite Church, and Courtney Mast of Weatherford, Okla., a member of Pleasant View Mennonite Church.

Freshmen named to the **Hesston College** Dean's List include Zach Baumgartner, Courtney Mast, and Joel Murray, member of Hesston Mennonite Church.

Sophomores named to the Dean's List include Megan Leatherman, John Oyer and Elliot Wilder.

Freshmen named to the Honor Roll include Lauren Weaver.

Goshen College named the following students to the Dean's List for excellence in academics: Benjamin Wade Baumgartner of Hesston, a senior studying Bible and religion and member of Whitestone; Daniel L. Graber of Hesston, a sophomore studying accounting and a member of Whitestone; and Daniel Hershberger Penner of Harper, KS, a senior studying history and a member of Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church.

Nathan Ramer, formerly from Harper, KS, and Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church, was a 2011 graduate from **Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary** in Elkhart, IN.

Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series

Hesston College announces its annual AVDS program for October 28-30, with the theme "Getting Beyond Them and Us—to We." Throughout the centuries, the church has struggled with the call to be both distinctive and open to others, to both proclaim and receive. Whether the issue was circumcision or peacemaking, the deeper concern has always been—how do we talk to each other about talking to each other? How can we be so attractive that people will want inside the church door? How can we be attracted to people whose theology challenges us? **How can we extend a hospitable hand to all people and continue to be distinctively Anabaptist**? How do we eliminate the non-essential barriers?

Principal speakers will be Hal L. Shrader, lead pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona; Joanna Shenk, associate for Interchurch Relations for Mennonite Church USA from Elkhart, IN; and Anton Flores-Maisonet, full-time volunteer developing a missional community of US citizens and Latin American immigrants in LaGrange, GA.

Registration is available online at www.hesston.edu/avds. For additional information, contact Elaine Schmidt at elaines@hesston.edu

Do You Know?

From the Conference Resource Advocate, Joyce Zuercher

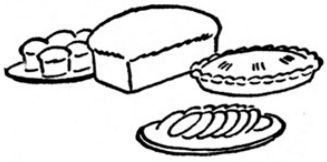
Food is one of the basic needs of living things, and currently a hot topic. Acquiring, cooking, and eating food and a broad spectrum of related areas, such as concern for the environment, global warming, the locovore movement, increasing obesity, baby boomers and aging, organics, genetic alteration and many more, are widely discussed in magazines, newspapers, social networks, and popular talk shows.

As such a basic need, food is often used as a spiritual metaphor, as in the fruits of the spirit, and the bread of life. For us, as Anabaptist Christians, how we think of and use food strikes to the heart of our beliefs, as it influences how we care for the earth God created for us, our own bodies, the families in which God placed us, our community of believers, and the world of humans around us.

Our Mennonite Publishing Network offers a number of titles to help us with our use and attitudes toward food. Cookbooks immediately come to mind, and two recent publications, *Simply in Season,* by Lind and Hockman-Wert, and *Saving the Seasons*, by Meyer and Meyer, are especially helpful to those who raise some of their own food, try to eat local food, or foods in season. There is also a study guide for *Simply in Season.* A new printing of *More With Less* and *Mennonite Community Cookbook* are also available from MPN.

Another book, including some recipes but not a recipe book as such, is Melodie Davis's *Whatever*

Happened to Dinner, which encourages families to eat together. There is some indication that children in families who eat at least one meal a day together do better academically and are less likely to use drugs or alcohol and to respect and follow their parents' counsel. At a workshop during SCC Family Festival, one person pointed out that empty nesters and retired people also have busy lives and can use help in finding time to eat together.



One more book, new this spring, is *Mennonite Girls Can Cook,*by Lovina Schellenberg and others, originated in a blog of the same name. This is almost a coffee-table book with many pictures, and includes foods from other cultures as well as the German/Eastern European Mennonite cuisine. Those of us who are not of that background will find the exact measurements of ingredients, etc., very helpful!

Look at food through the eyes of faith--the VBS curriculum for this summer, *Taste and See, God is Good*, is also about food. Although the Bible School season may be nearly over, you can also use this curriculum for a 12-week fall and winter program.

And finally, "Come to the Banquet" will be the theme of Western District Conference's annual assembly, July 29-30 at Bethel College and Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton. In preparation for this event, the summer issue of **Check it Out** from the Conference Resource Library in North Newton lists more good reading on the topic of food, including some for children. Get the list at crlib@mennowdc.org. Items from MPN may be ordered at www.mpn.net.

Calendar

July 4-9 MC USA Biennial Convention, Pittsburgh, PA

Sept 9-11 SCC/WDC Women's and Girls' Retreat, Camp Mennoscah

Nov 5-6 South Texas (UCIM) Convention, Brownsville, TX

Nov 11-12 Sister Care, Equipping Women for Caring Ministry, Hesston Mennonite Church

2012
Jan. 13-14 Pastor/Leader/Spouse retreat at Grand Prairie Hotel, Hutchinson, KS