**MOUNTAIN STATES MENNONITE CONFERENCE**

**REPORTS FOR ANNUAL ASSEMBLY**

**TAOS, NM**

**AUG 3-5, 2018**

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**CONFERENCE MINISTER TEAM (CMT)**

**Barry Bartel, Charlene Epp, and Merv Birky**

After a period of transition in conference ministry, the delegates affirmed a three-person team last October, each designated quarter time, and each with other employment. The *challenge* for a team of part-time persons is to ensure that we all know enough about what the others are responsible for without the inefficiency of trying to know everything! The *opportunity* of this kind of arrangement is the ability to confer about ideas and issues and benefit from different perspectives. (*Zing!* articles described our respective roles if you need a refresher.) One reality of bi-vocational conference ministers is that events conflict at times; Barry had already committed to being at a board meeting in Guatemala before being invited to this CMT role and won’t be at Assembly this year (although he did participate in the planning committee).

If we would write a “state of the conference” report, we would describe that this is a wonderful time to be part of MSMC! Exciting things are happening with passion ministries, congregations are energized and vibrant in their communities, and ministries beyond what could be planned are emerging. As we may be prone to think, all of the things we can tell you about are positive!

1. **Visioning with the Conference:**

The Leadership Board of the conference and the CMT have embraced the vision of MSMC: “To pursue God’s dreams by the power of the Holy Spirit in the way of Jesus Christ.” This vision stands the test of time since being articulated in the Preamble of the initial conference bylaws in early 2006.

This vision will be on display at the Assembly in Taos, with the theme “Pursuing God’s Dreams: How then Shall We Live?” The Assembly holds the potential of beginning to clarify and even set a new direction for the conference. We would like to follow this up with conference visioning retreat, involving key leaders and open to all.

It is critical as we imagine our future that we pay attention to what attracts people to us who are not cradle Mennonites. Not only are they attracted to us, but we are attracted to them! Most of the pastors selected in the last several years by congregations in our conference are not cradle Mennonites. Ken Gingerich, as he provides leadership for the conference as moderator, can also testify to the growth of the Albuquerque Mennonite Church by drawing people well beyond the cradle crowd because of who they are as a church community.

Let’s embrace Assembly in Taos! Let’s use the energy to reflect on who we are and where we are going.

1. **Working with Congregational and Pastoral Transitions:**

A major part of Charlene and Merv’s role is to help with transitions, and we encourage you to check with one of us as soon as you anticipate a transition.

A number of transitions occurred since the last Assembly. First Mennonite Church (Denver) welcomed Glenn Balzer as pastor. Duncan Smith served as gap pastor there before Glenn began, and Duncan continue as outreach consultant until the end of August. Albuquerque Mennonite Church welcomed Erica Lea-Simka as pastor after interim leadership by Ed Katzinger. Boulder Mennonite Church welcomed Randy Spaulding as pastor, and Rick King concluded in an interim role there. We look forward to getting to know all of the new pastors at assembly!

Sojourn (Ft. Collins and Greeley), Beloved Community (Littleton), and Alive with Grace (Pueblo) continue to strengthen as new congregations with leadership introduced last year. Anita Amstutz served part-time at the Alamosa Fellowship. And we mourn the loss of two congregations. After more than 50 years, Rocky Ford Mennonite Church celebrated its last service on November 19, 2017; David Mourn ended his pastorate there and, after concluding his pastorate at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in La Junta, Jeremy Yoder served in an interim pastoral role during the final months that Rocky Ford held services. Merv now serves part-time at Emmanuel. And Peace Community Mennonite Church (Aurora) decided to withdraw from MSMC and join South Central Mennonite Conference, so Tim Davis will now relate to SCMC. We wish them well.

In addition, Glennon Heights Mennonite Church has called Ryan Koch as pastor to begin in September. Nathan Graber-McCrae serves as interim after Betsy Headrick McCrae ended her ten-year ministry to begin a five-year MCC term in Africa with her husband, Bruce.

1. **Supporting Passion Ministries:**

A major part of Barry’s role is to support passion ministries. The SEED group actively encourages new ideas and initiatives and processes applications for grant funding within the conference. SEED and MCC are sponsoring an immigration round table in Ft. Collins in September, bring together the many diverse expressions of work for immigrant justice in the conference for dialogue and networking. These are some of many ministries reflected in congregations in the conference. In addition, RAWTools, TiLT, Casa de Paz, and Colorado Village Collaborative relate with the conference and move forward with vision and passion. These and various other expressions of passion will be highlighted at Assembly (especially Saturday evening) rather than in print here.

1. **Supporting Credentialed Persons:**

A major part of our role is to provide support not only for pastors, but for all credentialed leaders. Charlene meets regularly with those in the northern part of the conference in the DAMM group, and Merv meets regularly with those in the southern part of the conference in the SECOMP group. Barry meets regularly with the SEED group. And we all meet individually as appropriate with those leaders. We also seek to provide resources for congregations to better support pastors, partly through our CMT column in the *Zing!* newsletter. Each November we host a weekend Pastors’ Retreat at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp.

A primary role of the CMT is to maintain credentials of persons in our conference. With active pastors, chaplains, persons licensed for specific ministry, and retired persons, we maintain 87 credentials. The Ministerial Council is also involved, and in particular takes the lead in considering whether to grant a new credential. Together the MC and CMT worked on the Credential Review Document that was first presented at the assembly last year and will be presented in revised form this year. The MC report identifies the credentials granted this year.

At the encouragement of the national leadership office of MC USA, we arranged for three sessions of Healthy Boundary Training in May, and also an additional training for persons to be able to lead the training. The next HBT will be held November 9 at Beth-El Mennonite Church in Colorado Springs. Unless a person is retired and unable to complete the training, or certifies training through chaplaincy or other involvement, we are requiring all persons to compete the HBT within a year of joining the conference, and to participate in a refresher every three years. We have also included information on the conference web page under Resources, including a tab with information on how to report allegations of misconduct.

1. **Helping Plan Major Events:**

CMT is involved in planning and carrying out major conference events. *Zing!* reports describe them:

* Faith and Life Forum in La Junta, Colorado, April 20-21, 2018
* Assembly in Taos, New Mexico, August 4-6, 2018
* Immigration Round Table in Aurora and Ft. Collins, Colorado, September 28-30, 2018
1. **Relating to the National Church:**

The CMT relates directly to the national church in a number of ways. Credentials are held by conferences, and then transferred between conferences. We relate to the National Leadership Office. Usually Merv and Charlene attend the Conference Ministers’ gathering once per year. And usually Barry, along with Ken and another conference leader, attend the Constituency Leaders’ Council meetings twice per year.

*Submitted by Barry Bartel*

**MODERATOR**

If there was a word to describe the past year for MSMC, it would be “busy!” If there was a phrase used to describe the past year, for me it would be “joyfully busy!”

**New Conference Leadership**

The MSMC leadership board was given the task of finding new conference minister leadership and after last summer’s assembly we opted for a team approach—with a three-member Conference Minister Team (CMT) comprised of Charlene Epp and Merv Birky (giving leadership to congregational and pastor support) and Barry Bartel (who is connecting to passion ministries, providing leadership for conference forums, roundtables and outreach, and church-wide connections). The new team was approved by delegates after a second delegate gathering (via ZOOM and in person) in September.

There are challenges to having three part-time leaders. Each brings unique gifts and perspectives which is a strength, and each has other ministry or career obligations which can be a complicated way of serving. We plan to conduct an initial review and evaluation of the CMT’s first year this fall. But I am sincerely thankful for the sense of stability and balance the CMT is providing after a period of transition. We also note appreciation for Linford and Mary Etta King who served as transitional pastor/interim conference ministers through last September.

In January we also said good bye to administrator, Karen Martin who very capably served the Conference from our early days. Jen Dudenhefer (Boulder MC) has been hired to fill this vacancy and is doing an outstanding job of helping organize, manage and keep tabs of lots of many moving pieces. Jen is quickly becoming the glue that is holding us together!

**Leadership Board changes**

**Brian Hannekin** resigned in February, citing scheduling conflicts and a desire to be more available to his congregation. This position was added previously and currently remains open.

**Nelda Thelin** (Emmanuel) who will complete her second term in December, has been a vital, incisive and wise member of the board. She will be truly missed.

**Michael Martin** (Bethe El) resigned from the leadership board in March because of growing obligations to RAWTools. The board appointed **Amy Zimbelman** (Mountain Community) as his replacement. Amy is on the ballot to officially fill the position beginning in January, 2019.

***“Amy Spaulding Zimbelman****grew up in Colorado Springs and is happy to be back as of summer 2016. She is bi-vocational, serving as co-pastor at Mountain Community Mennonite and tutoring refugee children through Lutheran Family Services. She holds a BA from Gordon College and an MDiv from Duke Divinity School. While in college, she studied abroad in the Middle East which led her to reexamine Christ’s life of service, community, peace, and justice—and as a result, she grew to love the Mennonite Church. She has served in Zambia through Mennonite Central Committee and for four years in South Dakota working with refugee resettlement through Mennonite Voluntary Service. Her husband and best friend, Matt Zimbelman, is a self-employed professional woodworker. Together, they enjoy spending time outdoors, cooking, having long conversations, and enjoying their one-year-old son, Bennett.”*

We have one additional Leadership Board **vacancy** and hope to have nominee information by assembly. We will ask for an e-mail vote later.

**Ongoing leadership board members:**

**Tatdao Yang** (Hmong Mennonite) to be approved for a second term

**Eldon Mast** (Boulder Mennonite) continuing

**Pam Duncan** (Sojourn Mennonite) continuing

**Katie Cunningham** (Albuquerque Mennonite) to be approved for a second term

**Ken Gingerich,** moderator (Albuquerque Mennonite) to be approved for a second term

**Additional committee positions to be filled**

In addition to the remaining vacancy on the Leadership Board there are two positions on the Ministerial Council that delegates will be asked to approve. The Leadership Discernment Committee is in conversation with several people who have agreed to serve or are considering the positions. We hope to have biographical information at assembly and will ask for affirmation in a follow-up e-mail ballot.

**Other things I’ve been involved in the past year:**

Organizing monthly Leadership Board meetings in person or via ZOOM video conferencing

Consulting with, and assisting members of the Conference Minister Team as requested

Assisting with communication details (Zing!, bulletin inserts, prayer calendar, etc.)

Attending CLC gatherings (Kansas City and Lansdale, Pa.) and national convention

Working directly with the Finance/Development and Leadership Discernment committees,

Supporting SEED, and other committees as requested.

Participating with the CMT and others in planning Annual Assembly and Faith & Life Forum

**Congregational changes**

In November, members of **Rocky Ford Mennonite Church** were surrounded by former members and friends as they said good-by to the reality of being a congregation together. After nearly 60 years the small group that remained felt it was time to bring conclusion to their life together. Most of the Rocky Ford members have joined with the nearby East Holbrook and Emmanuel congregations.

In the Spring, we were informed that **Iglesia El Centro** was also discontinuing as an “official” MSMC congregation due to dwindling numbers and the return of some members to their countries of origin. El Centro was led by Wilmer Villacorta who continues as a minister in our conference.

On July 1, Charlene Epp joined with **Peace Mennonite Community Church** in Aurora to share a blessing and farewell as they took final steps to leave MSMC and join with South Central Mennonite Conferences. After several years of processing, the majority of members at Peace Church felt they would be more “at home” affiliating with South Central.

**Sojourn Mennonite Church** is expanding its presence and witness from Ft. Collins into the Greeley community, essentially becoming a two-campus congregation. Some of the Sojourn Greeley attenders were previously part of Greeley Mennonite, others are from the local community. This is a major undertaking for one of our youngest congregations and merits our ongoing interest and support.

And we have just received confirmation that both Fernando Perez and Rebeca Torres have been approved for thirty-month religious work visas. They will join with **Beloved Community Mennonit**e **Church’s** intentions of expanding as a multi-cultural faith community in the Littleton area. Fernando and Rebeca will also be available to other areas of the conference to consult and assist congregations who are interested multi-cultural ministry.

**The future**

The real reward of *helping* lead Mountain States Conference is thinking about who we’re becoming and where we’re headed. Despite the regret of saying good bye to several congregations through closure or departure this past year, I believe we are solid at our core. I have an enduring faith in in our sense of God’s calling as we’ve welcomed creative new pastoral leaders, as we’ve seen passion ministries in our region become recognized far beyond the Mountain States region for their unique and somewhat prophetic visions, and I’m VERY INTERESTED in what the shape of new communities of faith might look like as we think outside the box about church planting.

We’re living into some exciting new ways of being faithful communities—from Sojourn Ft. Collins/ Greeley and Beloved Community, to Defiance and Alive with Grace. I’m also excited about the way our more traditional communities are thinking outside the box as we work at picking up the broken pieces of a culture that is increasingly violent, polarized and chaotic—taking on the challenges of immigration, hunger and homelessness, mental health, loneliness and alienation—for starters...

We *can* provide a “safe landing” for folks looking for authentic expressions of what it means to follow Jesus—to be inclusive of those who are deemed unacceptable by the powers, to advocate for peacemaking instead of domination and exploitation, and to call for restoration instead of retribution when it comes to justice. In many ways, we’re already doing this.

We face significant challenges, but challenges often precede opportunity. Maybe one of the opportunities of being Anabaptist in the 21st century, is the call to open ourselves to some new ways of imagining who we are—more than traditional Mennonite culture, more than doing things the way we’ve always done them. It means trusting our instincts, reaching outside of ourselves and anticipating what Anabaptist faith communities might look like when we pay attention to God’s presence and activity around us—in the neighborhoods, rural villages, towns and cities of Colorado and New Mexico.

Mennonite Church USA is also calling congregations to engage in the *“Journey Forward”* process—that articulates core common values and challenges us to be Anabaptist churches within our cultural and regional contexts. I hope you’ll find ways to participate in *“Journey Forward”* and prepare your congregational delegates for the next national gathering in Kansas City next year­­­.

I also hope we’ll come together again next summer as a renewed, invigorated and growing conference that is committed to Jesus and to his ways of being a sign of God’s presence in our world.

*Submitted by Ken Gingrich*

**DIALOGUE RESOURCE TEAM**

After a period of lower activity during conference leadership transitions, the Dialogue Resource Team stepped up its engagements again this past Fall. Two members of the Conference Minister team, Charlene Epp and Barry Bartel, previously served on DRT, facilitating ease of communication and a strong understanding of how DRT can serve conference and congregational needs. One DRT member was invited to lead a congregational dialogue session in the late Fall, and another team member provided conflict intervention and mediation services in two other congregations early in 2018. The team also provided informal phone consultations over the past year with CM and Ministerial Council members, as well as transitional staff working with various congregational dynamics and pastoral changes. In addition to such facilitation, intervention and coaching services, DRT continues to provide regular "With Care" columns for ZING!, exploring topics relevant to interpersonal and group communication, dealing with differences, conflict transformation, and adapting to change.  DRT members are also available to design and deliver related educational programs at congregational or regional events.

This Spring, DRT said good-bye to team member Luke Yoder and welcomed Mary Gardner, who joins on-going members Jill Schmidt, Duncan Smith, Alice M. Price and Jeff Newcomer Miller. Along with adding a new member, the team recently updated its Guidelines for referrals and fees, as well as its brochure and conference web presence. Conference members with training in mediation and facilitation and interest in the work of DRT are invited to contact Alice M. Price, who coordinates the team, at aliceprice1950@gmail.com. Congregations interested in possible DRT engagement should first be in touch with their CM liaison or other CM team member.

*Submitted by Alice M. Price for the DRT team*

**MINISTERIAL COUNCIL REPORT**

**Members** of the Ministerial Council during 2017 – 18 were Katie Cunningham (Leadership Board), Shelva Leep (First Mennonite), David Mourn (Beth-El), and Duncan Smith (Glennon Heights). Members of the Conference Minister Team serve as ex-officio members.

**Pastor Spouse Retreat**. Because of the transition to the new conference minister team Shelva Leep and Katie Cunnigham planned and led the Pastors Retreat, November 2017, focusing on prayer. Thanks to Katie and Shelva for the many of hours of work they put in planning/leading. Conference Minister Mary Etta King helped with the initial planning until she and Linford left at the end of August 2017.

**Activities.** The Ministerial Council (MC) met for five separate interviews over the course of 2017-18. As a way of orienting with the new Conference Minister Team there was a joint meeting with the CMT and MC. They met for a day at the end of January, 2018. Other meetings were by Zoom. The plan is to set up regularly scheduled meetings during the 2018-19 year.

The Ministerial Council gave input into the Credential Review Document for MSMC. The MC also reviewed its’ own process and logistics for working with credentialing, its’ structure and meeting schedule, re-wrote its’ job description, and worked with CMT to review and coordinate roles and tasks.

MC members participated in Boundary Training. Shelva Leep and Duncan Smith were trained to be trainers of the basic boundary training.

**Credentials granted 2017 – 18**:

* **Jordan Farrell** (Beth-El) License Toward Ordination
* **Barry Bartel** (Glennon Heights/Conference Minister) Ordination
* **Jeff Newcomer Miller** (Albuquerque) License for Specific Ministry, Mediation
* **Randy Spaulding** (Boulder), License Toward Ordination
* **Erica Lea-Simka** (Albuquerque), License Toward Ordination

Duncan Smith (Chair), Katie Cunningham, Shelva Leep, and David Mourn

*Submitted by Duncan Smith (Chair)*

**SEED REPORT**

2017 was an interesting year for SEED. We worked with Sojourn Mennonite in Ft. Collins, CO to explore church planting and shared worship with new and existing church groups. We also used our resources to help two people from MSMC to attend the Sent Gathering in Chicago. Additionally, we were able to offer resources to Carlsbad Mennonite for the “Peace at the River Festival” in Oct 2017.

For 2018 we offered support to Peter Sprunger-Froese and the bannering/protesting he and others do against war; they have been bannering for over 20 years in the Colorado Springs area. We are looking forward to supporting the upcoming Immigration Round Table Sept 28th-30th,a partnership between MCC, MSMC, and others exploring one of the important issues of our time. SEED is planning to support the emerging Women in Leadership work MCUSA is creating by offsetting the costs of conference fees and materials.

We thank the Mountain States Mennonite Conference for all support and resources made available to SEED.

*Submitted by Matt Zimbelman*

**LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT**

Leadership Discernment has the task of identifying and calling people to fill conference leadership roles. This is done informally as we learn about people with unique callings and giftedness in our midst and then engaging in a more formal discernment process. We are primarily responsible for calling leadership board members, committee chairs and ministerial council members.

The committee consists of a convener, a representative from the Conference Minister Team, a leadership board and the moderator. Paula Kuhns recently resigned as convener and Rae Shellenberger (Mountain Community) has agreed to fill in. A Leadership Board Member will be appointed to replace Nelda Thelin (Emmanuel) after her term is completed at the end of the year. Special thanks to Paula who initially helped set up the calling and discernment process for us. We wish Paula and Bruce all the best as they relocate to the Portland, Ore. area.

*Submitted by Ken Gingrich*

**FINANCE/DEVELOPMENT**

A slightly reorganized Finance/Development committee met by ZOOM in May. Members are Jerry Martin (Beth El), Tim Yoder (Alamosa), Pam Duncan (Sojourn), Dennis LeFevre (Everence/Beth El), Rita Balzer (Conference Treasurer) and Ken Gingerich (moderator) and Barry Bartel represents the Conference Minister Team.

We discussed disposal of the Pueblo Mennonite church parsonage which is a Conference asset we currently own and manage. We talked about possible ways to apply for and access grants from foundations. and we reviewed the investment priorities and policies used by Everence to manage our endowment. We also affirmed the “living within our means” approach to budgeting. Tim, Rita and Ken met in June to begin the 2019 budget proposal process.

*Submitted by Ken Gingrich*

July 1, 2018

Dear Congregations of Mountain States Mennonite Conference:

We write to you with mixed emotions as we transfer our affiliation from Mountain States Mennonite Conference to South Central Conference. We are sad at the ending of this affiliation. More importantly we want to express how grateful we are to the many blessings we have generously received from the MSMC, many congregations and many individuals.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge some of the things we are grateful for. We must begin with all of the financial support we have received from the time of being a church plant jointly of the 2 conferences in the region at the time. You have supported us with financial support at various times through the years. You have lent us money to complete the lower level for a larger kitchen, classrooms, offices and a fellowship area. You have faithfully supported us with the annual Peach Fundraiser. You have supported us in providing facilities and helpful participants when we raised funds through auctions in preparation of the groundbreaking of our church building. You supported us as volunteers and a skilled and experienced coordinator of volunteers during the building project. You have supported us in joint ventures of Vacation Bible School when we didn’t have enough people to do this alone. You have celebrated with us when we had our 25th anniversary as a congregation. You supported us with several interim pastors when we were between full time pastors. You have also supported us with skilled and pleasant Office Administrators. And I’m sure there have been many other ways that I have not mentioned. We are grateful for them all.

We are very appreciative of the many ways you have individually and collectively supported us through the years. We hope, intend and look forward to continue to have relationships with you through hymn sings, quilting, MCC sales in Rocky Ford, MEDA and the various individual relationships amongst us.

Thank You!

Elders, Pastor and Chair of Council

on behalf of Peace Mennonite Community Church

Margaret Tyacke

Marjorie Hofer

Phil Oyer

Tim Davis

Preston Hofer