

Always Forward; Always

By Ryan Koch, MSMC Moderator

I love this quote by Luke Cage. It reminds me that we always need to be looking and moving forward. Always looking for where God is leading us next. In many ways, delegate session 2021 was about the future. While it was nice to see so many old and new friends in person, I'm thankful that around a dozen or so delegates were also able to join virtually. A special thanks to Stephan Goertzen and Roger Weaver because making all that technology work in a foreign space is really hard. That is especially true when you meet in an almost 150 year old chapel with really poor wifi.

The big new initiative that was introduced during the delegate session was the Future Anabaptist Fund. I'm thankful for the delegates' excitement and support for this initiative which will support 18 - 30 year olds as they explore different ministry opportunities with our churches, our passion ministries and our conference. As part of the assembly, the delegates amended the 2021 budget to set aside \$6000 which will be used to match, one to one, the first \$6000 which churches, individuals, and organizations donate to the fund. As a bonus, any donation of \$40.00 or more will also get you one of Sidney Nuñez's prints, our current conference intern. We will be working to grow this fund over the next few years. We pray it will help not just encourage young Mennonites to pursue forms of ministry; we also pray it helps our conference grow and explore new things.

At assembly we also heard from SEED and why they recently decided to disband. SEED has been such a gift to our conference, our churches and passion ministries over the years. However, we know that there is a season for everything. We are so thankful for all the work all the members of SEED has done and we will find ways to give thanks for SEED's ministry in the coming months. We also know that the conference is going to have to find ways in the coming months and years to support those new initiatives which do bubble up.

Following the delegate assembly, the two words I heard most were honesty and openness. That is because a portion of this year's delegate assembly was tough. As was shared, there were two instances of allegations of pastoral misconduct which preoccupied a significant portion of Leadership Board's time, our Conference minister's time, and some of our partner ministries and churches' time as well this past year. We know we are not alone in our struggle against abusive power and harmful leadership. However, we also know that we have to do better. As Amy Zimbelman mentioned, we have to do better equipping our congregations, our passion ministries and our partners to recognize and be able to respond to all forms of misconduct, neglect and abuse if and when they happen. We hope the training that Amy proposed will be helpful to congregations. As a Leadership Board we are committed to promoting and creating healthy boundaries of all kinds. And I'm thankful that we dared to be honest and open because you cannot have healthy boundaries without these virtues.

As a Leadership Board, we have a lot of work ahead of us this next year. I'm so thankful that Linda Mawhorter, Wilmer Villacorta, and Pao Thao will be joining the Leadership Board at the start of next year. We have some riveting work ahead of us like looking closely again at our bylaws and some of our policies and procedures. We also will be prioritizing the work of anti-racism as a conference while also exploring what concretely it would take to prioritize church planting within Mountain States Mennonite Conference.

Lots of great work to do. Thanks again for a wonderful assembly and for everyone's participation in the delegate session. Always Forward. Always.