

**Annual Report of the Conference Minister
August 3, 2009**

It is the end of my third year as the Conference Minister for Mountain States Mennonite Conference. I am amazed to think back over the past three years. The questions that come to the top for me are "What have we done" and "What should we be doing going ahead?" The first question is briefly addressed here at the outset, the second throughout this report.

What have we done?

We have listened carefully and learned much and loved deeply. We have been in relationship with pastors and leaders across the conference. laughing, crying, and praying together We have worked with the Leadership Board and the Ministerial Council to provide structure and direction for the Conference. In addition we have been in touch with many many potential leaders across the wider Church as part of the ongoing work of pastoral transitions. We have participated in planning the Conference wide events such as Faith and Life Forums, Annual Assemblies, and Pastors Retreats. We have dreamed of what might be and nudged at numerous new efforts, partnerships, and relationships. We have been in conversation with so many parts of the Mennonite Church across the country from our colleges to seminaries to the Mission Network to Mennonite Mutual Aid to Mennonite Publishing House to Convention Planning to Executive Staff and on and on. We have built and nurtured many, many relationships that enable us to stay connected and walk the path with others. It is overwhelming at times, but as a whole, it is a deep rich blessing to be involved in this work.

Pastor/Leader Relationships

Pastoral relationships continue to be key to the work and pastoral transitions take the bulk of the energy in this area. As has been my experience every year, numerous churches are in transition. This was the year that Ron Blough died unexpectedly at Greeley. There are no words to describe the deep loss for so many of us, particularly for Rhoda and family and the folks at Greeley. God did provide in this hour of need in so many ways. One way was to bring Orlan and Grace Koehn along at just the right time. Orlan has been the Interim Pastor as the church has grieved and begins to seek new direction and leadership. Peace Mennonite Community Church invited Pat Hobin to come and lead their transition process. Pat has brought a wealth of insight and experience and has served in such a good way. A search committee is being finalized at Peace to begin considering new leadership. Rocky Ford said goodbye to Don Penner after seven years of service and welcomed Marlin Good to serve as transition pastor with them. Marlin most recently served the East Holbrook congregation as an Interim Pastor and is beginning to lead the process of transition for the folks at Rocky Ford. Finally at Emmanuel Mennonite, Steve Schmidt accepted a call to pastor a church closer to what was home for he and Wanda in Kansas. Emmanuel is in the process of considering a number of options and will likely call a transition pastor to help them through this time of change.

At East Holbrook we have been so pleased to welcome John Stoltzfus as the new Pastor there. As it turns out, John is now the only settled Pastor in the valley and we

are excited about the leadership he brings. John and Brenda moved to Colorado from Stuarts Draft, Virginia. Mountain Community celebrated the arrival of Melissa Roth as their new Pastor. Melissa came to Mountain Community from Dallas and brings a wide variety of experience and enthusiasm. We are eager to see what God has in store for this new leadership. At Arvada, Perry Ferris accepted the call and was licensed in the fall of 08. Perry arrives with a wide range of skills from a background in counseling and consulting and teaching to name a few. Arvada is in the process of change as they seek to pursue the dreams of God. At Beth-El, Mike Martin was affirmed as an Associate Pastor with primary responsibility for Youth. Mike has been a part of the church for nearly a year so relationships are in place and everyone is excited about the next steps in developing their vibrant youth program. Two ordinations were held during the past year, one for Phil Rosenberger at Light of Life in Farmington New Mexico and one for Betsy Headrick McCrae at Glennon Heights in Denver. In both cases, we are so grateful. Phil is well received and connected in Farmington and continues to revel in the ministry to which he has been called. Betsy is such a gift at Glennon Heights and has given new life and perspective to the vision of the church there.

In addition we continue to be in conversation with so many potential candidates across the country and are eager to see who will join us next.

Conference Wide Activities and Vision

Karen Cox, pastor at Boulder Mennonite Church, led our **Pastors Retreat** this past year. Karen shared her personal journey with healthcare decisions and challenged us to consider how we are taking care of ourselves. There were many new faces at the Retreat including spouses and future spouses. We have played with the name in the past year and plan to simply settle on Pastors retreat. Spouses and significant others are surely fully welcome and invited but not all pastors have spouses so we are trying to be fully welcome to these folks as well.

Faith and Life Forum was held in Pueblo where we were welcomed and well supported by the Pueblo Mennonite Church. Keith Harder was present and led much of our time together. Keith is on staff with Mennonite Church USA and is giving leadership to developing The Corinthian Plan, which is a health care plan designed to cover Pastors and Church Workers.

Annual Assembly was hosted by Boulder Mennonite and centered around the theme "By the power of the Holy Spirit. It was an energizing time of reconnecting and considering what the Holy Spirit might be saying to us. One of the unique contributions of the Boulder congregation was to organize a "service project." Everyone was invited to bring supplies for health kits and the entire group spent time assembling health kits to be sent to MCC for distribution. Annual Assembly for the coming year will be held at First Mennonite Church in Denver.

Two **New Efforts** have begun in Denver. Dayvid Graybill has begun a Sunday evening meeting in his home that is called *Another Way*. Another Way welcomes a wide diversity of people, there are no prerequisites for participation. It seeks to explore our experience with God through the use of the arts as a centering point for

there meetings times. Food and fun are also essential. Phil Ebersole has also begun a Sunday evening meeting called *The Bridge*. Phil feels called to welcome young adults who resonate with the theology of Anabaptists but have not found a home in the traditional church. They envision creating a group that is Evangelical and Anabaptist and have begun doing some outreach on the West side of Denver.

Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) continues to increase it's presence in the region under the leadership of Jerry Kennel. Currently an MMA office and staff are growing in Fort Collins and we anticipate continued growth in the coming years.

In the past months a variety of conversations have been held with the Dean Ervin Stutzman and Professor Lonnie Yoder of **Eastern Mennonite Seminary (EMS)**. The conversations include exploring for how we might begin to partner with EMS to provide opportunities for basic seminary education for folks in this region. These conversations are in the initial stages and are ongoing. In addition there are conversations about partnering with the EMS LEAP program (Learning, Experiencing, and Participating), which is a program that encourages theological exploration for high school age persons, and DOOR, (Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection) which is a national volunteer service program run under the auspices of Mennonite Mission Network and headquartered in Denver.

We were blessed this past year to be the location for the **Hmong Mennonite Missions** annual conference. The Hmong Mennonite Church of Westminster served as the hosting congregation bringing folks from around the country and even from numerous countries around the world to join in the Conference. Congratulations are in order for the work of the Hmong Mennonite Church in providing a stimulating and invigorating experience for all participants, both young and old.

Mennonite Urban Mission (MUM) continues the work of seeking a central location for all the Mennonite organizations along the front-range to office together. The vision is centered on having a one-stop location for getting connected to all things Mennonite in this region. A small beginning is taking place in the duplex at First Mennonite Church in Denver where DOOR is headquartered, along with a Mennonite Voluntary Service Office and a Mountain States Mennonite Conference Office, are present. There is much goodness in the synergy that occurs when we are together under one roof.

An **Anabaptist Wellness Center** is being envisioned and conceptualized currently by Annie Lengacher Browning and Perry Ferris. While in its very beginning stages, Perry and Annie bring unique gifts to wellness and envision inviting a group of practitioners across the conference to join them in inviting a wider variety of on going personal and spiritual growth services.

Finally, a **Church Vitalization Group** is being assembled to consider how we might be involved in supporting churches who desire to be rejuvenated and how we might create and give better support church planting efforts. Glenn Balzer, the National Director for DOOR will give leadership to this group and an initial two-day gathering is envisioned for early this fall. Ongoing conversation around this initiative

continues with Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) around how we may partner with MMN in this revitalization and church planting effort. MMN is eager to partner with us.

Larger Church Connections

This summer a number of our members attended in the Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) Convention as delegates and others simply as participants. We continue to be in consistent conversation with MCUSA around leadership transitions in the Denomination. I have served on a group of folks charged with exploring how to proceed with the appointment of a Denominational Minister. Others among us have served in other capacities. We continue to attend a participate fully in the Constituents Leaders Council (CLC) which is a group of around 75 leaders from across MCUSA that meets to provide counsel and input to Executive Board. Over the past several years, persons from our Conference have provided leadership for all the worship times at the CLC. In addition, we support and attend the annual Conference Ministers Meetings and the newly created Moderator's meetings. These are meetings that provide insight and relationships that grows from experience across the Mennonite Church. They are invaluable.

Conclusion

As I have reflected the experience from where I sit throughout this report I am again grateful for the many things that are bubbling in our midst. It seems to me that we are at a time of being deeply grateful for the foundation that has been laid for us by so many who have gone before us, but we are also at a place where the time is ripe for "moving on!" May we consider in the coming year what it might mean for us to be "moving on" as we are "*Pursuing God's Dreams, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the way of Jesus Christ.*"

Finally, I simply want to express my deep gratitude for the work of Jerry Martin as moderator for the past two years. I didn't know Jerry when he came on board, and my guess is at the beginning we both looked at each other a bit sideways wondering what we had gotten into. Let me commend Jerry to you as a good and faithful servant and a wonderful friend. It was surely an unexpected deep blessing to be able to work with him for the past two years. Thanks Jerry. Be blessed. Don't go away.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.

--Ephesians 3:20

Submitted By: Herm Weaver
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