

Seeking a “middle ground” for Mennonite Church USA

Many of you are already aware of the anxieties and tensions within our denomination and conference over issues related to same-sex covenanted relationships. Many in the broader church also anticipate that “something” will come out of the delegate sessions at MCUSA biennial convention this summer in Kansas City which will begin to “settle the dust” about the future of the denomination and its structures.

An earlier Buzz article named our intention at Waterford for a congregational conversation later this spring, which may help inform Waterford’s MCUSA delegates going to those sessions.

As a pastor I have been uncomfortable with the pessimistic assumption that the denomination will either crumble apart or just be left as a feeble shell of what it used to be, with comparable fallout for area conferences like Indiana-Michigan. But recently I’ve been encouraged by a movement for what some see as a possible way forward toward as much unity as possible within MCUSA amidst our diversity. Several of us local Mennonite pastors, from varying theological places on these issues, have recently come together with a suggestion to our denominational leaders that might point the way.

This is to inform the congregation that I am adding my signature to a letter from eight or nine northern Indiana pastors (from both Indiana-Michigan [IMMC] and Central District Conferences [CDC]), to be sent to the members of MCUSA’s Executive Board, as well as to the IMMC and CDC representatives of the advisory Constituency Leadership Council. These are the groups that will influence or decide delegate resolutions. The letter basically encourages formation of a resolution to the delegates which would recognize four main points as the basis for our remaining together as varying congregations and conferences:

1. Confession and lament of the current divisions and distractions from mission
2. Affirmation for ongoing ethical boundaries and standards, so it’s not that “anything goes”
3. Acknowledgement of where we no longer have consensus
4. The terms for moving ahead (mutual grace and respect toward those who differ from us) where neither wing of the church “wins”



One reason I am encouraged by this possible path forward is because the inspiration for the letter actually came from a November 2014 declaration by the Hispanic pastors of Western District Conference. Their official position in support of the current Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective has not changed, and yet they are willing to respect pastors and congregations at a different place, without criticism or questioning of those leaders’ values, and remain in larger

fellowship with them. In return, they ask for the same respect and validation as partners in the mission of the church. Some of us local pastors believe that these Hispanic brothers and sisters of ours from the Texas region have led the way in what may be the wisdom of God for our times.

This letter is intended only for the named recipients and we will not publicize it more broadly. I want to be clear that I am signing my name merely as a pastor within IMMC. I am not attaching Waterford’s name to my name because I am not speaking on behalf of the congregation as a whole or its leadership. I have consulted with the other Waterford pastors and with Ministry Leadership Council, who understand and support my signing of the letter under these conditions. But it’s also important to me to be transparent with the congregation about this action. I welcome your comments and prayers as we in the broader Mennonite church navigate these troubled waters.

—Pastor Neil Amstutz

Update from the Ross Richers

On the bulletin board you will find the latest newsletter from the Ross Richers, extra copies are available for you to take home. If you would like to receive the newsletter by e-mail please send an e-mail to rossrichercommunication@gmail.com and ask for your name to be added to the list. You can also follow the Ross Richers's blog at <http://twowaymission.net/>

Nine-month Financial Update

The end of January marked the completion of three-fourths of our congregation's fiscal year. During those months, we have seen significant ministry activities in the life of our congregation, supported by generous financial contributions from many people.

Through nine months, total giving to our Operating, Mennonite Education, and Either Funds has been about 1.0 percent below the same period from a year ago. Several factors have likely played a role in this reality – giving from many households has increased slightly; we were aware of a number of households who anticipated a decline in giving this year; the calendar year-end increase in giving we often experience was a bit smaller this year; and attendance has decreased by several percent from a year ago.

Last spring, we as a congregation approved an ambitious spending plan that reflected a 6.5 percent increase over the previous year. This is also a time when we begin to project year-end total expenditures and when Facilities & Finance Ministry Team focuses more on actual expenses than on budget figures. In the Operating Fund, it is likely that actual expenses will be somewhat below our spending plan. This is largely due to the way that our staffing situation has played itself out, though there have also been several unanticipated expenses that were not budgeted for. In the MEF, expenditures for the year are essentially complete. With changes in final enrollment, it is clear that our expenses will be significantly below the budgeted figure, as is often the case.

As we approach the end of our fiscal year, a significant challenge remains. With these projections, we would need average weekly offerings in the three funds to total slightly more than \$17,000 over the final three months to meet expenses. For context, our average offering through nine months has been about \$14,600. We invite you to help us in meeting this challenge. In addition to your prayers, might you consider an increase in giving? Here are several ideas:

- If each of our approximately 200 households gave \$12 more per Sunday, we could reach this total.

- Recognizing that not all households are able to increase at this level, might your household “adopt” another and increase by \$24 per week?

- Might you use the season of Lent to begin or increase the spiritual practice of generosity, giving an additional amount during the remaining Sundays leading up to the celebration of Christ's resurrection?

- Might you consider an additional one-time contribution to living the vision of God at Waterford. Perhaps a tax refund or the money saved from lower gasoline costs could benefit the congregation.

- And as always, if you need to miss a Sunday due to travel or weather, please remember to give that Sunday's offering in the following week.

During the coming months, Facilities & Finance Ministry Team will continue to monitor our giving and expenditures, keeping you updated on our progress as a congregation. We invite your prayers as we do so. In addition, if you have questions, please free to contact a member of the team.

—Lyle Miller, on behalf of FFMT
(Jim Fisher, Dave Hostetler, Tom Yoder,
Alan Zimmerman, Lyle Miller (staff))

MYF Visits Senior Adults

On Wednesday, Feb. 11, five MYF guys visited Inez Culp—she turned 93 this month! Inez is originally from Maryland, and that is where she met her husband, Lester, when he was in a Civilian Public Service camp during World War II. They have lived in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Kansas, moving to Goshen in 1954 when Lester began 33 years of teaching science at Bethany Christian High School. Lester moved from the Maples to Greencroft Healthcare on Friday. Inez and Lester are the parents of three adopted children. Inez enjoys making candles, which she donates to the Depot.



(back) Jackson King, Hee Won Cho, Matthew Smucker; (front) Nathan Berkey, Inez Culp, Jack Gingerich.



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The *Waterford Buzz* is normally published weekly for members of Waterford Mennonite Church. Items for inclusion should be given to the editor by 5 p.m. Tuesday preceding publication.

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