



# 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.*

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## *FOLLOW-UP TO GOD'S FAMILY FESTIVAL (ANNUAL CONFERENCE)*

Those of you who attended God's Family Festival on June 12-13 at Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church, or who read the report from that meeting in the summer Conference Messenger, are aware that we approved a new constitution and bylaws that provided for a new organizational structure.

The principal change in structure recognizes the limitations of having two geographic clusters of churches—one in the north, and one in the south. It also recognizes the importance of maintaining primary relationships between the two clusters. For many years, the southern group has been organized into a district known as UCIM (Unidad Cristiana de Iglesias Menonitas) that has maintained its leadership pattern and periodic gatherings. UCIM will continue to function as the Southern Regional Representative Council (SRRC).

What is new is the formation of a Northern Regional Reference Council (NRRC). Its composition is to include at a minimum the lead pastor of each congregation plus one other member. Other participants will be the Regional Conference Ministers (previously called Overseers), members of the Executive Committee, and representatives from Hesston College and Mennonite Women. (The lead pastor was specified so that there is a balance between lay leaders and pastors, but it should also be emphasized that the meetings will be open and others are welcome to attend.) This group is to meet three times a year, once in conjunction with the annual meeting.

Provision will be made for representatives from each region to be present at the other's

meetings, in order to maintain direct communication and sharing. The next meeting of the SRRC (UCIM) will be November 7-8, in Mathis, TX at Calvary Mennonite Church. The organizational meeting of the NRRC will be held on October 10 at Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church in Harper, KS. Churches in each region will receive, or have received, more detailed information regarding their meeting.

## *2010 GOD'S FAMILY FESTIVAL*

Although more than nine months away, we encourage all our congregations to place on their calendars the dates and place of the 2010 God's Family Festival. It will be held from June 25 to 27 on the Hesston College campus and in Hesston Mennonite Church. In an effort to enhance the "family festival" nature of the event, we are encouraging participants to consider staying in the college dormitory to facilitate the kind of after-hours sharing that can be an appealing part of the total experience.

We are pleased to announce that two resource persons have been confirmed for participation with us, both with Kansas roots and South Central Conference connections. They are Duane Yoder, lead pastor of Lindale Mennonite Church near Harrisonburg, Virginia; and Jessica Schrock Ringenberg, associate pastor of Zion Mennonite Church in Archbold, Ohio. A program planning committee will be activated soon to begin the detailed planning, which will include a variety of components that will appeal to all ages.

The philosophy and emphasis behind the naming of our annual meeting, God's Family Festival, is the strong belief that our personal and congregational lives are enriched if we expand our borders beyond our Sunday morning relationships at home, and make an effort to get to

know persons from all over our geographic region. While the local congregation is where our primary relationships are formed and nurtured, the church is more than that, and the area conference provides a vehicle to expand those borders.

## REGIONAL CONFERENCE MINISTERS

When South Central Conference no longer employed a full-time conference minister, a system of regional conference ministers was initiated. They were originally called 'Overseers', but as prescribed in the new constitution and bylaws, their title has changed to Regional Conference Ministers (RCM), to be more consistent with a pattern increasingly common among the 21 area conferences in Mennonite Church USA.

The intention is that every congregation and pastor will have an RCM, but to date, we have not been successful in finding qualified and available persons. The search continues in the north, with some hopeful prospects. In the south, we have the good fortune of having the services of Amzie Yoder from Albuquerque, New Mexico. In July, Amzie began a pattern of spending one week a month with the 8 churches in south Texas. He comes with all the desired qualifications and more: he is totally bilingual, having spent many years in ministry in Central America, and has had extensive pastoral experience. He has lived and worked in a variety of Hispanic cultures. He is an experienced teacher and uses an educational approach to dealing with congregational and regional issues and needs.

Current RCMs in the north include Marion Bontrager, relating to South Hutchinson, Whitestone and Pleasant View Mennonite Churches; Grace Brunner relating to Spring Valley, Pleasant Valley and Crystal Springs; and Heber Ramer relating to Hesston Mennonite Church. For the past several years, Wally Jantz has served in a coordinating role for the northern RCMs. As mentioned above, a priority is to find one or more persons who will serve the remaining churches in the northern region.

## CONGREGATIONAL NEWS

Eric Miller, associate pastor at South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, was ordained on Sunday, September 13, at the Journey @ Yoder campus.

Jesse Blasdel has been called as youth and young adult pastor at South Hutchinson Mennonite Church beginning October 11.



Carina Zehr of Crystal Springs Mennonite Church in Harper, KS is involved in LEAP365 (Learning, Exploring and Participating) at Eastern Mennonite Seminary this year. In July, Carina and 11 other youth spent time on the campus of EMS with faculty and staff learning about call and vocation. They also traveled to New Orleans, LA for a week of cross-cultural exploration. Carina will choose a mentor from her home congregation and complete a year-long intentional mentoring cycle supervised by LEAP staff.

Two young persons from Whitestone Mennonite Church have begun one-year assignments through Mennonite Voluntary Service: Audra Christophel, 2009 graduate of Goshen College, is located in Tucson, AZ; and Aaron Voth, a 2009 graduate of Bethel College, is located in Boulder, CO.

Hesston Mennonite Church is celebrating its centennial year coincident with Hesston College. The church has scheduled a number of special music events in past months, and will host a major weekend celebration, October 3-4. The Thanksgiving weekend will also include some activities. Everyone is welcome to attend any of these programs.

Roma Schmidt, HMC member, has updated the congregation's history. The last was published at their 75th anniversary, written by Justus Holsinger.

Calico Rock (AR) Mennonite Church hosted a special worship service for bikers on September

13. Pastor Dale Ivy, himself an avid motorcyclist, organized and led this important community outreach which included a fellowship meal.

### *PASTOR/ELDER/SPOUSE RETREAT*

Conference leaders in general, and the Regional Conference Ministers in particular, operate in the belief that our congregational lay leaders are a vital part of the local church, but that they deserve to have access to information and resources that enhance their important work. This is especially true since in most congregations, there is turnover in these positions nearly every year.

Acting on that belief, the churches in the northern region have scheduled a Pastor/Elder/Spouse retreat for February 12-13 at Cross Wind Conference Center near Hesston. Churches are urged to put that on their 2010 calendars now to protect the date. The Conference Ministerial Commission is giving leadership to the program content, with detailed information to be shared closer to the date.

In cooperation with the UCIM Regional Conference Minister, we will give attention to providing a similar opportunity in the southern region.

### *THE CORINTHIAN PLAN*

Congregations in Mennonite Church USA are in the final weeks of making a decision about participating in a proposed new health care insurance plan for pastors and church workers. One of its important features is that once it is in place in the congregation, any future pastors are guaranteed coverage without any exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

It is imperative that any congregation that is still contemplating the possibility of signing on, communicate their decision immediately to the appropriate MC USA office or their ambassador.

### *IMMIGRATION CONSULTATION*

From September 18 to 20, about 70 persons from across Mennonite Church USA

gathered at the Lakeview Camp and Conference Center just south of Dallas, Texas, to attend “And you welcomed me: a consultation of the people of God on immigration.” Participants from SCC included Maria Day, Hesston College students Kate and Kendra Alison from Hesston Mennonite Church; Leona Diener from Good News Mennonite Church in San Juan, Texas; and Bill Zuercher, Whitestone Mennonite. In addition, another Hesston College student, Amanda Smith from Iowa, attended.

Participants were reminded that in 2003 at the MC USA assembly in Atlanta, delegates adopted a Statement on Immigration that included the following sentence: “We reject our country’s mistreatment of immigrants, repent of our silence, and commit ourselves to act with and on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters, regardless of their legal status.”

The principal resource person for the weekend was Dr. M. Daniel Carroll Rodas, professor of Old Testament at Denver Theological Seminary, who gave three addresses and conducted informal question and answer sessions. Born of an American father and a Guatemalan mother, he has spent much of his life living and teaching in Guatemala. He is so totally bilingual that he did his own translation—speaking a sentence or two in Spanish and repeating it in English, both flawless and unaccented!

In his first session, Dr. Carroll Rodas informed us that immigration is a global issue, not just in the U.S. He focused on how Christians can talk about immigration based on our knowledge of the Bible. He said that the history of humanity is a story of migration, of movement from place to place, often motivated by looking for work or religious freedom. With the assertion that we should begin the debate not with law but with people, he cited examples of Abram (Abraham), Joseph, Ruth, Naomi, Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah, all of whom were immigrants but with very different stories. In God’s sight, and by extension in our sight as those created in God’s image, all immigrants are individuals with worth, value and dignity and deserve to be regarded and treated as such.

In his second session, Dr. Carroll Rodas looked more extensively at the matter of law. Every country creates itself, largely as expressed through its laws. Laws *create* a culture and also are a *reflection* of the culture and values of a nation. He cited examples in the Old Testament that made it abundantly clear that the alien and stranger were to be welcomed and treated with kindness. For the Christian, a goal should be to see laws created that reflect the heart of God. In early Israelite society, the immigrant lacked the support system provided by extended family and had no claim to land, so the Israelites were to make up for that in the way that they welcomed and treated the strangers. The Biblical message is that God loves the vulnerable persons, and as God's representatives on earth, we should too. In the current debate about immigration (often couched in "illegal" terms), we should pay attention to the values that our country's laws reflect.



In the final session, Dr. Carroll Rodas looked at Jesus and the New Testament, noting that Jesus began his life as a refugee, fleeing to Egypt with his parents to avoid certain death at the hands of Herod. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, and his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, were examples of how he taught or modeled how we are to treat those outside the mainstream of society. Dr. Carroll Rodas suggested that all Christians are sojourners, many of whom themselves have been welcomed into a new society. We should thus extend a welcome to all those who come to us. He concluded by saying that Romans 12 is the defining character of the Christian; Romans 13 deals with the function of government. It is fair to ask, what kind of government is this, and what kind of laws does it have? What kinds of values do the laws reflect, contrasting legality with charity? The law is good for the people whom it favors. How can we improve the law so that it will help the outcast?

As we are well aware, our country is embroiled in a debate about "illegal" immigration, with feelings and emotions often running high. A

number of our and Western District Conference congregations primarily in Texas, are dealing on a daily basis with the realities of this debate, serving many persons who are undocumented. Our challenge is to function as communities of healing and hope, recognizing the complexity of the issues but never forgetting that we are talking about human beings whom God loves.

Fortunately, a variety of resources are available to assist congregations in addressing immigration issues. Mennonite Central Committee has a packet of materials available from its regional offices (ours is in North Newton, KS) or online at [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org). The Western District Conference Resource Library also has materials available, which can be accessed at [www.mennowdc.org/ResourceLists.html](http://www.mennowdc.org/ResourceLists.html).

### HESSTON COLLEGE NEWS

As this is being written, the college is gearing up for its largest-ever attendance at a Homecoming weekend—the anchor event on September 25-27 in a year-long celebration of the college's centennial year. From Friday morning until Sunday afternoon, there is a nonstop schedule of significant and interesting events. These include the unveiling of a commissioned sculpture made of cedar wood by Paul Friesen; a history forum reflecting on the college's past, present and future relationship to its sponsoring Mennonite Church; the premiere of the centennial history book, *A School on the Prairie: A Centennial History of Hesston College 1909-2009*, written by John Sharp; a centennial cookbook with over 900 recipes collected from alumni and friends; DVDs with historical vignettes and a collection of choral music sung through the decades; a tour of historic homes; a production of the musical, *The Quilters*, including the presentation of the centennial quilt designed and created by Martha Hershberger and Faith Penner; class reunions; academic division and student dormitory open houses; reunions of former presidents, deans, faculty and staff; multiple sports events; an auction of over 100 donated items, many of them with historical connections to the college; a banquet followed by

a music gala; and a concluding worship service with a 100+ voice alumni choir.

For those of you who missed the weekend, many of the special items are on display throughout the campus, or for sale in the college bookstore. Some of them will be featured again during the Thanksgiving weekend.

The next significant event of primary interest to our churches is the Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series (AVDS) weekend, October 30-November 1. Its theme is "Learning the Bible in Life-Giving Ways: History, Hooks and Heilsgeschichte." This will be a condensed version of the highly-regarded Biblical Literature course that all students take. In walking through the whole Bible story, it seeks to answer the question, "How has God worked in history to solve the sin problem and bring everything under the Lordship of Jesus Christ?"

Principal speakers are popular faculty members Marion Bontrager and Michele Hershberger, complemented by the good humored wisdom and insights of Ted Swartz of Ted & Company. Michele will interrupt her sabbatical year of teaching at LCC University in Klaipeda, Lithuania, to help lead this important event.

More information, including registration details, is available on the college's website: [www.hesston.edu/avds](http://www.hesston.edu/avds). You can also call 620-327-8290, or email [elaines@hesston.edu](mailto:elaines@hesston.edu).

### *SUMMER COLLEGIUM*

Applications are now available for the Summer Collegium, a project in support of small congregations at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. Clergy (and their spouses) from 25 small churches of all Christian denominations are invited to spend nine days at Virginia Seminary for encouragement, education, rest and renewal. **All expenses, including travel, books, meals, lodging, child care at home and pulpit supply, are paid by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.**

The theme of the Summer Collegium this year is Leadership in the Small Congregation. The keynote speaker will be Alice Mann, a

prolific writer on congregational ministry, and John Bell from the Iona Community in Scotland will join the worship team for the conference.

The dates for the Summer Collegium are June 23 - July 1, 2010. Application forms are on our website, [www.vts.edu/education/collegium](http://www.vts.edu/education/collegium), or will be sent in the mail by emailing [SummerCollegium@vts.edu](mailto:SummerCollegium@vts.edu) or by calling 703-461-1760. Applications must be postmarked by December 15, 2009, to be considered.

### *RESOURCE ADVOCATE'S CORNER*

*--Bill Zuercher*

An earlier article in this newsletter reports on a recent consultation on immigration, about which significant resource materials are available. Please refer to that article above for access information.

There is a new set of resources from Mennonite Central Committee that will be of special interest to youth leaders and peace educators. Focusing on cluster munitions as one current aspect of U.S. militarism, these resources describe the global scope of the problem, MCC's long history of involvement, interactive bible studies, and practical tools for education and advocacy within the congregation. For detailed information, see [mcc.org/clusterbombs](http://mcc.org/clusterbombs).

Effective July 1, Mennonite Media became Third Way Media. The Harrisonburg-based division of Mennonite Mission Network is the longest running Mennonite/Anabaptist public media office in the U.S.

**Third Way Media**

"We want to continue our mission of providing innovative, creative, storytelling, practical, life-changing, faith-based media to the general public," said Burton Buller, director of Mennonite Media since 1999. "We place messages of hope and reconciliation from an Anabaptist Christian perspective into the marketplace of ideas. We hope that helps to inform the cultural dialogue that determines the

values by which this nation lives.” Buller said they decided to more closely align with their most popular and well-known brand name—Third Way Café.

Third Way Café is the Web site which provides information on Mennonites for the general public, offering both history and present-day thinking from an Anabaptist viewpoint. The name “Third Way” taps into Christians and the broader public who are looking for a sane, middle, third way—neither right, nor left; neither Protestant nor Catholic; neither evangelical nor mainline, according to Buller.

Third Way Media will continue as a division of Mennonite Mission Network and as part of Mennonite Church USA. Implementing the name is expected to take place over the next several months.

Remember to consult the Western District Conference Resource Library online for a host of resources: Your Library Catalog - At Your Fingertips: [www.mennowdc.org/Library.html](http://www.mennowdc.org/Library.html)

In the September issue of Check It Out, you will find practical resources for shaping worship services in the very wonderful Words for Worship 2 from Faith and Life Press (buy your own copy, quick!); reflections for those grieving the loss of a little one in the gentle resource, Naming the Child; and an up close and personal view of the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams in At-Tuwani Journal. See this listing at [www.mennowdc.org](http://www.mennowdc.org). Email us at [crlib@mennowdc.org](mailto:crlib@mennowdc.org) to reserve one of the resources for your use.

Planning for Fall Faith Formation and Christian Education? Remember to contact the Western District Conference Resource Library to inquire about new DVD series, new study options for adults and ideas for youth and children's clubs. Call 316-283-6300 or email: [crlib@mennowdc.org](mailto:crlib@mennowdc.org) The early birds get the best pick!

Several popular speakers were featured at the adult and/or youth conventions in Columbus in July: Shane Claiborne, Jim Wallis, Greg Boyd, and Ted & Company. The Resource Library has a large number of books and DVDs/videos by these

authors and performers for you to use.