



M E S S E N G E R

The mission of South Central Conference is to produce healthy, missional congregations by resourcing, connecting and empowering them to be Christ in the world.

2009 Annual Assembly

As we reported in the last issue of the

Messenger, the 2009 annual assembly will be held on June 12-14. The location will once again be Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church. It will not be a joint conference with Western District Conference this year; they will be meeting August 7-8 at Bethel College. Plans are underway to provide a charter bus to facilitate the participation of persons from south Texas.

A program planning committee is in the process of formation. The goal is to create a program of worship, celebration and fellowship with a minimum of delegate business. It will be designed with features of appeal to all ages. Our goal is to have an event that is inviting to families, which will reinforce the importance of the inter-relationships among congregations in our conference. The setting of Hesston College and Hesston Mennonite Church makes this especially feasible because of the facilities and accommodations.

Executive Committee Update

South Central Conference's Executive

Committee gathered for its periodic meeting, October 24-25 at Hesston College. Vi Leinbach from South Hutchinson Mennonite Church was welcomed as a new member, representing Mennonite Women. Farewells were said to Spike Hostetler, Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church, Harper, KS; and Gracie Tijerina, outgoing moderator of the south Texas (UCIM) district.

Major points of discussion and decision included the following:

1. Approved the formation of a Church Growth and Visioning Team whose task will involve the discernment of new church planting location and timing, and a plan to support

- and encourage our congregations in their outreach ministries.
2. Discussed the most effective and efficient staffing pattern for SCC in its goal of providing ongoing support to pastors and congregations, as well as to fulfill the need for a recognized "face" for the conference.
3. Heard an update on the MC USA initiative to provide healthcare coverage for all pastors and church workers, which will potentially involve all of our congregations.
4. Approved a plan to encourage incoming pastors, especially younger ones with educational debts, by providing a modest grant program to help repay some of that debt.
5. Approved the expenditure of some Fall Mission funds to encourage and enable young adults to attend the Mennonite Church USA delegate assembly in Columbus, Ohio next July.
6. Began the conversation about reorganizing the conference into a north and south region, with intention to maintain primary relationships as much as possible, recognizing the factors of distance and resulting travel costs.
7. Confirmed the date and place of the next annual meeting for June 12-14 at Hesston College, offering travel subsidy for persons coming from the south. The program will be designed to be family-friendly and offer an opportunity for creating and strengthening friendships and relationships among member congregations.
8. Deferred action on a constitution revision in order to give attention to creating a more concise and current document, to be supplemented with bylaws and/or a policy and procedures manual.
9. Heard detailed reports from Hesston College and Mennonite Women.
10. Received an update on the plans to produce a basic communication piece identifying conference priorities and leaders, with a copy to be made available to members of all of our churches.

11. Heard plans to create a conference website, with a goal of having it up and running by December 1.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be April 3-4 at the Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Hydro, OK. Between now and then, the smaller Administrative Committee will meet as needed to deal with ongoing agenda.

Road Signs for the Journey Author Coming to our Area

In our last issue of the *Messenger*, we reported that every congregation has received a copy of the 2006 Mennonite Membership Profile, entitled Road Signs for the Journey, written by Conrad Kanagy of eastern Pennsylvania. As was mentioned, this is the latest of three comprehensive studies of Mennonite and other Anabaptist churches' membership, highlighting some sobering trends that give cause for concern and suggest some correctives if we are to remain a faithful community of believers.

At the initiative of Howard Wagler, lead pastor of South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, with the co-sponsorship of Hesston College and South Central Conference, Conrad Kanagy will be coming to our area on March 20-22. A small group is at work outlining the elements of the program that Kanagy will be leading, details of which will be shared with all of our churches well in advance of the dates. Meetings will be held in South Hutchinson, possibly to include the Journey @ Yoder campus, and a Hesston location. We encourage all congregations to make note of these dates, and plan to send as many persons as possible to be a part of the discernment that will take place.

UCIM Annual Retreat

The south Texas (UCIM) district held its annual retreat at Camp Zephyr on Lake Corpus Christi near Mathis, TX, November 7-9, with over 120 persons spending some or all of the weekend enjoying the worship, fellowship and food.

Congregational News

We would like to include in this section news

of important events and activities in the life of all of our congregations. We glean what we can from church bulletins and other sources, but rely on reports and announcements sent to us for this purpose.

Michele Hershberger, a Bible Instructor at Hesston College and a member of Hesston Mennonite Church, was ordained for her teaching and preaching ministry on November 16.

Journey @ Yoder began its schedule of weekly worship services in the Yoder location on Sunday evening, November 9, to a full house of prospective members, well wishers and colleagues from South Hutchinson Mennonite Church. The church plans to meet at 6 p.m. on Sundays, and is forming neighborhood groups as a means of encouraging fellowship and mutual support as this congregation gets underway. Kevin Wilder, until recently the campus pastor at Hesston College, has arranged for a van to be available to transport interested Hesston College students to Yoder. Kevin and his family, who live in Hesston and attend Whitestone Mennonite Church, have committed themselves to participate at Yoder for its first year.

Greensburg Mennonite Church celebrated the dedication of its newly reconstructed building on November 2. The sanctuary was full and overflowing with members and guests, including a number of persons who had served with Mennonite Disaster Service in Greensburg since May 4, 2007, when the tornado hit. The church held an open house in the afternoon to accommodate members of the community who attend their own newly rebuilt churches in the morning.

Hesston College News

Hesston College students serving as Residence

Assistants (RAs) during the current semester include the following:

- *Abby Erb, Hesston Mennonite Church
- *Kaitlyn Mast, Pleasant View Mennonite Church
- *Daniel Penner, Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church
- *Travis Petersheim, South Hutchinson Mennonite Church



Students who were in the cast of the fall play at Hesston College, “The Diviners”, include:

- *Erin Hershberger, Hesston Mennonite Church
- *Jessica Juhnke, Hesston Mennonite Church
- *Ana Loucks, Whitestone Mennonite Church

Members of the Bel Canto Singers from South Central Mennonite Conference include Ana Loucks, Jessica Juhnke, and John N. Murray (Hesston Mennonite Church).

Pastoral Thoughts on the Election

*by John Murray, Lead Pastor
Hesston Mennonite Church*

A number of persons asked me why I didn’t

make any public comments about the election, particularly the presidential election in the days and weeks leading up to that important event in our nation. I offer a few reflections about the election process and our journey together as a nation and a global community as we look to the future.

1) The political process, political leaders, and public policy are important. However, the reign of God will not be ushered in by political leaders, laws, or public policy. Nor will political leaders, laws, or public policy ever stop the coming of the reign of God. In my observation, the political climate in the United State has come to be filled with arrogance, fear, verbal attacks and expressions of hatred. This has escalated to the point of questioning the faith commitments of those who have differing political opinions. It has been said that the greatest threat to Christianity is NOT political leaders and public policies that are not favorable to Christian thought and practice, NOR is it the spread of other religions, NOR is it atheism and persecution. The greatest threat to Christianity is bad Christianity. I would define “bad Christianity” as Christianity that does not keep its focus and its practice on following the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of love and compassion, healing and grace, hope and joy, peace and service, forgiveness and reconciliation. These qualities can be lived regardless of the political, cultural, and economic conditions in which we live or the political opinions which we hold.

2) Because of the reality expressed above some persons I know have made the choice not to

participate in the political process including choosing not to vote. I understand and respect that position even though personally I choose to participate by voting.

3) I believe that it is important for those who chose to vote to carefully and prayerfully discern candidates’ qualities, character, and positions on issues of domestic and international policy. The challenge is that this discernment is a very complex task. I believe that part of the task of each voter is to discern what issues are of primary importance and what are of secondary importance at the current time. I believe that respectful dialogue in this discernment is an important part of the process. I believe that we need to recognize that people of faith and conviction may come to different conclusions in that discernment process. No candidate or political party ever fully reflects all of the concerns, hopes, and desires that we individually carry. As congregational leaders, we have chosen not to publish or distribute “voters’ guides” at the church because every voters’ guide makes choices about what issues are important and what are not important by what issues are included and excluded from the guide and the order in which they are listed.

4) I believe that it is important for us pray for God’s guidance in the discernment process and to trust that God has guided that process whatever the outcome. However, I do not think that in either elections or baseball games that there is one person, party, or team that God wants to win and that God wants the other person, party, or team to lose. Ultimately I believe that the more important question for all of us to wrestle with is less about “who is the right person for any elected office” and more about “are we the right people?” Whether or not our preferred candidate wins the election, will we be people of respect and honor, grace and love, reconciliation and peace? If our preferred candidate lost, will we honor the discernment of the majority while we continue to participate in the ongoing process of discernment and practice with respect and honesty about our ongoing concerns and desires? If our preferred candidate won, will we continue to honor and respect the concerns of the minority voices? Will we engage in ongoing dialogue and discernment of the important national decisions that will arise that we may not even have considered yet?

I believe that it is a blessing to be part of a country in which we are all invited to participate in the political process. I believe that comes with an important responsibility for each of us to consider carefully the spirit and attitude with which we participate in that process particularly in relationship to how we relate to and speak to others about those who have different political perspectives than we do.

Website Development

We are getting excited about the progression

of our conference website. Each congregation will be listed on the website with contact information for each. If SCC congregations have pictures of events or of their churches worship time or buildings, we would be glad to include those in our News/Photos section of the website. Please send them, in their original size, to scmenno.org or mail a CD or hard copies of the pictures to our office. The address for our new site will be www.scmenno.org. The site should be functioning soon after January 1, so check us out.



Mennonite Women

The year 2008-2009 is starting off as an interesting year for South Central Conference Mennonite Women with a variety of ways to serve Christ in the church, our communities and around the world.

Again this year, the leadership is making a clear effort to find ways to involve women from each of the congregations in the Kansas/Oklahoma region of South Central Conference. A woman from each congregation has been invited to be the contact person representing their congregation. They are:

- Lidia Zehr, Crystal Springs Mennonite, Harper
- Pam Morris, Faith Mennonite Church, South Hutchinson
- Virginia Koehn, Gospel Fellowship Church, Montezuma
- Minnie Koehn, Greensburg Mennonite Church
- Trish Brenneman, Hesston Mennonite Church
- Marcia Bickle, Pleasant Valley Mennonite, Harper
- Anita Anderson, Pleasant View Mennonite, Hydro, OK
- Vida Yutzy, South Hutchinson Mennonite
- Mary Bitikofer, Spring Valley Mennonite, Canton

- Marilyn Hartman, Whitestone Mennonite, Hesston



A new and unique opportunity for persons church-wide is the project introduced by Mennonite Women USA in collaboration with Mennonite Disaster Service. Folks are invited to make and/or donate quilted wall hangings to be used by MDS when a house being completed by MDS is being dedicated. The quilted wall hanging is presented as a housewarming gift to the homeowners. This project is called "Housewarming" Sister-Link. The coordinator is Eloise Yoder, 128 Pheasant Lane, Archbold, OH 43502; phone 419-445-2228, theyoders@rtexpress.net.

Save the Dates: March 9 & 10, 2009 The Comforter Blitz; March 19, 2009 MW Sunset Supper at Hesston Mennonite Church.

To read more about Mennonite Women, country-wide and world-wide, go to the email newsletter "A Postcard and a Prayer" from Berni Kaufman bernik@mennonitewomenusa.org.

Submitted by Nancy H. Peachey, SCC MW KS/OK, Vice President.

MW Sister Church Project

The Sister Church Project initiated by the SCC

Mennonite Women in June of this year is spreading to South Texas! Few of the South Texas churches were represented at the project's inception during the women's luncheon at conference in Hesston, so Miriam Huebert-Stauffer, coordinator of this ministry, shared about the project with SCC sisters from the south at the UCIM conference held near Mathis, TX, November 7-9.

Women present were quizzed on their knowledge of churches located outside of their immediate area within the conference. Collectively, the group was able to name all the SCC churches, but few individuals could have done so alone. Miriam pointed out that if we have difficulty naming most of the churches in our conference, we likely know few people that attend them, have little connection with them or know what their needs are. The great distances in our conference are a barrier to building relationships and supporting each other. Our focus is also generally (or largely?) fixed within our own church community, straying little to other churches near or far.

Yet this barrier doesn't have to hold us back from being connected. How about relating to just one other church in the conference, a sister church? Making a phone call, sending an email, or writing a card of encouragement once a month is a doable outreach. Then, share that connection with your home church. Of course, the sky is the limit with creative ways to build relationships and support each other with the gifts and talents each church possesses. One can make a visit, arrange for the youth to get together, have a pulpit exchange or attend special events, just to name a few. But starting simply with an introduction and "How can we pray for you?" is more than most of our churches have ever done, even between SCC churches located within a reasonable distance of each other. In the words of Paul from Galatians 6:2 & 10: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

If you are not aware of who your sister church is, here is a list. These churches were all matched randomly with the exception of those churches which already had an established sister church relationship. Check with your SCC MW contact person for more information, or contact me, Miriam Huebert-Stauffer: 620-628-4416; chrismim@netks.net.

South Central Conference Sister Churches

A "Sister-Link" project initiated by the SCC Mennonite Women's Executive Committee KS/OK, under guidelines established by Mennonite Women USA. Established June 28, 2008, for a proposed two years until the 2010 SCC annual meeting, to then be evaluated for continuing, reorganizing or discontinuing.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." Ephesians 3:20

Iglesia Menonita Rios de Agua Viva, Matamoros, MX
Mt. Pisgah Mennonite, Leonard, MO

Iglesia Menonita la Nueva Jerusalem, Matamoros, MX
Argentine Mennonite Church, Kansas City, MO

*Iglesia Menonita Eben-Ezer, Cd. Reynosa, MX
*Iglesia Menonita Buenas Nuevas, San Juan, TX

Iglesia Evangelica Menonita Gethsemani,
Matamoros, MX

South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, South
Hutchinson, KS

Centro Cristiana Menonita Jerusalem, Veracruz, MX
Faith Mennonite, South Hutchinson, KS

*Prince of Peace Mennonite, Corpus Christi, TX
*Hesston Mennonite, Hesston, KS

United Mennonite Church, Premont, TX
SCC Mennonite Women's Committee KS/OK

Tabernaculo de Fe, Mathis, TX
Spring Valley Mennonite, Canton, KS

New Life Christian Center, San Benito, TX
Greensburg Mennonite, Greensburg, KS

Iglesia Menonita Rey de Gloria, Brownsville, TX
Calvary Mennonite Church, Mathis, TX

Iglesia Menonita del Cordero, Brownsville, TX
Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church, Harper, KS

Alice Mennonite Church, Alice, TX
Berea Mennonite Church, Birch Tree, MO

Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Hydro, OK
Gospel Fellowship, Montezuma, KS

Whitestone Mennonite Church, Hesston, KS
Crystal Springs Mennonite, Harper, KS

*Calico Rock Mennonite Fellowship, Calico Rock,
AR
*Rogers Mennonite, Rogers, AR

*Churches with a previously established sister
church relationship.

MC USA Convention 2009

The next Mennonite Church USA convention is

less than a year away, to be held in Columbus, Ohio, June 30 to July 5, 2009. This is an opportunity to join brothers and sisters from across the United States as we gather for worship, discernment and fellowship.

On-line registration is available beginning December 1; paper registration can be done on and after January 2, with an early registration deadline of April 30. Churches should have received registration and preliminary program information already.

In the last *Messenger*, we mentioned that Tonya Keim Bartel from Whitestone Mennonite Church is a member of the Youth Convention Planning Committee, and that Gary Oyer, also from Whitestone, continues to serve on the audiovisual technical team. Since then, we have learned that Ana Hinojosa Gomez from Church of the Lamb in Brownsville, Texas is not only a member of the Youth Convention Planning Committee, but will also be a co-leader of the worship in the youth convention.

As announced to churches a few weeks ago, one of the projects for Fall Mission offerings is to provide funds for scholarships to cover registration and lodging for young adults (18-30 year olds) from our congregations to attend the Columbus Assembly. This is in keeping with efforts of MC USA to engage in a more active way our young adults in the life of the Mennonite church. Those young adults present at San Jose 2007 played a significant role in the delegate table discussions. The number of young adults present was limited however. In 1989, 45% of our members were under the age of 45; now 30% are. For the future of the Mennonite church, we need to encourage and promote this kind of participation at the leadership level. As you consider your congregation's representation at Columbus, you are encouraged to tap the shoulders of young adults.

Mennonite Church USA Health Plan

Many of you have read and heard about the

current work underway to create a health insurance plan available to all pastors and church workers in MC USA congregations. This is being done in response to a mandate by the delegates at the San Jose 2007 assembly, for something concrete to be done to provide health care coverage, particularly for pastors, in recognition of the fact that too many of our church families are without such coverage.

A plan has now been developed that will be the subject of congregational education to begin early in 2009. A host of so-called Ambassadors are being recruited and trained in all of the MC USA area conferences. An ambassador will be assigned to every congregation to make sure that the information is delivered to the leaders and decision-makers. The plan contains a strong mutual aid element, in order to make the coverage available and affordable to all eligible persons. For the plan to be viable, the leaders have determined that 80% of MC USA congregations will need to sign on to participate.

Enrollment can begin by April 1, 2009, with coverage effective January 1, 2010.

Congregational leaders will be contacted with more information of direct interest to them.

New Commission Being Formed

Reference was made in the report from the

conference Executive Committee above to the formation of a Church Growth and Visioning Team. Its main tasks will be to discern opportunities for new church planting; to provide support for those engaged in church planting; and to assist established congregations in expanding their missional calling in their own communities.

We are pleased to announce that the following persons have agreed to serve: Howard Wagler (chair), South Hutchinson Mennonite Church; David Greiser, Director of Hesston College Pastoral Ministries Program; Heidi Unruh, Faith Mennonite Church, South Hutchinson; Cindy Mason, Whitestone Mennonite Church; and _____, Hesston Mennonite Church.

Resource Advocate's Corner

New Music CD: "All Nature Sings".

Nature: its beauty, grandeur, complexity and awesomeness, has captured the imagination of many of the Biblical writers, particularly in the Psalms. Now a new music CD from Mennonite Media focuses on nature, "All Nature Sings: Hymns and Anthems of God's Creation." It includes 24 a cappella songs from the archives of the former Mennonite Hour radio program and will make a great Christmas gift. As always, the proceeds from the sale of this CD and all other products from Mennonite Media support the outreach media ministry of **Mennonite Mission Network**. The price is \$12.95 or less for quantity sales. For more information, go to store.mennomedia.org under "Music," call 800-999-3534, or email loish@mennomedia.org.

We have available in the South Central Conference office an exhaustive list of children's book & DVD suggestions to accompany Gather 'Round curriculum, winter 2008-2009. A copy will be sent to

anyone interested; address an email to scc@sccmenno.org

All books are in print and available unless designated with an *; all DVD's are available for purchase. Books not in print may be found in public, private or church libraries as well as for purchase at <http://used.addall.com>. New books or books in print may be found at <http://www.addall.com>. Compiled by Marjorie Geissinger, Mary Grieser, and Naomi Kauffman, members of the Bux-Mont Librarians in PA, with the hope that teachers, parents, and librarians would work together to provide some of these rich resources to the children in our congregations. The Bux-Mont Librarians publish *News and Views*, a quarterly newsletter for church librarians. This newsletter containing book reviews, is a valuable resource for churches and may be ordered for the nominal fee of \$10 per year from mmgrieser@gmail.com Sample copies are available.

Mission banks are again being offered free to all children in grades K-6 from Mennonite Church USA congregations. Beginning on January 1 and going through March 31 congregations can visit our website at www.MennoniteMission.net/MissionBank or e-mail MissionBank@MennoniteMission.net to order banks and teaching tools.



Missio Dei (Latin for God's mission) is a quarterly booklet published by **Mennonite Mission Network**. Each issue invites reflection and dialogue about God's mission in today's world. Each issue also includes questions for personal or group reflection. Advocates can check out all 16 issues of *Missio Dei*, but our latest is entitled Tongue screws and testimony. In this booklet Alan Kreider reflects on the stories of early Anabaptist writers, and why Mennonites often struggle to share their faith and choose silence over verbal witness today. We also have another recent edition of *Missio Dei* that features Conrad Kanagy writing about a survey that looked at church planting from 1990-2005. To subscribe to or order Mission Dei, people can send a request to MissioDei@MennoniteMission.net. You can also download copies of *Missio Dei* at <http://www.mennonitemission.net/>.

Hot Topics and New Worship Resources

In the November, 2008 edition of **Check It Out** from the Conference Resource Library in North Newton, you will find some "hot" new resources that are timely. Creation Care is a new study by **Mennonite Mutual Aid** that features 12 sessions on the environment. 7 Steps to End the War and Save the

Planet by Mennonite pastor Steve Ratzlaff is sure to spark discussion. For Worship planners there are over 14 new titles featured on various aspects of congregational worship. To view this issue or dozens of back issues of resource lists, visit www.mennowdc.org/Library.html. To reserve an item for your use, email the library: crlib@mennowdc.org or give us a call: 316-283-6300.

A number of items of interest are available from **Mennonite Publishing Network**, by accessing their website at www.mpn.net.

On the new home page hit the Herald Press tab to see recent products and what is coming. Note *Pax Avalon*, a full-length novel done in graphics! This format should have appeal to the post-modern culture and other folks as well.

Under the Faith and Life tab notice the *Faith Marker* kit. It is a meaningful and easy resource for congregations to honor the on-going faith development from children through adults.

Also hit the Curriculum link to see the new Vacation Bible School material on the Holy Spirit. That will be out in January. This can also be used for mid-week children's ministries.

The Church Supplies link will show you all of the topics now covered with the *Close to Home* pamphlets and issues yet to be addressed. These are carefully researched pieces that have been well received.