

Chapter 2 Items for Discussion and/or Action

Annual Sessions 2020 Minutes and Proceedings

IMMC Annual Sessions

Zoom

Friday, June 19, 2020—Saturday, June 20, 2020

“Built Together”

Recorder: Anna Board

Opening Worship Service, 1:30pm

1. Mark Schloneger, pastor of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Church and member of Goshen Mennonite Ministers Committee, served as emcee this session. Music was introduced by John Buschert of Benton Mennonite who played recordings of hymns and shared the sheet music on his screen. Elements of the service include the following
 - Mark welcomed attendees, summarized in minute 2.
 - Mark introduced Aaron Kaufmann who served as IT assistance.
 - A pre-recorded video of various members of IMMC congregations reading portions of Ephesians 2:11-22. Readers included: Ruth Mischler (Benton Mennonite), Lavonne (Berkey Avenue Mennonite), Ben Bouwman (Walnut Hill Mennonite), Rachel Eby (Bonneyville Mennonite), Talashia Keim Yoder (College Mennonite), Merle Hostetler (East Goshen Mennonite), Julian Gonzales (East Goshen Mennonite), Tim Nafziger and Belen Robledo (North Goshen Mennonite), Shin Ye Tan (Walnut Hill Mennonite), Katie Misz (Waterford Mennonite)
 - Singing included, H. 1 “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness”
 - **Congregational Story:**
 - North Goshen Mennonite Church: Izaete Nafziger shared about how the congregation has been challenged to find a new way to be “the church” during COVID-19. Member of North Goshen worked with a local Spanish radio station to distribute meals and assisted them in paying for bills. The church walked alongside members of the community as they struggle with immigration and medical issues. They have opened their parking lot to Maple City Health center to be used as a COVID-19

testing site. This has been a great help to the Latino community and to those who don’t have access to healthcare. Monday to Friday, the church is open and being used as a resource to the community, doing God’s work.

- Ben Bouwman, chair of the Leadership Enhancement Team, introduced pastors who were new to Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference including Quinn Brenneke (Prairie Street Mennonite Church), Cyneatha Millsaps (Prairie Street Mennonite Church), and Grant Miller (Kalamazoo Mennonite Church).
- Ben closed the time and released attendees for a five-minute break.
- Mark welcomed attendees. He reflected on GMMC’s original plans for the weekend and on the loss of not being able to gather in-person. He expressed thankfulness for the ability to gather over Zoom. He also reflected on Juneteenth and how members of IMMC should take the time to celebrate the contributions of African Americans in the church. He introduced the theme verses Ephesians 2:11-22.

Teaching Session 1, 2:00pm

6. Ben Bouwman introduced the guest speaker, Safwat Marzouk (AMBS)
7. Safwat’s topic was: “Built Together: A Biblical Vision for an Intercultural Church”
 - He spoke on the meaning of a “diving wall” as outlined in the Ephesians 2 passage. He challenged listeners to consider their cultural dividing walls and ways to “move from activism to welcome the stranger to embodying integration in our congregations.” To do this, it is important to define culture, multi-cultural and intercultural. He asserts that the church must become intercultural, behaving as, “a covenantal community that cultivates a decartelizing unity and fosters a just diversity. In this covenantal community differences are received as a gift, not a threat; and boundaries are not rigid, but rather porous and mutually negotiated.” The hard work of intercultural competency is necessary and built by five principles: This is God’s Project (Worship), The Need is Mutual, Conversation is Mutual (Mission), Fellowship is Vital, Healthy Boundaries are Necessary (Communion). The time ended with the

reading of *A Prayer on Diversity* written by Swee Ann KOH.

Worshipful Work, 3:30pm

8. Opening. An audio recording of the hymn “Longing for Light” was followed by a word of introduction by Bob Yoder, moderator and member of MLT. Attendees were instructed to have their virtual packets and report books ready. Links to both resources were made available in the chat bar.
9. **Congregational Story.**
 - Waterford Mennonite Church: In a prerecorded video, Cindy Voth shared of three ways that God is building up Waterford MC amidst the pandemic. She reflected on how worship services have moved to being livestreamed. They have learned and grown in their ability to bless one another. She gave an example of times when the congregation offered special blessings over Zoom. They are finding new and creative ways to connect with one another and their community through Zoom: Bible studies, congregational prayer meetings, congregational meetings. There are ways to include those who could not otherwise have been included. 16 women at WMC have sewn masks for the community.
10. **Breakout rooms.** Brenda Meyer, moderator-elect and member of MLT, explained to attendees that they would be put into Zoom break out rooms for 10 minutes. During this time, they were to tell one another their name, congregation and one-way God has been Building Together their congregation during this time.
11. **Minutes.** Bob referred to the Minutes and Proceedings of the June 13-15, 2019 Annual Sessions held at Amigo Center, Sturgis, MI, found on the website and pages 14-22 of the printed report book. These minutes were approved as printed by a very strong affirmative vote.
12. **Conference staff and the MLT were introduced.** Brenda also introduced Shana Peachey Boshart who is the Denominational Minister for Faith and Formation for MCUSA.
13. **Gifts Discernment Team (GDT) report.** Bruce Nofziger, chair introduced the Affirmation ballot, included in the delegate virtual packet. Bruce asked delegates to open the online Affirmation ballot and the link was posted in the chat bar. The Affirmation Form was presented with recommendations by both GDT and MLT for adoption. The vote was taken by delegates selecting Yes or No on each position separately. The Form in the virtual packet also lists those previously affirmed or appointed by MLT to various positions. Delegates were asked to complete the Gifts Inventory, included in the delegate packet and as an online Google Form, for GDT’s future use. Bruce encouraged attendees to think intentionally about nominating people of color and recognized that the leadership teams need to better reflect the make-up of conference.
14. **Stewardship Team (ST) report.** Cindy Steiner, chair, included a variety of items in her report: she noted that affiliation sheets will be sent by mail and email to each congregation and should be passed on to delegates. Cindy reminded delegates of the Capital Fund Grants that are available to congregations. Missional Seeds pledges for 2020 stand at \$14, 268, up from \$11,977 the previous year. She thanked Belmont Mennonite Neighborhood Fellowship, East Goshen Mennonite, Fairhaven Mennonite, Good News Community Chapel, North Goshen Mennonite and Prairie Street Mennonite for their increased giving. The current year’s financial report as of May 31 shows income of \$183,298 and expenses of \$190,177 with a net income of \$6,879. Cindy highlighted the financial support as equipping, resourcing, and training in support of the conference’s mission. The ST expresses many thanks to the conference for its support. Cindy called attention to the 2020-2021 proposed Spending Plan, found on pages 27-28 of the delegate Report Book. The total projected income and expenditures are \$248,900 and \$248,040, respectively. The vote for the Spending Plan was taken online using a Google Form. The link to the ballot was available on the conference webpage and in the chat bar.
15. **Demographic Survey.** Bob gave a brief explanation about the demographic survey that was completed by 35 of the 45 IMMC congregations. This survey consists of 34 questions and is part of the efforts of the MLT to increase intercultural competency and to understand the diverse make-up of IMMC. The following findings are a snapshot of the responses received as of June 19, 2020:
 - 19 congregations responded that they do not have any public congregational statements that refer to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual

orientation, age, educational level or economic level and 13 do. Other questions asked about formal membership, number of delegates sent to Annual Sessions, and the age range of individuals who participate regularly in the congregation. There were questions about economics and education level of individuals in each congregation. The next section concerned comings and goings (i.e. new members, number of withdrawn memberships. Respondents were asked which of the leadership teams they could give a description of. There was also a section asking respondents to reflect on what they learned about their congregations from this survey.

- Bob shared about the six phone calls he's had with pastor who've completed this survey. He is encouraged by the excitement around this topic and that it seems like there is good energy for IMMC to be doing this work.
- He thanked all of those who took the time to complete the survey and shared that this work in intercultural competency will inform MLT goals and focus in the following years.

16. **Closing.** Mark Schloneger gave announcements and John Buschert played a recording of SJ 27 "God of the Bible"

Evening Worship, 7pm

17. Mark Schloneger greeted those who gathered on Zoom and gave a few announcements:

- Register for Seminars taking place on Saturday
- Instructions on how to access the worship livestream
- Donations are being accepted for IMMC congregations who are facing financial hardships. Instructions on how donations can be made were given.
- Viewers were then sent to the College Mennonite Church homepage to watch the worship livestream.

18. Talashia Keim Yoder served as worship leader

- Welcome and prayer, three candles were lit as a visual representation of the three regions of IMMC.
- Congregational Stories
 - Benton Mennonite Church: Rachel Yoder Penner shared about how Benton served and cared for their family after the birth of their daughter. The members and

pastors at Benton Mennonite have walked alongside of them.

- Berkey Avenue Mennonite Church: Lowell Nafziger and Sherm Kauffman explained how their community garden came to be. The garden is available to anyone in the community to use. It has become a place for relationship building.
 - Walnut Hill Mennonite Church: Ben Bouwman, pastor, talked about the year of transition the congregation has experienced. He shared how this transition began with the retirement of pastor Jane Stoltzfus Buller and continuing through the adjustment of moving to an online format. Walnut Hill donates 40% of their budget to missions and supporting Bethany students.
 - Singing, H.55 "Cantemos al Señor" and SJ 13 "My Soul is Filled with Joy"
 - Worship team included: Ben Bouwman, Rhiannon Harrison, Jes Stoltzfus Buller, Linda Lehman Thomas, Theo Budiardja, Jason Harrison
 - Scripture, the video of Ephesians 2:11-22 was played
 - Dan Miller, conference pastor delivered a sermon. See summary in minute 16.
 - Singing, H. 407 "We are People of God's Peace"
 - Response, Talashia Keim Yoder
 - Singing, SJ 73 "The Lord Lift You Up"
 - Blessing, Talashia Keim Yoder
19. Dan's talked about the hostility in the current culture and how Christians should look for a word of transformation from God. He related the divisions between the Jews and Gentiles in the Ephesians passage to the walls of hostility built up in today's culture. He challenged listeners to think on how they are responsible for perpetuating the polarization. Rather than constantly reacting, we are meant to respond as people of peace. He discussed how the hard work of learning to engage cultural differences requires being humble with oneself and others. We are reconciled not by what we do, but by Christ who is our peace. Christ created one new humanity out of two, it is something new. Christ killed the hostility. The differences are not necessarily destroyed, but the hostility between persons has been killed. He quoted Tom Yoder Neufeld, "Peace does not

come about without a life and death struggle...it costs nothing less than the life of the one making peace." Entering Christ's peace is disorienting. Christ's peace is not the destination, but a gift. Jesus turns our values upside down. We are being asked to consider the question: 'Jesus.'" We are being asked to proclaim Jesus in these times.

Saturday, June 20th, 9am- 4:15pm

Morning Worship, 9:00am

20. Bob Yoder, moderator served as worship leader
 - Congregational Story
 - Bonneyville Mennonite Church- Stacey Garten, Bonneyville MC-Stacey shared how the members of Bonneyville supported her family during a difficult custody battle. The congregation was present at the court proceeding when Stacey and her husband were granted custody of their grandson.
 - College Mennonite Church- Daniel Yoder and Talashia Keim Yoder shared how the congregation has been able to serve the community financially and through the food pantry during the circumstances surrounding COVID19. They also announced the launching of a new "This is the Story" an all-age, year long curriculum that takes participants through the entire Bible.
 - Call to worship
 - Singing, SJ 4 "You've Got a Place" and SJ 64 "Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo"
 - Scripture reading, Ephesians 2:11-22
 - Sermon, Joanne Gallardo, Berkey Avenue Mennonite Church
 - Singing, H. 322 "For We Are Strangers No More"
 - Communion, Led by Brenda Meyer, moderator-elect and pastor at Benton Mennonite Church
 - Singing, SS 123 "Let Us Talents and Tongues"
 - Closing by Bob Yoder
21. Joanne Gallardo spoke on what it means to be a household of God. Followers of Christ are one household. A household is home when everyone is here; each person is an important piece of the puzzle. Joanne offered a few guidelines for helping the church live together. First, "leave no one behind." We are not all in this together. Inequality exists and we are not all at the same table experiencing the current reality in the same ways. Leaving no one behind means giving up

some of what we have for those who are wanting. Second, "we talk about things". You can't be built together if you can't talk to one another. Open communication promotes authenticity and pathways to connection. Life together in Christ is like a puzzle, each piece fitting together and making the most sense when they are a part of the whole. One piece missing makes for an incomplete puzzle. Another principle is "believing the best of one another". This isn't conformity but making room for each piece to fit. We are guided by love. Love is something you practice. It must be a habit, something you make a part of your routine. We are called to be guided by love, not a patronizing/all excusing love, but a gentle, intentional love. "Christ seeks to reconcile all things together and to build us together in love is at the heart of the message in Ephesians." "What does it look like to be built together?" "What does it mean to know that not all of us are on equal footing?" It may mean giving up power and control. God's people are a strange people. We are called to live as a strange, but lovely household.

22. Seminars, Saturday, 10:30am-11:45am, three options included:
 - Nekeisha Alayna Alexis, "Intercultural Competency" (two, 45 min sessions)
 - Cory Martin, "Elkhart Jail Ministry"
 - Aileac Deegan, "Dealing with Grief"

Worshipful Work 2, 1:15pm-2:30pm

23. Opening. A recording of "My Life Flows On" was shared by John Buschert as a gathering song.
24. Congregational Story. In a pre-recorded video, Denise Reesor and Joel Holsopple of East Goshen Mennonite Church shared about the impact of the Colossian Way curriculum on their group. They have learned about conflict resolution and how to value the diversity of thought in their congregation. The focus has shifted to what members do share rather than what they do not.
25. Voting Results. Bob Yoder, moderator relayed the results of the votes on accepting the 2019 Annual Sessions Minutes, the GDT Affirmation Slate and the 2020-2021 Spending Plan. All three items received strong votes of approval. Bob then introduced Dave Sutter for the Leadership Enhancement Team Report.
26. Leadership Enhancement Team. Dave Sutter, interim chair of LET, introduced the members of LET including Ben Bouwman, Chris Kauffman,

Kent Miller and the newest member, Andrea Grotenhuis. Dave discussed the following work done by LET:

- Congregational Coach role-LET is working on expanding the role of Congregational Coaches. LET has been speaking with current coaches and congregations to learn what they need in terms of support and training. The updated copy of the ministry description of Congregational Coach is available in the Virtual Packet. Dave highlighted points in the new description and shared his own positive experience with having a congregational coach at Kern Road. LET identified qualities of a congregational coach, identified term limits for coaches, the roles and functions of a congregational coach-congregation connections, identified what congregations can do in the relationship, and highlighted LET's responsibilities to coaches and congregations. LET will be sending out letters to congregations asking for names of people who might be good options for congregational coaches.
 - Framework for Pastoral Growth- Sent to pastors each year and focuses on two of the core competencies. Pastors are encouraged to engage with this and to find a support partner to walk alongside them in this. Dave thanked those who participated this year: Amy Kratzer, Ben Bouwman, Dave Sutter, Brenda Meyer, Dan Schrock, Esther Lanting, Jen Shenk, Katie Misz, Phil Bontrager and Randy Detweiler.
 - Deceased Pastors-Kent Miller read a brief obituary of each pastor who died in 2019-2020. The obituaries are included in the Report Book on page 34: Juliana Bender, Moses Andrew Beachy, Dean Brubaker, Wilma Cender, Paul Gingerich, William Hooley, Rex Jones, Willard Swartley.
27. Congregational Updates. Bob Yoder introduced Sharon Yoder, the conference pastor of leadership transition. Sharon delivered the report on behalf of the Ministry Credentialing Team. Other members of MCT include Ruben Chupp, Angy Moore, Suella Gerber, Phil Waite and Wilma Bailey. Details on the congregational updates are included in the Virtual Packet.
- Dawning of a New Day- Due to health issues, Robert Hunt is no longer able to continue the ministry of Dawning of a New Day. A moment of silence was taken to thank God for his ministry.
 - Lake Bethel Mennonite Church- This congregation chose to affiliate with Evana on August 27, 2019. A moment of silence was taken to thank God for their ministry.
 - North Main Street Mennonite Church- North Main held their last public worship service on July 28, 2019. After the closing of the church, North Main gave many generous financial gifts to organizations made possible by the sale of their properties. A moment of silence was taken to thank God for their ministry.
 - Paoli Mennonite Fellowship- Paoli was a duly affiliated congregation and has chosen to move membership to Central District Conference. A moment of silence was taken to thank God for their ministry.
 - Piedra Viva Mennonite Church-This congregation meets at Sunnyside Mennonite Church, Elkhart, IN and is in process of becoming members of IMMC. Naun Cerrato, pastor of Piedra Viva, has a vision for planting Spanish speaking congregations in the Michiana area.
 - In a prerecorded video, Naun Cerrato offered greetings on behalf of Piedra Viva and thanks to IMMC and Sunnyside for their welcome. He shared his vision for planting peace churches in Elkhart County.
 - Suella Gerber offered a prayer of blessing for Piedra Viva.
28. Brenda Meyer discussed the process on the next two agenda items. Both items, the Tanzania recommendation and Covenant recommendations, will be introduced and then followed by breakout room conversations.
29. Tanzania Recommendation from MLT. Brenda provided background information of the relationship with IMMC and the Shirati Diocese. The Tanzania Affinity group worked to discern whether IMMC should have an official partnership with the Shirati Diocese. They were concerned that both COVID19 and climate change make international travel more difficult. There were also concerns about commitment and energy in conference surrounding this relationship. The MLT considered the recommendation by the affinity group and decided not to continue with

an official partnership. MLT recommended that no official partnership occur.

The three considerations the MLT had were:

- Different expectations from both parties, particularly financial
- MLT wasn't sure they had seen the required energy from IMMC delegates
- The timing, both with COVID and climate change. and also with the work on Intercultural competency, MLT thought it might be better to focus on those congregations already in IMMC.

Sharon asked for questions, there were no questions from attendees.

30. Covenant. Bob Yoder relayed the MLT recommendation to delete the "covenant" section of *Renewing a Vision*, thus eliminating the "signing of the covenant". However, the MLT will continue to focus on strengthening relationships among our congregations. In December of 2017 the MLT paused the covenant idea for three years. MLT tested ideas on covenant with pastor groups and at 2020 Regional Meetings and found support to not continue with the signing of the covenant. Proposed action: The section "Covenant for congregations and credentialed leaders" be removed from the 2017 *Renewing a Vision* document. Bob asked for questions, there were no questions from attendees.

31. Breakout rooms. 10 min.

32. Bob Yoder asked for questions following the breakout rooms. There was one question about the covenant section being there because of legal liability. Bob Yoder noted that IMMC and MLT can take action and are working on reaching out to the congregations who have been inactive and then ask why they are a part of conference and if they want to continue to be.

33. Action. Delegates were asked to vote online on the following action: the section "Covenant for congregations and credentialed leaders" be removed from the 2017 *Renewing a Vision* document.

34. Open mic.

- Marj Rush Hvide thanked the planners for the efforts to move Annual Sessions online
- Bj wrote in the chat bar that she thought Annual Sessions went very well.
- Bob echoed Brenda Meyer's words from the previous day in offering thanks to Anna Board for her work in organizing Annual Sessions. He

also thanked Aaron Kaufman for his good work.

- Bruce Nofziger reminded attendees to fill out the Gifts Inventory Form.
- Millard Graber wrote that the topic this year was very timely. Bob identified the ways that the Holy Spirit influenced this year's topic which now is so fitting in light of current circumstances. The Spirit has been at work in building the conference up in different ways that we can strengthen relationships with each other now to further the reign of God on this earth.
- Prayer. Bob led a time of prayer.
- Completing service on leadership teams. Bob Yoder offered words of commendation to each of the following individuals for their service on their respective leadership teams: Randy Detweiler (MLT), Rose Shetler (Stewardship), Verlin Miller, (Stewardship), Steve Hochstetler-Shirk (Personnel) and Wilma Bailey (MCT).
- Announcements. Mark Schloneger offered last minute announcements about filling out the Gifts Inventory Form, Video recordings of the Friday and Saturday worship services are available online. Attendees were asked to fill out the evaluation. Mark offered thanks to Dan, the the MLT, Anna and Aaron for their flexibility in adjusting to the online format. Annual Sessions 2021 will be at Amigo Centre.
- Prayer. Randy Detweiler offered a prayer of gratitude and blessing.
- Closing remarks. Mark offered thanks to Marty Lehman who served as local coordinator.

Teaching Session 2, 3:00pm

35. Safwat Marzouk's topic for this second session was: "Built Together: The Role of Empathy and Power in Conflict Transformation."

- Safwat began by expressing the importance of narrative in conflict resolution. He used the example of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 36-50. The estrangement the brothers felt in Genesis 42 allowed them to empathize with Joseph's struggle. Justice leads to empathy and empathy leads to transformation. The brothers are transformed, and Joseph is transformed by "breaking the cycle of violence through forgiveness, from a place of power." He made the point that, "When you

are oppressed: your story matters and you are the one who should be telling it.” Safwat spoke on preaching peace through narrative-following the example of Jesus. This requires “engaging in storytelling and listening, sitting with these stories before moving too quickly to do something.” The time concluded with the reading of words by written by Cyneatha Millsaps entitled, *Love Moves at a Snail’s Pace.*”

36. Conclusion and Sending

- Vote on covenant, Bob Yoder reported on the results from the vote on covenant. 51 of 52 votes voted in approval. It was decided to remove that portion from the *Renewing a Vision.*
- Blessing for pastors, Dan Miller lead a prayer of blessing: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”
- Dan invited participants to clap for the GMMC planners and Staff members. Gratitude was expressed for the hard work that went into this Annual Sessions.
- Dan concluded with a prayer of Paul for the church of Ephesus. He offered words of blessing.
- Sending song, SJ 78 “We Will Walk with God”, a prerecorded version of this song was shared by John Buschert.