

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference (PNMC)
Conference Communications Council
“That We May Be One: The Gift of Ecumenical Relationships”
Zoom meeting – February 10, 2024

8:30 - Opening, Welcome and Prayer

Opening and prayer were led by Eric Massanari, PNMC Executive Conference Minister. Eric led with the explanation of the intention of the Conference Communication Council. Eric determined that the council is a time of discernment, gathering for advisement and council, and engagement as we learn together. Acknowledgement was made to Barb Buxman, Administrative Assistant and Brenda Hostetler Kauffman, Communications Coordinator of PNMC for all their work and gifts shared in development of the Council. Eric noted that all 24 congregations have a District Pastor assigned to them including the Hispanic Concilio with Samuel Moran serving this group. A special note was made to remember Samuel and Orfilia Moran as Samuel is dealing with major health issues. The church camp directors Brisa Peacock at Camp CAMREC and Tony & Brenda Kauffman at Drift Creek Camp were acknowledged for their service. Bryce Miller and Megan Ramer were thanked for their help with Zoom formatting and Hosting and Danny Arguello for his work as our Spanish language interpreter.

A video from Grateful.org was viewed with the reminder that each day is a gift and we need to open our eyes and experience the day. This was an introduction to the theme of the council based on the gift of Ecumenical Relationships. The scripture passage used was John 17:17-23, the Passion Narrative in which Jesus prays for the disciples to know the truth and to be one with each other, and that God loves us! We signed using American Sign Language, “the peace of God be with you” in closing.

9:00 am Congregational Roll Call

Representatives were asked to answer, ‘How have you experienced a fulfillment of Jesus prayer, “that they may be one,” in the life of your congregation?’

Zion Mennonite Church- Hubbard, OR – Pastor Steve Bomar recalled that at a recent Church budget meeting the congregation identified priorities with unanimous approval resulting in a larger unity of the congregation.

Western Mennonite – Salem, OR – no report

Shalom Church – Spokane, WA - Jan Yoder reported working with Everence during a time without a pastor, using funds to provide support for a person from Sudan.

Seattle Mennonite Church – Seattle, WA – Megan Ramer reported that they are pleased to have Charlene Epp as an Interim during Megan’s sabbatical. Megan reported the blessing of baby dedications has been a time of collectively receiving the babies as their own children. Also noted that Charlene Epp is the District Pastor for the Chaplaincy of PNMC.

Salem Mennonite Church – Salem, OR – Marg Mobley-Oorthuys reported the congregation’s work on communication skills using the MCC Peaceful Practices study has been uniting the

congregation. The congregation has worked on the using the Doctrine of Discovery also. They have a group who support the LGBTQI community. Salinas Aid is a support group for Palestine they work with as well. Work continues on communication skills with Comunidad Cristiana Vida Nueva with whom they share their building for use.

Prince of Peace Mennonite Church – Anchorage, AK – Alana King-Weaver reports working closely with the New Service Adventure Unit has brought unity in pooling resources to support this group. They have begun meeting in person more regularly but also have many distance members for which they have acquired new speaker technology for use in their Zoom use.

Portland Mennonite Church – Portland, OR – Kristen Swartley reported a oneness through the Family Promise Metro Program, sharing support for a local family in need with other congregations.

Pacific Covenant Mennonite Church – Canby, OR – Wilbur Kauffman reported that simply existing as a congregation is a unifying process. They have discussions of worship sessions.

Mountain View Mennonite Church – Kalispell, MT – Miriam Mauritzen shared that their congregation has been having shared experiences working with Bradley Kauffman as they work through the Voices Together Hymnal. This has allowed the group to make more room in the circle for those with differences.

Ministerios Restauración – Portland, OR - Sylvia Shirk, District Pastor for this group represented the congregation. They have been working with Family Promise Metro program joining other faith communities to help families in need. Nelly Moran-Ascencio has been helping to provide leadership for this group during Pastor Samuel's medical leave.

Meridian Mennonite Church -Meridian, ID – Rick Bollman reports that the name change from formerly Emmaus Christian Fellowship, has made their congregation a more inclusive group to the community. The congregation worked with the Treasure Valley Churches to bring Sarah Augustine to speak of the Document of Discovery and how to honor the Indigenous lands they occupy.

Menno Mennonite – Ritzville, WA – Emily Toews reports the Women in Mission comforters unifies their group. New members from Warden Mennonite have felt a part of the group through this ministry.

Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship – Boise, ID – Jack Swaim reported the unity in their group as they experienced Pastoral turnover with their interim pastor selected having passed away before beginning her role. Everyone in the church has stepped up to keep the ministry going. They look forward to welcoming Weldon Nisly as an interim pastor during their search process.

Iglesia Anabautista Ebenezer- Keizer, OR - Eric reported that Pastor Jesus Fuentes was away at a Pastors meeting. The congregation is doing well, meeting regularly.

First Mennonite Church of Aberdeen – Aberdeen, ID – This group is in transition with Brian Leisher serving as interim.

Filer Mennonite Church – Filer, ID – Ron Hershey reports they have an active card ministry to the missionaries around the world. They send birthday cards to missionaries and their family members with the whole church signing the cards and sending the cards electronically.

Evergreen Mennonite Church – Kirkland WA – Amy Epp has been affirmed in her ministry at Evergreen. The group has had a slow return to in person meetings. They are now having shared meals and a quilt retreat is planned prior to the MCC auction. They also make quilts for the graduates in their congregation.

Evergreen Heights Mennonite Church – Caldwell, ID – Kathy Bilderback reports their service projects include comforters tied for MCC. Their fourth Sunday service is to meet for an early afternoon meal and service project.

Eugene Mennonite Church – Eugene, OR – Steve Kimes reports finding unity in singing four-part harmony. Singing one song with different voices and notes. They also work together to reach out to the homeless assisting with laundry services and taking meals into homeless camps to share meals with residents.

Corvallis Mennonite Fellowship – Corvallis, OR -Cathleen Hockman-Wert reports their group has been working together on the development of a church purpose statement.

Community of Hope Church- Bellingham, WA – Duncan Smith reported that the church is a young church composed of three components. The Wild Church, an Online church and a Queer Theology Sunday School class. They have been participating in local actions ceasefire for Gaza.

Comunidad Cristiana Vida Nueva – Salem, OR – Misael Araujo reports their congregation has been worshipping at Salem Mennonite for 22 years. He describes them as a small group with a great vision. Misael belongs to a national board and is the spokesperson for Hispanic Ministry North West. This ministry has grown extensively in helping immigrants navigate the immigration system. They are asking for help with this ministry.

Bend Mennonite Church – Bend, OR – Pastor Sam Adams reported they meet monthly for a shared meal as part of their practice and find it building unity as the meal is tied with the Lord's supper. Excitement is building with the group looking to host the PNMC Annual meeting in June.

Albany Mennonite Church –Albany, OR - Pastor Peter Epp, reported greater unity as the congregation assimilates a new family with roots in the Assembly and Jehovah Witness churches. They resonated with the Mennonite faith and reclaiming faith as conscious objector status as Mennonites.

Theme: *That We May Be One: The Gift of Ecumenical Relationships*

led by Eric Massanari

Ecumenical is defined as pertaining to the whole Christian church, the Greek word means the whole inhabited world; also, inter-denominationalism, to fulfill unity, heal division and reach out across Christian denominations. Ecumenicalism seeks mutual understanding and affirmation of distinct gifts while respecting differences.

A common humanity is referred to in Mark 9:38-41; Galatians 3:25-28 and Ephesians 4:1-6. In Christ we are all children of God. The body of Christ is likened to singing in harmony. Many early church creeds were developed in light of ecumenical efforts. The World Council of Churches also developed out of ecumenicalism. The main premise of ecumenicalism is aligning primary allegiance to Christ and Christ's love for all.

The Mennonites in Indonesia have a term meaning being called to be peacemakers. Silaturamhi is an Arabic term meaning 'strengthening the bonds of friendship.'

Story Telling

Four groups spoke on their experiences with ecumenical relationships during a time of story -telling.

Mountain View Mennonite Church (Kalispell MT) spoke of having a non-Mennonite pastor during interim and have one-half of their congregation coming from a non-Anabaptist background. Due to distant location (from other Anabaptist groups) they find working with an interfaith network a necessity. The congregants stand with their Jewish community speaking out against anti-Semite actions. Their pianist moves through out the community congregations to provide services for many groups. This provides networking opportunities to work together. They are seeing deep relationships form. They liken these relationships as a Peter/Cornelius relationship. God doesn't show partiality. A word to PNMC about this process is to maintain curiosity.

Seattle Mennonite Church (Seattle WA) – Developing a relationship with Rabbi David and the Kadima Reconstructionist Community in Seattle provides many opportunities to grow community. Recent efforts stopped the construction of a new youth jail from being constructed. The Christian community formed a perimeter around the group as they practiced their ceremonies during heightened threats to the Jewish Community. Both communities have shared naming ceremonies for infant dedications, where the child's name is whispered into their ear. Both are working toward ceasefire efforts in Gaza. They support the Jewish stance for peace which includes not returning to being an occupying force in the lives of others. Working toward ceasefire has been a collective issue and the Jewish community finds the Christian expression missing. Anabaptists have a deep well in the Human One. Mennonite Action provides opportunities to grow community.

Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship (Boise ID) – reports the development of a group of women who extended to the women in the LDS community to help tie comforters. The group has become known as the Knotty Ladies. They collaborate to send comforters through MCC. Through this collaboration they have also developed guest volunteers to work with the homeless increasing this work capacity.

Chaplaincy experience (Portland OR) Stephen Obold-Eshleman spoke of his experience as a hospital chaplain in the Veterans Administration hospital. His duties included preparing the chapel for various services. On Friday's, the chapel was prepared for the Muslim Jumu'ah prayer time inside a Catholic Chapel. The Muslim physician led the prayer time with intercessory prayers for healing. Stephen offered hospitality and was in turn welcomed and invited to participate. Many of the veterans are from the Iraq wars. The Muslim faith has a shared belief in God and view Christians as being on their team. Stephen found more diversity within groups of believers rather than between denominations. His experiences have seen a broad spectrum of religious and political diversity. He relayed the incident of a patient with COVID believing his faith would protect him, not believing in the science of protection. While he offered a prayer for this man, the patient later died.

A break out session was held to discuss what was noticed in the shared stories and what we have to learn from ecumenism.

PNMC Board session

PNMC Board member introductions were made and the board session began with reflections from Eric on Gelassenheit – a yieldedness of faith or a sense of leaving behindness and described as an engagement to turn toward the world and accept pain in light of Christ's love.

Eric named the six churches that have left the PNMC in the last two years. Denominational loss has also been noted within other conferences. Great loss can birth new beginnings. We have seen a hopeful emergence with the activity in the Mennonite Action network. This is a reformation time for churches happening because of forces out of our control and because of choices we have made.

Treasurers report – Dave Hockman-Wert presented reports of the past year 2023 and the budgeted 2024 year. He described a budget squeeze is developing as we have had the lowest budgeted giving in the history of PNMC. We have had the largest deficit since 2008. The budgeted deficit for 2024 is \$51,246.

Chris Nord, board chair thanked Dave for his reporting and offered some options for congregations. He noted that congregational giving has declined by \$50,000 over the last decade. Congregations were asked to examine their budgeted giving and determine if they could give 6% of their overall budget to PNMC. While this is the recommended guideline for giving, know that PNMC is grateful for any level of giving that can be afforded.

The Gifts Discernment Team is seeking nominations for the Board Secretary position and vacant positions. Please reply to Chris Nord with nominees from your congregation.

The meeting was closed with prayer by Chris Nord, Moderator at 12:30 pm PT.

Date for the 2024 PNMC Annual Meeting June 21-23, Bend OR

Register early! <http://pnmc.org>

Submitted,
Julia Todd, PNMC Secretary