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One Body, Many Members: Gathering as a Conference and as a Denomination

Eric Massanari, PNMC Executive Conference Minister

One thing I enjoy about attending churchwide gatherings is the opportunity to reunite with friends and colleagues with whom I cross paths only periodically. Two weeks ago, while in Greensboro, NC for the MC USA biannual convention, I shared a lingering dinner conversation with my friends Sarah Augustine and Sheri Hostetler. We were discussing changes in our makeup and structures as a denomination, and how this is also reflected in conferences, congregations and church organizations. Sheri, who pastors at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, said, “This makes me think of the prayer we offer before every meeting in our congregation.” Sheri proceeded to recite the prayer from memory:

Holy God, whose presence is known in the structures we build and also in their collapse.

Establish in us a community of hope.

Not to contain your mystery, but to be led beyond security into your sacred space.

Amen

It is a wise, vulnerable and courageous prayer to offer, not just with our words but with our lives. The words acknowledge a truth that we do well to remember: **Even if all of the structures, practices, dogmas, rituals, symbols and doctrines that we typically think of when we think of “the church” were to fall away—entirely—the Good News of God’s love in Christ would still be Good News. Love would still find a home in human hearts and in the beating heart and living breath of community.**

Remembering this allows us to hold our identity as Christ-followers in a healthier way. It means we might be released from certain forms of idolatry and taking ourselves too seriously. We might be more ready to critique ourselves than we do others. We might become less reactive and defensive in the ways we express our faith. It means we are freed to be more curious, more open and more creative together. It means God will have more room to move, in and through us.

I value the church. I believe that the Body of Christ has a vital role to play in the mending of a fractured humanity and the healing of our wounded planet. This will be true only insofar as we hold our more familiar notions of “church” in proper perspective, remembering they are a container and not the contents, they are a means and not an end unto themselves. The church naturally and needfully changes over time. 500 years ago there was a pivotal time of great upheaval and reformation in the Body of Christ, and it seems we are experiencing a similar season right now.

Coming together with other churches and conferences, as we do each year for our PNMC Annual Meeting and every two years as a denomination, is an important way in which we nurture the health and continuing emergence of the Body of Christ in the world. As I joined in these two gatherings this summer, I found myself feeling inspired, challenged, and hopeful. Gathering in these ways has become a radical and much needed act of community building in our world today.

PNMC Annual Meeting in Kalispell, MT (June 19-22)

Meeting at an all-inclusive site like the Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp allowed us to really drop-in together for a few days of learning, worship, and community building. We were so warmly welcomed and graciously hosted by the Mountain View Mennonite Church congregation!

Delegate sessions brought two significant decisions: **First, delegates unanimously welcomed Community of Hope Mennonite Church (Bellingham, WA) into full membership in PNMC and MCUSA.** This joyful moment included sharing from several COH members who bore witness to the radical hospitality and innovative expression of church that is found at Community of Hope. **Second, delegates discussed and passed a resolution brought by the PNMC Board, “A Call to Discipleship Amidst a Culture of Christian Nationalism.”** (see the 7/16/25 PNMC *eBulletin* or the [PNMC homepage](https://www.pnmc.org) for the full text). Both of these decisions, and the discernment surrounding them, left me inspired and grateful to be part of a conference that is willing to learn, grow and challenge ourselves to be living witnesses of Christ’s love.

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-Eric Massanari's summer reflection, continued from page 1

Our worship services and seminar sessions were grounded in the Apostle Paul's admonition to "not be conformed to the ways of this world" (Romans 12:2), and instead allow Christ's love to be our center and our ground. In our opening worship, **Glen Guyton**, Executive Director of MCUSA, challenged us to confront false humility in ourselves and in the church, and to "stop making ourselves so small." He offered an inspiring call to claim the leadership roles God has given each of us to fulfill. On night two, **Sarah Augustine**, co-founder and Executive Director of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, invited us to consider the truth of who we are as children of God and remember that we contain within us "the power of stars" as bearers of God's divine image. On Sunday, Pastor **Miriam Mauritzen** (Mountain View Mennonite Church) and **Misael Aruajo** (Comunidad Cristiana Vida Nueva) invited us into a powerful, prophetic reflection on the Good Samaritan story and the pressing, timeless question, "Who is my neighbor?"

A painful element of our gathering were the absences. A number of PNMC congregations were not present, and we recognized that for some this was because it does not feel safe to travel across state lines in this current climate of repressive government policies and actions targeting the immigrant community, people of color, and our transgender and queer siblings in Christ. We felt these absences acutely.

We are excited to share that our next Annual Meeting will be at Albany Mennonite Church in Albany, OR, June 25-28, 2026!



Mennonite Church USA Convention, Greensboro, NC (July 8-12)

A hotel/convention center on the interstate-ringed, cement-draped outskirts of Greensboro was a far cry from the Flathead Valley of Montana. However, the 1,600+ Menno-folk who gathered there for the MC USA *Follow Jesus* assembly brought radiant warmth, vibrant color and enlivening energy that transformed the institutional spaces of a convention center.

In the opening days I was inspired by the variety of seminars inviting participants to follow Jesus with our whole selves—head, heart, body and spirit. Though some seminars were geared specifically to youth or adults, many seminars had an intergenerational attendance. Worship services brought together the whole community—children,

youth and adults of all ages. I appreciate these changes in our denominational assemblies, which in earlier times contained the children, youth and adults in very separate spaces for learning, worship and even mealtimes.

Friday of convention week held the delegate session, and it proved to be a busy day at delegate tables. For a helpful summary of the discernment and decisions you can go to [this page on the MC USA website](#). Highlights for me included the renewed recommitment to advocacy for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as a clear commitment to support the MC USA Safe Church effort and the newly revised [Prevention and Accountability Resource](#) addressing ministerial abuse and misconduct. Delegates did important work on behalf of the entire church, and their work will shape the life of each of our congregations and conferences moving forward.

Similar to our conference gathering in Kalispell, MT two weeks earlier, the most difficult part of the MC USA convention for me was the awareness of who was absent. Together, we must continue to support and advocate for our siblings in Christ who are extremely vulnerable at this time, and who are facing threats of violence and the abuse of their basic human dignity as children of God. Even when they are absent from such gatherings, they must be all the more *present with us* through the power of the Holy Spirit who makes us one.

I want to thank all of you and those who represented your congregations at the PNMC Annual Meeting and at the MC USA Convention. Attendance at these events is a major investment of time and resources. Our presence with one another in these ways is important and it is one meaningful way we join with God in the continued transformation of the church and our world.

PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES



“When we gathered for Annual Conference on Flathead Lake, I was reminded of the blessing to be part of this Mennonite body of Christ. For all that was planned (and I served on the Planning Team), the Holy showed up and sparked for me over and over in the unplanned, in simple unscripted gifts like snagging a paddleboard and casting out onto Flathead Lake at sunset after the evening program only to be dazzled by the ballet of bats waking to the night, diving artfully over the lake clearing the cooling night of mosquitoes. There was the evening conversation with our District Pastor Gary Jewell, another with Peter Epp, and a wonderful wandering walk in the woods with Sylvia Shirk where we found the labyrinth and listened deeply to our souls. There was the joy of meeting Susan Lohrentz, and laughter round table with Mark and Judy Nord. The testimonies of worshippers at Community of Hope hopeful to worship without fences, Sarah sharing the emboldened abusive vial hurled at her while exiting a plane on the byways of life these days and to all who live in brown and black bodies, and Pastor Misael Araujo giving witness to the dangerous roads his congregation faces when all roads to safety seem blocked. These I will carry with me always, let them shape and reshape me. There were the conversations in Sam and Craig’s class as we reflected on the images of Jesus we grew up with and how these images changed...a conversation I continue to reflect on and invite others into as I ponder this holy Jesus that catches me by surprise, comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. And Sarah Augustine gathering us outside to teach us a simple prayer prayed for millennia, a prayer I now pray each day and share in the circle groups I tend at our mental health clinic. I watch as good medicine I received becomes a healing balm for others. Annual Conference came at a time of great discernment. As seasons change, I am grateful to know this body and believe you have so much to share and offer for those who have given up on finding a home in the Beloved Community and still want to believe in the Shalom of God.

Hold fast to what is good...hold fast to one another.”

Mountain View Mennonite Church Interim Pastor, Miriam Mauritzen

“I attended the workshop led by Sarah Augustine. She talked about how we are not separate from creation. Damage to the earth is damage to the body. She challenged us to think about how it might change our view of creation to say that the land is our body? She left me with words of hope and words of challenge: Hope that the spirit of life is on the earth. Creator God generously renews the earth and faithfully brings us each new season. Challenge: In that extractive practices and capitalist systems are destructive to the earth and we should feel obligated to resist them.”

-Angie Nord, AMC

Mark you calendars!

Next year’s Annual Meeting will take place in Albany, OR,
June 25-28, 2026.



The next Conference Communications Council will take place on Zoom,
Saturday, January 31, 2026,
8:30 a.m. — 12:00 p.m.



Please notify office@pnmc.org if you have updates for the Directory.

MDS WA Annual Meeting

Camp CAMREC will host the MDS WA Annual Meeting on **Saturday, August 30** over Labor Day weekend. Accommodations and activities for individuals, kids and families will be available as a part of the Camp for All Ages.

Mennonite Disaster Service

Region 4 Annual Meeting - September 26-27, Portland Mennonite Church

The theme this year is "Learning to Build on Shifting Sands" with scripture from Joshua 1:9: *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."* Living in a time where it feels like so much is transitioning or changing all around us, how does MDS continue be the hands and feet of Jesus in responding to those affected by disasters? We hope you will join us for a time of learning and celebrating the work happening in Region 4. Please spread the word to anyone who would like to learn more about MDS! Additional information can be found at the [here](#).

Mennonite Country Auction, October 4, Menno Mennonite Church, Ritzville, WA

Once again, the Auction Committee is seeking auction items. Hand-crafted items, tickets to events, vacation getaways and other unique items sell well! Please call or email Cleon Claassen at 509-760-3579 or cclaassen@smwireless.net with your items. For quilt donations, contact Debbie Shank Miller at ds56@comcast.net.

The Oregon Mennonite Relief Sale, October 11, Linn County Fairgrounds, Albany, OR

While the sale is several months away, several shops are beginning to gather items:

Sew Much is accepting donations. Fabric pieces should preferably be at least 18" x 22". Notions and accessories are welcome, but no large quilt frames please. Contact Joan Steninger at 360-335-5539 for donation logistics.

Menno Marketplace welcomes the following: hand-crafted items made from fabric, wood, pottery, yarn, paper, etc. Donations of packaged food items are also desired such as maple syrup, honey, coffee beans, or specialty jams and sauces. To donate your hand-crafted items, contact Trudy McKinnell, mckinnell.trudy@gmail.com or Debbie Pauls, debbiepcde@gmail.com.

Used Book Shop is looking for adult and children's books and audiovisual items. Contact Dave Hockman-Wert, dhwert@yahoo.com.

New: We're adding a **Plant Sale** to this year's sale and need your help! Pot up your clippings or extra plants and bring them to donate. All proceeds support Mennonite Central Committee. Let's help things grow—for a good cause!

PNMC CONGREGATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS & MINISTRIES, *continued*

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

PNMHS is seeking a volunteer editor who is willing to write articles for a digital newsletter to be sent to supporters and churches. Background material and supporting information would be provided. The writer is expected to craft an article of approximately 400-500 words to be included in the quarterly newsletter. The article will be included with other information about current PNMHS activities. If interested or desiring more information, please contact Linwood Rush, Board Chair, at 503-260-7480 or by email at rushlin2@gmail.com.

Drift Creek Camp

Register [at this link](#) for the **2025 Fall Quilt Retreat, October 16-19!**

Continued Prayer Request and Support for Ian Morton

We continue to pray for Ian Morton, son of PNMC Moderator, Karla Morton and her husband, Craig. Ian suffered a major stroke in June and continues to do the hard work of rehabilitation and recovery. A *Caring Bridge* site has been established and you can find updates and send well-wishes there: [Ian Michael Morton](#). If you would like to join others in making contributions to help cover the significant costs of Ian's ongoing care you can do that in either of the following ways: (1) [GoFundMe for Ian Morton](#) or (2) Mail a check to Meridian Mennonite Church, where Craig and Karla have served as pastors, and your contribution will help provide matching funds through an Everence matching fund grant.

Thank you!

MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS



Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

Susan Kenagy of Dix Hills, New York, has graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), Elkhart, IN, with a Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies. Kenagy, who completed her certificate from a distance, recently retired from her engineering career at Steinway & Sons in Astoria, New York. She previously earned a Bachelor of Arts in Natural Science from Goshen (IN) College and a Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR.

Her home congregation is Plainview (NY) Reformed Church, a congregation of the Reformed Church in America. She also has roots in Albany (OR) Mennonite Church, a congregation of Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA. She is married to Biene Schaefer, and they have two adult children.

Hispanic Mennonite Church

Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church), Mennonite Church USA's Hispanic constituency group, is postponing its 2025 biennial assembly due to the risk of raids, riots and surveillance. IMH comes together every two years to make decisions, learn, share and renew commitment to God's mission. The IMH executive board decided June 13 to postpone the in-person gathering scheduled for Aug. 28-31 in Dallas. IMH will instead hold a virtual assembly Aug. 30 online. IMH board member Sergio Nava, a member of the pastoral team at Resplandec Church in Pembroke Pines, Fla., said in MC USA's *MenoTicias* [Spanish newsletter](#) that the virtual assembly is intended to be a space for prayer, formation, discernment of next steps and renewal of Hispanic leadership. "This time is also an opportunity to question our dependencies, rethink strategies and trust more radically in the God who sustains us," he said. "You need to unlearn the idea that your success depends exclusively on others. It's time to cultivate a spirituality that renews your hope and inspires you to bear the burdens of others, as Galatians 6:2 teaches."

Upcoming e-Bulletins:

Aug 18 (submissions due by 8/11)
 Sept 1 (submissions due by 8/25)
 Sept 15 (submissions due by 9/8)
 Oct 6 (submissions by 9/29)

If you would like to contribute, please send a brief announcement in Spanish & English with website links to brenda@pnmc.org. Our goal is to provide a valuable resource, not an In-Box jammer. If space is tight, we may omit announcements that are not as pertinent to PNMC. Announcements will run ONE time only, unless specified otherwise. We welcome your feedback!

For more PNMC updates: <http://pnmc.org> e-Bulletin Archives: <http://pnmc.org/Resources/eBulletin>