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Remembering and Reimagining

Eric Massanari, Executive Conference Minister

Remembering an Ordination

On Wednesday, May 6, I marked the 25th anniversary of my ordination. I have not made a practice of celebrating this day in the past, and usually the 6th of May has come and gone without thinking much about it. This year, however, it came to my mind weeks beforehand. I did some math and realized that it was 25 years ago that I stood before the Shalom Mennonite congregation (Newton, KS), along with dear friends and family members, spoke vows of intention and commitment, and received an official looking certificate signed by two conference ministers: Marvin Zehr (Western District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church), and Peter Hartman (South Central Conference of the Mennonite Church). The Shalom congregation was, at that time, dually affiliated with two conferences of what were then two separate denominational bodies.

This year, I chose to mark the anniversary with a day of prayer and walking. I walked my way through favorite parks, through downtown Bellingham, and then along the shoreline of Bellingham Bay. All the while, I let my mind pass over my life, from childhood until now, and focused on the people and events that have been formative on my path and helped me listen more deeply to the winds of the Spirit in my life. Along with the people I expected to remember—many beloved mentors and guides—there were others who came to my heart-mind that surprised me, including people I would have once considered antagonists, adversaries and challengers along the way. I found myself remembering these individuals with the same feeling of gratitude, realizing that they, too, in vital ways, helped me learn, grow, deepen and broaden my understanding of what it means to **live wakefully and love attentively**—to *practice presence*.

“Practicing presence” is how I have come to understand and define the path of ministry in its varied expressions. Whether I’ve served as a congregational pastor, a chaplain, a spiritual director or a conference minister, I’ve found that the deepest ground of these roles has been the same: to practice loving presence with God and with other human beings in the particular relationships and circumstances that shape our life together in this wondrous and wounded world. My hours of walking prayer on May 6th left me feeling immensely privileged and deeply grateful to be on this path that is inspiring and heartbreaking, clarifying and confounding, perennially humbling and always full of new learning—in other words, a path that traverses holy ground wherever it leads. **This holy ground is the ground we all share, and the call to practice loving presence is our shared call from the God who dwells among, within and beyond us.** There is no moment of our lives when we are not given the invitation and opportunity to practice loving presence.

Reimagining a Denomination

The same year that I was ordained (2001), delegates from both the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church voted to merge the two groups into one denominational body, Mennonite Church USA (Mennonite Church Canada was formed as a result of this same decision). This merger came after years of discernment and struggle, and the decision was certainly not without its detractors and sharp critics. As it is with any threshold crossing in life, we were collectively aware that this new venture would bring both loss and gain, pain and possibility. With the history of fracturing and dividing that has been a hallmark of the Body of Christ from its very beginnings, could it work for two separate denominational bodies to actually join in “holy matrimony”? Depending on how you might reflect on the last 25 years of Mennonite Church USA, and from what vantage point you are doing the reflecting, your answer might be an emphatic “Yes” or “No,” or perhaps a still uncertain “Maybe.”

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“Tendril” photo by Yolanda Kauffman



Share a book! At our June gathering in Albany, everyone is invited to come prepared to visit our **"PNMC Little Library"** – where anyone may donate a book (or more!) and take a book home – **free!** Take this opportunity to do a little spring cleaning of your bookshelf and share an engaging story or helpful resource with fellow PNMCers. Any donated books that remain unclaimed at the end of the conference will be taken to the book booth at the **Oregon Mennonite Festival for World Relief**, benefiting Mennonite Central Committee.

Thursday, June 25:

1-4pm Ministry leaders retreat
4:30-7 Ministry leaders picnic
6:30 Registration opens at Albany Mennonite Church
7:30 Opening gathering & Hymn Sing

Friday, June 26:

8:30-10am Morning Worship
10:30—Noon Plenary Session
1:30 Seminar/Activity Period 1
3:15 Seminar/Activity Period 2
Dinner on your own
7-8:30pm Evening Activity

Saturday, June 27:

8:30-10am Morning Worship
10:30—Noon Plenary Session
1:30 Seminar/Activity Period 1
3:15 Seminar/Activity Period 2
Dinner on your own
7-8:30pm Evening Activity

Sunday, June 28:

Morning brunch and concluding worship together at Albany Mennonite Church

[REGISTER HERE](#)

(BY JUNE 1st!)

[Hotel info here!](#)

Seeking Unity Through Nonconformity based on Jesus' sermon on discipleship, Luke 6:17-49:

Worship Speakers – We will gather for worship on **Friday, Saturday** and **Sunday** mornings. Our preachers will include **Dwight Friesen**, Professor of Applied Theology at the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology; **Rachel Ringenberg-Miller**, MCUSA Denominational Minister for Ministerial Leadership; **Rachael Weasley**, Pastor of Community of Hope Church in Bellingham, WA.

Seminar Topics – Friday and Saturday afternoons will include two 75 minute seminar periods, with two seminar offerings during each period. Our seminar topics and presenters will be:

- **"Healthy Congregations and Healthy Leaders"** – **Rachel Ringenberg-Miller**, MCUSA Denominational Minister
- **"Mennonite Action and Faithful Resistance"** – **Julie Allyn**, Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship
- **"Abuse Prevention & Accountability"** – **Duncan Smith**, PNMC Conference Safety Liaison
- **"Ministering with Gen Z"** – **Rob Kirby**, Oregon State University Campus Pastor and **Dwight Friesen**, Professor of Applied Theology at the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology
- **"What Every Church Needs: 5 Core Strategies for Developing a Strong Stewardship Ministry"** – **Steve Bustos**, Everence
- **"Worshiping With the Anabaptist Community Bible and Drawing Near Resources"** – **Cathleen Hockman-Wert** (CMF), **Jaqui Eicher** (Albany Mennonite Church), and **Tyler Merrill** (Seattle Mennonite Church)
- **"The Enneagram and Faith"** – **Marlene Kropf** (Albany Mennonite) and **Cynthia Hockman-Chupp** (Zion Mennonite)
- **"Exploring New Approaches to Baptism and Church Membership"** – **Peter Epp** and **Sara Rempel** (Albany Mennonite)

Evening Activities – On **Thursday, Friday** and **Saturday** evenings we will have opportunities for interactive singing, learning and creating together:

- **Thursday – Hymn Sing!** Once again, we will kick off our annual meeting by joining our voices in a joyful chorus!
- **Friday – "Writing Our Way Together: On Grief, Lament and (somehow) Hope"** – An interactive creative writing workshop for all, led by **Jaqui Eicher**, Chaplain of Mennonite Village.
- **Saturday – "A New World, A New Song,"** **Michael Collier** (Mountain View Mennonite Church) will share about his work establishing the Tacoma Refugee Choir and lead us in more singing together.

Service Opportunity – On **Friday** afternoon, **Jackson Street Youth Services**, serving unhoused youth in Linn and Benton counties (OR), will bring two different service projects to the Albany Mennonite Church for us to help with. This will be a great way to support the local community where we are gathered!

Plenary Sessions – On **Friday** and **Saturday** mornings we will gather as a whole community in 90 minute plenary sessions. Led by **Karla Morton**, PNMC Moderator, and members of the PNMC Board of Directors, we will receive reports from the PNMC board and staff, vote on the 2026 slate of volunteers for conference leadership positions, and join in communal dialog and discernment.

Pre-Conference Contemplative Retreat for Pastors, Chaplains and Other Ministry Leaders – "From Role to Soul: Reflecting on Our Deepest Vocation." On **Thursday** afternoon (1-4pm), **Eric Massanari**, PNMC Executive Conference Minister, will lead our ministry leaders in a time of prayer and reflection on the call to ministry. This retreat, and the picnic dinner following, are open to PNMC pastors, chaplains, leaders of ministry programs, and appointed representatives from our congregation-led churches in PNMC. *(If this includes you, please indicate your plans to attend this retreat and appreciation dinner on the registration form.)*

Register online at www.pnmc.org before June 1. Hotel information is posted. If you intend to book a room, plan early as availability wanes in the summer months. We look forward to seeing you in Albany!

Eric Massanari's reflection continued from page 1 . . .

There have been further fractures and divisions over the last 25 years. Our denomination is roughly half the size it was when MC USA was first formed. There is pain in these stories, wounds that are still tender, and losses to be grieved. Yet, there is also clarity that has emerged, and I, for one, have been feeling a sense of **hopefulness and inspiration at what is possible** at this present moment for the faith community we call Mennonite Church USA.

This is why, when **Glen Guyton**, Executive Director of MC USA, asked if I would serve on the newly forming denominational Restructuring Task Group, a committee charged by the MC USA Executive Board with reimagining the structures of our denominational leadership to better fit our current realities in the church and the needs of our world today, I said yes. Obviously, it was not the exciting name of the committee that convinced me (I am choosing to refer to the group as “The Maybe Committee”), but it was the fact that this feels like the right time to be doing this work.

Our group is an advisory group, serving on behalf of the Executive Board, and we have been working with facilitators from the Foresight Team from the University of Houston. The committee is comprised of 25 people, and one of the things I have most appreciated is the racial/ethnic, gender, age, theological and role diversity of the group. I have also been grateful to have facilitators from outside MC USA who are guiding our process, because it forces us to confront some of our insider-speak, and the presumptions and blinders we bring to the table. For instance, during one of the recent meetings, the lead facilitator asked, “What do you all mean when you use this term ‘ethnic Mennonite?’” You can probably imagine the can of worms opened by such a question, and how revealing and helpful it was to open it!

Our work began with individual interviews with Foresight Team members in March of this year. We were asked wide-ranging questions about our perception of the current realities of our denomination, our hopes, our concerns, our dreams. Those interviews seeded the content for two, in-person gatherings of the committee over the last two months, the first one in April in Chicago, and the second was held this past week in Indianapolis. Our discernment and dialog have been challenging and inspiring as we’ve focused on the question: *How does MC USA need to be structured and oriented (particularly at the Executive Board, denominational staff, and program agency levels) to better serve our conferences and congregations as we engage the challenges of our present moment, and move into an uncertain future?*

The work of the task group continues, and ultimately it will be up to the MC USA Executive Board and the delegate body of the denomination to make needed decisions and changes. For now, what I can say with clarity is that a remarkable group of trustworthy and gifted leaders has been called together to do this work, and I feel privileged to be part of it. Though I am often skeptical of “futurism” efforts, I feel like we began our work in the right place: paying honest, humble attention to at least some of the gifts, the growing edges, the wounds, the successes, the mistakes, that make us who we are as Mennonite Church USA today. And through it all we are recognizing the most important element of this effort: *practicing presence* with the Holy Spirit who is at work among us and within us as the Body of Christ in the world. May we be bold and humble enough to keep doing that together—all of us who seek to follow Christ’s Way of Love.

To learn more about the overall Reimagining process, follow these links: [Reimagining Mennonite Church USA](#) | [Mennonite Church USA](#)

MENNONITE CHURCH USA & OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Feel called to mentor youth?



Become a Service Adventure leader!

WHERE: Anchorage, Alaska or Colorado Springs, Colorado
AGE: 24+ single, married or married with children
TERM: two-year term beginning August 2026
CONTACT: Michael Oyer at MichaelO@MennoniteMission.net

Mennonite Mission Network

Can a gap year change your life? Only if you’re up for adventure! Applications are now open for the 2026-27 term. **Service Adventure** is a 10-month volunteer experience **for young adults ages 17-20**. Live in community with peers and unit leaders, serve with local non-profit agencies, and grow in your faith with a supporting church congregation! Learn more and apply [here](#).

Ages 24+ should contact Michael Oyer at MichaelO@MennoniteMission.net!

Anchorage needs a Service Adventure leader!

Are you sensing God’s call to mentor and guide young adults as they grow in faith, service and community? Want to live in a beautiful place like Anchorage?

Answer the call and become a Service Adventure unit leader! Unit leaders mentor the young adults in the unit and provide some oversight and guidance for the household.

Mennonite Church USA

More than 50 leaders from across MC USA gathered in Chicago, **April 16–18**, for a **Constituency Leaders Council** meeting – a time of worship, learning and shared discernment, facilitated by Moderator-elect Todd Lehman. Follow [this link](#) to read more.

Upcoming e-Bulletins

June 1 (submissions by 5/25)
 June 15 (submissions by 6/8)
 July 20 (submissions by 7/13)
 Aug 3 (submissions by 7/27)

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>