

**WESTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE
E-MEMO**

June 28, 2011

*A weekly communication for:
WDC Churches and Pastors*

WDC Executive Board, Commission, Committee and Task Force members

Any content may be used in bulletins and newsletters and forwarded to congregational leaders and members.

WDC E-Memo is also available at: www.mennowdc.org (Conference Life / Publications)

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Clarence's Clarion Call

More Like the First Century Church Than I Wish

"We want to be like the early church in the book of Acts." As a new pastor, I had a somewhat idyllic perspective on what church life was like in the first century. I was drawn to the single-hearted devotion to the risen Christ. I embraced the enthusiastic proclamation of Jesus as Lord with the bold invitation of "Repent and be baptized." I was amazed at the embodiment of the Jubilee vision of the Old Testament that resulted in generosity and mutuality so "that there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34).

What I conveniently overlooked in my reading of the early church was the stream of ongoing conflict within congregations, between churches, and among church leaders. There was the matter of non-cradle Jewish widows being overlooked in Acts 6, but it was speedily resolved with the appointment of deacons of non-ethnic Jewish background. There was a deeper conflict about God's redemptive mission to the Gentiles and the inclusion of the Gentiles in the one people of God that keeps reappearing throughout the New Testament (Acts 15, Romans 14-15, Galatians 2, Ephesians 2-3). John E. Toews in the Believers Church Bible Commentary on Romans argues that the whole book is written to address this ongoing, festering conflict. This conflict was not only about relationships in the present, but it was also about how one interprets the Holy Scriptures. The early church was dealing with deep and profound differences in interpreting and applying the Scriptures (for them the Old Testament) to their present situation.

When I look at the Mennonite Church and the churches of the Western District Conference, I have to say that we are more like the first century church than I wish. The recent Leadership Commission action of finding a pastor's credentials in order after

performing a same-sex covenant service has moved us right into the conflict stream of the early church of explicating again the nature of sin, the reach of salvation, and the unity of the church. We are creating space in the agenda of our Assembly, July 29-30, to address the concern and conflict emerging from the Leadership Commission action. We expect that what we hear from the delegates will shape the work of the leadership of Western District Conference in the coming year.

As Western District Conference (WDC) Minister I see one of my roles in conflict is to pastor the processes of communication and decision making while sharing the load with the appropriate governing entities within WDC and with working groups that might be appointed by Executive Board.

At a deeper level, I take my commissioning as Conference Minister in Waxahachie, Texas, very seriously. In that service I was asked and promised to be constant in prayer, a faithful interpreter of scripture, a pursuer of the truth, and a proclaimer of the Word of God as it is understood and practiced in Mennonite Church USA.

For the prayer part I have made a commitment to pray the following prayer daily for the churches of Western District Conference and for our fellowship as a whole leading up to Assembly. I pray “that [our] love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that [we] may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11). I invite you to pray with me.

Prayer Requests

July 3 – Pray for our youth and delegates attending the Mennonite Church USA Convention in Pittsburgh this week under the theme, “Bridges to the Cross.” Pray for fruitful consideration of “The Purposeful Plan” for delegates. Pray for strong commitments to Christ and the path of discipleship for youth.

July 10 – For our Western District Conference, pray “that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11).

July 17 – Pray for two new working groups getting underway in Western District Conference – the Human Sexuality Discernment Task Force and the Church Planting Task Force.

July 24 – Pray for the Western District Conference Assembly, “Make No Excuses, Simply Come to the Banquet!” gathering at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, July 29-30. Pray for Sara Wenger Shenk, President of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and our keynote speaker, and all those leading Learning Tracks.

July 31 – Thank God for our Western District Conference Assembly – for inspiration received, for lessons learned, and for guidance given. Pray that our vision would be fruitfully lived out to:

Witness and invite others to faith in Jesus Christ,
Dwell in just and loving relationships, and
Connect to God's mission in the world.

Coming Events

July 4-9 – MC USA Convention, Pittsburg, PA

July 29-30 – WDC Annual Assembly, North Newton, KS

August 6-7 – Young Adult Retreat, Camp Mennoscah

August 23 – Let's Talk About...the future of Sunday School, WDC office

August 20 – Day on the Farm, rural Hillsboro

September 4-5 – Mental Health Spiritual Retreat, Camp Mennoscah

September 9-11 – Women & Girls Retreat, Camp Mennoscah

September 18-22 – Work & Play Camp, Camp Mennoscah

November 11-12 – Sister Care Workshop, sponsored by Mennonite Women USA, Central Kansas

Parish Paper

View the July issue of The Parish Paper at www.mennowdc.org (Conference Life / Publications). The topic is "How to Select Quality Staff".

WDC Announcements

1. Western District Conference Annual Assembly - A Premier Resourcing Event!

This year, congregations are encouraged to choose delegates, or encourage participation from non-delegates, based upon their leadership responsibilities and openness to gaining new ideas that can be used back home. A large portion of the schedule is devoted to worship services and resourcing events called Learning Tracks. In a 3-hour time block, persons can gain information and some practical action ideas on a variety of topics. Registration brochures for the WDC annual assembly sessions are available in the church office or at www.mennowdc.org. For any of you who are in a formal Sister Church Partnership and for those who would like to explore this opportunity to form friendships and relationships between Hispanic and Anglo congregations, we invite you to a conversation on Friday night, July 29 at 9 pm (after worship) in the Bethel College Church Fellowship Hall. Gilberto Flores, Associate Conference Minister for Texas will guide the group in: enhancing relationships, exploring different venues for communication and connectedness, understanding the value of a building bridges approach (in a cultural sense), discovering the appropriate role of committees in managing this relationship and how we can learn together, and grow together: a missional engagement. Plan now to attend this important time!

2. Available at the WDC Conference Resource Library - a set of 3 DVDs containing Ervin Stutzman's messages at the South Central Conference Family Festival held June 10-12 in Hesston, KS. These messages were prepared as part of the Festival theme: "Investing in Hope: Planning Together for a Christ Centered Future. Their titles and

texts are as follows: "Hope Nurtured by the Holy Spirit" based on Romans 8:18-28; "The Hope Encouraged by Scripture" based on Romans 15:1-7; "An Overflow of Hope by the Power of the Holy Spirit" based on Romans 5:1-5; 12:12; and 15:13. The DVDs contain the entire worship services which include a 3-part drama, scripture read in both English and Spanish, and a variety of music.

3. Where can your children or grandchildren ride a horse, try to catch a pig, pet farm animals, milk a goat, or take a ride on a wagon pulled by a tractor or horses? At the 16th annual *Day on the Farm* held at the Duerksen/Knepp farm northeast of Goessel, KS on Saturday, August 20 10 am. This family event is designed to help children from towns and cities connect with the rural upbringing of many of their parents or grandparents. This year's *Day on the Farm* will again feature the red-carpet arrival of Willie the pig. The event is free so make plans now to attend. More information can be found on the Western District website <www.mennowdc.org> under upcoming events.

4. It's hot and the new pool at Camp Mennoscah is a welcome relief for our campers. The pool was finished and filled in time for the first children's camp. Final payment to the pool construction company is now due. If you have been putting off making that contribution for the pool now is a good time to send it in. We still need \$70,000 to cover the complete costs of the pool. We also need 6 more individuals/families to give \$2,000 each. Your gift of \$2,000 will turn into \$3,000 thanks to a challenge grant. Please send your contributions to Western District Conference, PO Box 306, North Newton, KS 67117 and mark your checks "Camp Pool". You can also donate using your debit/credit card on the WDC website <www.mennowdc.org>.

MC USA Announcements

1. Volunteers wanted! MVS has high-need positions with Habitat for Humanity International and Ten Thousand Villages. Also volunteers are needed to coordinate refugee childcare, repair homes for low-income families, build LEED-certified homes, and assist at a homeless shelter. Visit Service.MennoniteMission.net or email JillS@mennonitemission.net for more info. Orientation begins on August 7, 2011 in San Antonio.

2. We encourage you to share *Prayers for Faith and Learning* (attached) with others. The document is set up so it can be a bulletin insert or distributed in church mail boxes. Some churches choose specific prayer requests to include in their weekly bulletins. Congregations or individuals who are interested in a free subscription to *Prayers for Faith and Learning* (or other MEA publications) may subscribe online at www.MennoniteEducation.org/Subscribe. Thank you for the many ways you support Mennonite education!

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