



**New York
Mennonite
Conference**

An area conference of
Mennonite Church USA

LIFE

In New York Mennonite Conference

Keeping Our Eyes on the Goal

LeRoy and Sherri Mast

2008 is here. Often we continue the race with little thought. Paul reminds us not to race aimlessly so that we'll be disqualified at the end but to keep our eyes on our goal, following the track that is laid out for us, 1 Cor 9:24-27. (Paul would've used the NASCAR metaphor had he lived in our area of the world.) Is a pit stop needed? At times we need others to help us examine ourselves to make certain we're in shape for the race, helping us to stay on the track. The Crew Chief (Christ) has qualified persons to assist us in the race. Our prayer is that each of us will stay on track allowing the Crew Chief to make adjustments as track conditions change. Expect the track to challenge your best skills. Have a great 2008, full of joy, opportunities and challenges.



LeRoy and Sherri Mast, following the track

Save the Dates:

Ordination of Connie Finney ✂ **January 20, 2008**
at Sojourners Mennonite Fellowship

Leadership Seminar ✂ **February 1-3, 2008**
at Clarence Center-Akron Mennonite Church

Delegate Assembly ✂ **April 5, 2008**
in Auburn, NY

Peace Conference ✂ **April 11-12, 2008**
in Washington DC

Constituency Leaders Council

Terry Zehr

The CLC (Constituency Leaders Council) met in Colorado Springs on October 15-17th. As usual the agenda was very full. Our conversations included several major issues we are prioritizing as a denomination.

Anti-Racism continues to be a complex, emotional issue. As a test, the CLC was segregated into table groups of racial/ethnic, women, and Anglo men. The meeting dynamic changed. During a discussion on racial/ethnic issues, the 'white' male tables struggled, while the women and racial/ethnic groups engaged quickly. Frankly, I was uncomfortable. This is an issue that I need to listen to others, not propose solutions. As a white middle aged, middle class male, in a rural village, my awareness around racial/ethnic issues is limited. I think my table felt the same way. We need to learn. There continue to be strong emotions around this topic, but my sense is that there is good faith in what needs to be done.

LeRoy and I both came away from this meeting a bit troubled. New York has most certainly become more homogeneous over the last decade, and our urban presence has diminished. This priority can be very interesting if we get serious about it.

We were also made uncomfortably aware of the movement by CLC toward unequal male/female representation. Women currently make up less than one in five CLC representatives. This is troubling, and was also a mirror for us in New York. We've only ever had male representatives to CLC and our Coordinating Council has only briefly had more than one female on it at any given time, until now.

Coming out of San José, the Health-care Access Action is a hot topic. In light of obvious brokenness in the health care system of the United States, and its resulting inequities, Mennonite Church USA is starting with a modest initiative. Can we form a true mutual aid program that offers health care coverage for all pastors of MC USA? This connects with issues of immigration, inequities along racial/ethnic lines, and affordability by hundreds of small congregations staffed by part time or volunteer pastors. CLC has been a major contributor to this conversation as it continues to move forward. A major question remains... do we still carry a vision for Mutual Aid?

At San José, the beginning of a new dialogue emerged. What are the lines of authority that Conferences have regarding discipline of congregations which diverge from confessional norms in issues of faith and life? Should conferences carry this authority, as we relate within an organizational structure? The discussion was vigorous and will be on-going.

I left this gathering with a sense of unity. On the second day, when meeting weariness usually sets in, I noticed how easily we were able to laugh together. The stress, even in the midst of thorny questions, was low. The sense was that we can work and worship together. LeRoy and I agreed that it was the best CLC we've attended yet. Our next gathering is March 31 - April 2 down in Laurelville, PA.

January 2008

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News from Conference Congregations

Editor: Kirk House

Pleasant Valley: Moving Next Door

In December Pleasant Valley Mennonite finalized sale of its original church property, including the building. But its move was a short one.

Nearly 50 years ago the church purchased the disused Pleasant Valley School and used it for meetings. When that building burned, members erected a purpose-built church facility.

The school/church ground was part of a tract donated in 1795 by land agent Charles Williamson, for school and cemetery use. When the Mennonites entered the picture the school part of the parcel was subdivided, with the other half going to the Moose Lodge.

When the Moose Lodge finally disbanded, their building became a restaurant—when the restaurant closed, the church bought it, reuniting the subdivided segments. They named the new facility Pleasant Valley Celebration Hall.

It soon became clear that the Celebration Hall (all on one level) was better suited for a 21st-century church facility, especially with an aging congregation. The old church was mothballed to save expenses, and will now become a private home and boat shop.

Colonel Williamson's hopes 212 years ago are still being fulfilled, with Pleasant Valley Cemetery and Pleasant Valley Mennonite Church still serving the community.

Clarence Center: Mental Health Support Group

Clarence Center is starting a support group for people struggling with depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and other mental health issues—either their own, or those of a friend or loved one. It will be a way for members to receive encouragement and to realize that they are not the only one in our congregation dealing with such difficulties. This group is forming in response to the interest generated out of the church's recent educational courses dealing with mental illness. Sessions will focus on a topic each time, but will have plenty of time for members to hear each others' stories, struggles and victories as we journey together toward healing.

Lowville

Sewing Circle Gathers a Bundle

In November the Faithful Workers Sewing Circle sewed five baby layettes and tied five quilts—four of them 60 by 80, and the other one a twin quilt. They gathered two school kits, six health kits, six knitted and crocheted items, 6 3/4 yards of fabric, three pounds of used clothing, six Christmas bundles, and \$190, in addition to 26 relief kits from the church.

Small Groups

Several special-interest small groups are operating in Lowville. These include:

- Peaceful Parenting
- Men's Connection Group
- Spirituality/Spiritual Formation Group
- Stories: How Mennonites Came to Be
- Fellowship Group
- Men's Coffee Hour

Lowville Volunteer in Vietnam

Since 1997 Donna Zehr Keener and her family have been serving in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Vietnam. Donna, who grew up in the Lowville congregation, teaches in the Saigon South International School. They went to Vietnam through Eastern Mennonite Missions, and now Mennonites have been licensed to operate throughout the country, giving them more opportunities for church leadership development.

Donna reports that Christmas in Vietnam is in many ways like Christmas in the US—commercial frenzy, heightened devotion, and new opportunities to tell the Gospel.

Christocentric Challenge

Lowville and Pine Grove Mennonite Churches met together in November for their Fall Spiritual Life Meetings. Dan Ziegler, president of Rosedale Bible College, spoke of being Christocentric—coming to all scripture through Jesus Christ.

Ziegler, who did not have a Mennonite upbringing, stressed being Christocentric through non-resistance and non-conformity.

Chair and MC USA Resource Advocate: Sue Klassen
Prayer: Mary Hoyer
Stewardship: Evan Zehr
Worship: Ben Lipscomb
Youth: Billy Dickerson

Judy Shean Becomes Treasurer

Terry Zehr, Moderator

It took a bit of doing, and we are late, but we finally have a new Conference Treasurer. Last fall, at Delegate Assembly, a candidate had not yet emerged, so we ended up going through a unique



Judy Shean

process. After recommendation by Leadership Commission and approval by Coordinating Council, we did an email ballot for Delegates. It took a bit of doing, but we received strong affirmation from the delegates who responded. Judy Shean (Watertown Mennonite Church), is joining Coordinating Council and will chair the Finance Commission. Judy is an elder at WMC and has a strong financial background, which prepares her well for this task. Please welcome Judy with your prayers and support as she begins her term.

Our next Coordinating Council meeting—Judy's first—is January 12th. We'd love your prayer support.

Register now! Leadership Seminar, February 1–3, 2008 at Clarence Center-Akron Mennonite Church!

Registration forms have been sent out to congregations; call Gene Miller for more information.

Prayer Request

Please hold LeRoy and Sherri Mast in prayer as they grieve the recent death of LeRoy's father.

Congregational Resourcing Commission

Chair and MC USA Resource Advocate: Sue Klassen
Christian Education: Chrissie Walls
Mennonite Women: Michelle Thomas
MCC and Pastors' Spouses: Sherry Mast
Peace and Justice: Jennie Harland