

# KC2015 Currents

Thursday, July 2, 2015  
Kansas City, Missouri

Produced for Mennonite Church USA convention by  
Bluffton University students, faculty and alumni



## In this issue

- Delegate Session 2-3
- Conversation Room 4
- Wailing Wall/Youth&Sexuality 5
- Panic Squad/Person's of Color 6
- Updates & Announcements 7



Photo Credit: Meg Short

*Delegates gather to deliberate the resolution on Faithful Witness Amid Endless War, Wednesday, July 1, 2015, Kansas City, MO*

## Mennonites find agreement in peace church principles

*By Caitlin Nearhood*

Wednesday's morning delegate session called for discerned decision-making in anticipation of considering two resolutions that day. Almost 900 people attended the session.

Rick Stiffney, CEO of MHS, gave the opening testimony about how MHS strengthens Mennonite-affiliated health and human service ministries. He connected with the Emmaus Road story in sharing about Bluestem Communities of North Newton and Hesston, Kansas; Sunnyside Retirement Community in Sarasota, Florida; and Kings View Behavioral Health Systems in central California.

"In each of these stories MHS was in some way instrumental; each of us was wounded and we were all on the road," he said. "In spite of that, God's spirit breaks in, and when that happens, we remember why we do this work."

Executive Director Ervin Stutzman referenced the Guidelines for Biblical/Communal Discernment reference document as he elaborated on the meaning of discernment, weaving personal stories into detailed discussion because it's "a vague term that needs review."

"So much of discernment is asking what God's up to in this situation," Stutzman said. "We're speaking about this because we're a witness to the world."

"How is God acting, and how do we align with God?" he asked. "We bring our issues, our fears, our faults ... and see what Jesus can do among us."

Jane Hooper Peifer invited delegates to listen to Psalm 139.

"Trust is an important element in communal discernment," Jane Hooper Peifer added, noting that there are different ways to discern God's will. "We must acknowledge our deep need to rely on the Holy Spirit."

Delegates considered and passed the "Faithful

Witness Amid Endless War" resolution, which calls for a recommitment to the way of peace and a rejection of mechanized (drone) warfare technologies and calls congregations to trust God, not modern warfare, for security.

Soto Albrecht invited two sponsors of the resolution to introduce it: Clair Good and Ruth Harder.

"If it is adopted, this wouldn't be bragging rights for Mennonites," said Harder, pastor of Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City, Kansas. "We must work on understanding and living Jesus' nonviolent lifestyle."

"I believe it's a moral calling as a peace church," said Good, motioning toward a small drone model onstage to describe the urgency of passing the resolution.

He called for "assertive grace" that reaches across boundaries and humanizes the enemy.

"We will never experience transformation by blowing our enemies up by pushing an impersonal button on a television screen," he said. "Let us instead try to find ways to eat at the table with our enemies and experience a new anointing of God's presence."

After table discussions, delegates voiced questions, comments and concerns in an open mic time. Table leaders reported on the discussions at their table for the board to consider.

An amendment was proposed to the resolution calling for an "... immediate ban on research, development, production and deployment of robotic and autonomous weapons, including military drones, and associated artificial intelligence technologies — placing them in the same category as chemical and biological weapons."

Both the resolution and the amendment passed with broad, but not unanimous, support.

# Delegates commit to peaceful deliberations

By Caitlin Nearhood



Photo Credit: Meg Short

*Meg Lumsdaine addresses the Executive Board and calls for greater diversity. Wednesday, July 1, 2015, Kansas City, MO*

Delegates remained divided on the Israel-Palestine Resolution at the end of Wednesday's second delegate session. After two preliminary surveys using green, yellow and red sheets of paper to indicate levels of support for the resolution, delegates voted by ballot to decide whether to table the vote on the resolution until the next assembly in 2017. This tallied vote will be announced at Thursday morning's session.

Moderator-elect Patricia Shelly invited supporters of the resolution to speak, including Tom Harder, pastor of Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kansas, who reiterated the resolution's opposition to Israel's military occupation of Palestine.

"This resolution is not anti-Jew or anti-Israeli; this condemns violence on all sides, including the United States' government support of it," he said. "This [resolution] affirms nonviolent acts of love and peace to all people of Israel-Palestine." He noted that Everence, the stewardship agency of Mennonite Church USA, supports the resolution.

During an open mic sharing time, Gary Nabors of East Peoria, Illinois, suggested tabling the resolution until 2017 to be rewritten, calling it "edgy," which he feels is against the Mennonite faith and beliefs.

Femi Fatunmbi, a pastor at Royal Dominion International Church in Los Angeles, reminded delegates of the purpose behind the resolution.

"We don't want to be pro-Israel or pro-Palestine; we want to be pro-peace," he said. "[This resolution] has to be passed if we want to be a peace church."

In addition, delegates approved a response to the Executive Board's statement of confession in an April pastoral letter to delegates. Clyde Kratz, executive conference minister for Virginia Mennonite Conference, along with nine delegates from three area conferences, proposed a resolution acknowledging that the assembly had heard the Executive Board's confession and offering forgiveness. The resolution passed with broad but not unanimous support.

In other business, delegates approved updating goals for the next two years for the Purposeful Plan, a list of churchwide priorities in Christian formation, Christian community, holistic Christian witness, stewardship, leadership development, advancing intercultural transformation and undoing racism, and church-to-church relationships. Stutzman noted how the goals from the previous two years have changed "dramatically" in response to national and global events.

Additionally, the majority of delegates affirmed the nominees for churchwide boards that the Leadership Discernment Committee had presented in Tuesday's delegate assembly session.



Photo Credit: Meg Short

*Wednesday, July 1, 2015, Kansas City, MO*

# Conversation rooms promote dialogue on contentious issues

By Brianna R. Lugibihl



Photo Credit: Meg Short

*Loretta Miller listens as group members express views concerning ISIS, Tuesday, July 1, 2015, in Kansas City, MO*

Twenty-three convention participants gathered on Wednesday afternoon to share views regarding the proper Christian response to the rise of terrorist organizations. This session opened the first of seven “conversation rooms” with today’s event titled, “The Challenges of ISIS to Christian Peacemakers.” Participants discussed topics including types and degrees of military intervention, export control of weapons and the nature of internal conflicts both domestically and abroad. Barry Bartel, an attorney from Denver, Colorado and member of the Dialogue Resource Team of Mountain States Mennonite Conference and Elizabeth Troyer-Miller, a conflict specialist from Central Mediation Center, facilitated the discussions.

“There are other places in the convention where decisions are made; that is the delegate body. There are spaces where people with expertise and training share their expertise; those are the seminars and workshops,” said Bartel. “But it seems to be important to have a place to share and listen to other people’s perspectives on topics where we know there is disagreement in the church and a space where there is no expectation for a decision to be made.”

Bartel and Troyer-Miller divided participants into groups and sat in circles facing each other before designating a time keeper for each group. They then provided process guidelines: only two minutes of sharing can occur while holding the “talking pamphlet,” also known as a “speaker’s staff,” or “talking stick.” Speakers were required to summarize the previous viewpoint before passing the pamphlet and each individual was asked to respectfully address others’ viewpoints when sharing one’s own. After 40 minutes of discussion, the groups reunited and participants discussed the results of the discussion process.

“I felt like a lot of the people in my group felt we weren’t as educated as we wanted to be. It was a bit of a shock,” said Mary Emile-Wagler, a participant from First Mennonite Church of Hutchinson. “But you could see all of the different eras we grew up in. That was my favorite part.”

Event coordinator Andre Gingerich Stoner, director of Interchurch Relations and Holistic Witness for Mennonite Church USA, said that these types of conversations have the potential to have significant impact on Mennonite Church USA. “People haven’t found ways to have the honest conversations about important topics where there are differences, and there are settings between congregations and pastors who worship five to 10 miles apart who have never had real conversations with each other,” Stoner Gingerich said.

“I suppose it would be ideal if we could work ourselves out of a job. If the church has a capacity to have this conversation as a part of its normal life, maybe the conversation room wouldn’t be needed or important,” Bartel said.

The conversation rooms were first held at the 2011 Mennonite Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, inspired by the work of Ron Claassen, co-Founder and director emeritus of the Fresno Pacific University Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, and Roxanne Claassen, co-authors of “Discipline That Restores.” Conversation rooms are intended to facilitate conversation on contentious issues without the need for resolution, Bartel said.

The conversation room is located in room 2215C of the convention center will continue to host events on a variety of topics throughout the week.

# Wailing wall creates space for lament

By Kenny Beeker

The Wailing Wall, an interactive installation set up in the exhibit hall this week, will serve as a place of prayer, reflection, and acknowledgment of pain, said display organizers. Installation coordinator Mary Lehman Yoder said she hopes the Wall will serve to, “name the laments and pains,” and “honor the experiences,” of those that have suffered from sexual abuse or violence. Organizers drew the name from the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, indicating a place for laments and prayers in the tradition of the Psalms.

Anita Lehman, who served as the artistic voice behind the project, said she hopes anyone having dealt with sexual abuse will come to the wall to “address their laments directly to God.” The project “addresses the specific pain of those that have experienced sexual abuse,” she said.

Visitors are encouraged to write down their lament and integrate the slip of paper into the installation. Laments pinned to the wall can be read by anyone. Laments folded and tucked inside the Wall will only be read by three people committed to prayer over these laments. Laments closed and taped, will, as the sign at the wall reads, “remain confidential, intended only for the One whose eyes and ears and heart are always open to us.” Participants are welcome to include their names or to submit their laments and prayers anonymously.

The idea for the installation was generated by the Discernment Group of Mennonite Church USA as a way to address issues of sexual violence within the church. Conversation about the installation began in response to the recent revelations involving the sexual misconduct of noted Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, Lehman Yoder said, but the concept was widened to include the larger issue of sexual violence in the church. “We all need to be more candid about sexual abuse. It happens,” Lehman Yoder said. She said that she hopes the wall will serve as a way to bring the topic into the light of public awareness and serve as a way to “name the reality of sexual abuse.” She also hopes the installation will serve to foster conversations leading to “healthy relationships between men and women.”

The Wailing Wall will remain for throughout convention and can be located at the south end of the Exhibit Hall.



Photo Credit: Meg Short  
Wednesday, July 1, 2015, Kansas City,  
Missouri.

# Speaker urges youth to reject worldly definitions of sexuality

By Venessa Owsley

Young Christians should be aware of a number of contemporary industries that profit from producing low self-esteem in consumers and make choices based on biblical themes of love and respect, said a speaker at a youth seminar held on Wednesday morning. Dr. Rachel Swartzendruber Miller, vice president of admissions at Hesston College, addressed issues of over-sexualization and human objectification in media and advertising and offered ideas for how to respond according to a biblical perspective.

Swartzendruber Miller identified and critiqued a number of industries, such as cosmetics, plastic surgery, and pornography sectors, that profit from exploiting fears and insecurities of young consumers. Swartzendruber Miller used examples of advertisements found in magazines to show the audience how these advertisements attempt to manipulate viewers into purchasing products. She drew examples from a number of companies including American Apparel and Burger King. Swartzendruber Miller touched on what she called our culture’s “fitness obsession” that contributes to eating disorders, insecurities and anxiety, if one does not fit into the “fit and skinny” category depicted in the advertisements.

Swartzendruber Miller highlighted major themes common in many advertisements; women are pictured as helpless and disposable, while men are depicted dominant and “tough.” These images and messages contributes to major issues in our society such as sexism, oppressive gender stereotypes and increased sexual violence, Swartzendruber Miller said. In contrast, she cited Galatians 3:28, that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” All are created in God’s image and we should cling to this truth, Swartzendruber Miller said. She also cited Psalm 39:14 and Corinthians 6:19-20 as biblical texts that reinforce the truth that God loves and accepts all.

Swartzendruber Miller challenged the audience not to support those institutions and industries that contribute to social and personal dysfunctions. She called for the youth to choose “modesty” and make choices based on self-respect, social awareness and a respect for others. She concluded by reminding attendees that they are loved as they are by God challenged them to “look past the skin.”

# Panic Squad as popular as potlucks

By Brianna R. Lugibihl

Thousands of hands encored as professional improv troupe, Panic Squad, performed Wednesday night. Over 900 Mennonites packed the former delegate hall following nightly worship to welcome the troupe from northeast Washington as they challenged the stereotypes of clean humor with over 20 accents, 10 flights of imaginary stairs, and intense audience participation, while answering the deepest questions of life, like “What would you do for a Klondike bar?”

“It sends the message that we have no boundaries to ourselves, even if we don’t use profanity or crude humor,” said audience volunteer Madison Hofer-Holdeman. “I like how they turned my family into adorable improv.”

Andrew Bright, Panic Squad Founder, with Dann Warick and Elijah Tameda, serenaded the audience with musical comedy therapy sessions, begged sound effects from the crowd, and used audience suggestions in the name of clean comedy. “Some improv groups take the art form very serious and don’t break that imaginary wall between them and the audience. We found that being ourselves and vulnerable with the audience is more important than being perfect in the craft,” Bright said.

Alex Harsha and Cassidy Bush from First Mennonite in Bluffton, Ohio, were impressed with the quality of comedic content in the performance. “I laughed so hard that my face hurts and I was impressed that they stayed in character. They did a good job of staying clean,” Harsha said.

“Our ultimate goal is that following our show, Mennonites will equate the Panic Squad show on the same level as they do potlucks at home,” said Bright. “I would say excellence is a big deal to us, you know there are stereotypes around us about clean comedy and people equate clean comedy with church comedy. We are comedians who work hard to put together a clean good show and showcase that for people who might have thought otherwise before the show,” he said.

Tameda, the musical therapist of the group, was introduced to Panic Squad on his first date at age 16 when the troupe asked him into stage as a volunteer. Three years later, he joined the troupe wielding a piano and a sense of humor. “Good, clean comedy is refreshing, so when our show is over and people come up to us and say that their faces hurt and stomach muscles ache or they really needed that, that would be our goal at convention,” says Tameda.

Tiffany Hildebrand, a convention attendee from Douglas Mennonite in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, said she looks forward to seeing the troupe again in the future.

“I think most comedy is sexual and dirty, and clean comedy is a nice change from what you see usually,” she said.

Bright and Dave Swan, two improvisationalists originally associated with Trinity Western University’s three man improv troupe Courtesy Laughs, formed Panic Squad in 1996. The troupe now includes 11 members from the United States, Canada, and British Columbia that perform in groups of three based on the event, geography, and availability. Bright coordinates the operation full time and led the team at Kansas City 2015 as Panic Squad’s third appearance at convention following Charlotte 2005 and San Jose 2007.

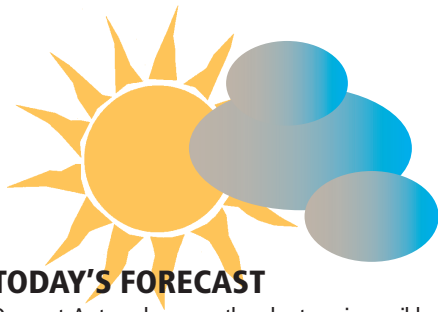
“The inspiration for me is hearing the laughs from the audience and that is an affirmation that I am using the way God made me,” Bright said.



Photo Credit: Meg Short  
*Andrew Bright and Elijah Tameda improvise skit from teen’s smart phone, Tuesday, July 1, 2015, in Kansas City, MO*



Photo Credit: Meg Short  
*Panic Squad begs audience participation, Tuesday, July 1, 2015, in Kansas City, MO*



### TODAY'S FORECAST

Overcast. A stray shower or thunderstorm is possible.  
High 79 - Low 66 / Chance of Rain: 20%

# TODAY'S Top Ten

## Best songs for a road trip.

10. Amish Paradise
9. Mennonite Blues
8. Seat 22
7. It's All Mennonite With Me
6. Watch Me Whip, Watch Me Menno
5. Going Back to Kansas
4. Teach Me How to Menno
3. I Like Dutch Blitz and I Cannot Lie
2. Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (606 Version)
1. 300 Bottles of Menno Tea

Tomorrow's question: **Best Mennonite Dance Moves.** Tweet or Facebook your answer with #Menno10.

# Updates & Announcements

■ Sign up for Friday afternoon learning experiences *Loss of Turtle Island* and the *Anabaptist Game* at the information booth.

■ Video recordings of worship services will be posted online for 24 hours on the convention website: <http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/worship-videos>.

■ Eric Kratz, a Mennonite professional baseball player, was recently released from the KC Royals. His Thursday morning seminar "Following Your Passion" has been cancelled.

■ Throughout convention this week there are many events dealing with sexual violence and abuse. If you should need someone to talk to or process with, there are a number of people with teal colored ribbons on their nametags who are available to listen.

■ Mennonite Women USA is raffling two gift baskets and a t-shirt quilt. Stop by the booth to get your tickets and check out the daily deals.

■ The shuttle from the Westin and Sheraton is primarily for those who have difficulty walking. If you are able, please use the city bus as an affordable alternative.

■ Limited Edition 2015 Stella pins are on sale for \$2 in the convention office (room 2213). Quantities are limited, get yours today!

■ The MEA Colleges and Universities are holding a drawing each day of convention for a \$250 amazon gift card. A grand prize of an iPad will also be drawn on Saturday. Sign up to win at the MEA booth.

■ Bus transportation to Worlds of Fun will depart 10 at a time at 3:00, 4:15, 5:45, and 6:15 on Thursday afternoon. Meet promptly at your departure time outside the 2300 Lobby on 13th Street. They will return beginning at 8:00 p.m. Look for information regarding your loading area and transportation time in your Worlds of Fun and Oceans of Fun ticket packet.

On the way  
En el camino