

## **Minutes of Special Delegate Session**

### **Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA**

#### **Martins Creek Mennonite Church, Millersburg, Ohio**

Aug. 9, 2014

**Prayer service** — Conference Minister Tom Kauffman welcomed the delegates, and the delegates participated in a worship service focused on scripture, singing, and both silent and corporate prayer.

#### **Business Session #1**

**Call to Order** — Moderator Dean Beck welcomed the delegates and reminded them about the resolution regarding Mountain States Mennonite Conference which was tabled at the 2014 Annual Conference Assembly in March. He gave some instructions regarding procedures for the day. Any resolution or amended resolution will require a two-thirds majority to pass. He introduced the Resolutions Committee members: Mel Hathaway, Dan King and Sara Meyer. He said that any amendments should be given to the Resolutions Committee before lunch. John Rohrer is serving as parliamentarian, and Dottie Hathaway is serving as timekeeper during the open mic time.

**Table Groups** — Delegates were given time for sharing with their table groups so that they could introduce themselves. Dean also asked them to discuss the following question with their groups: Did your congregation study this issue, and how?

**Timeline of Events** — Conference Minister Tom Kauffman presented a timeline of events related to the proposed resolution:

- Dec. 20 – Conference received a press release from Mountain States regarding the licensing of Theda Good, a woman in a committed same-sex relationship
- Jan. 25 – Leadership Team sent a letter to Mountain States Mennonite Conference
- Jan. 31 – Mountain States expresses willingness to send two people to Ohio Conference
- Feb. 2 – Theda Good licensed
- Feb. 5 – A suggestion is made to send a delegation from Ohio Conference to Mountain States
- Feb. 13 – An electronic letter from concerned pastors regarding the licensing of Theda Good is sent to the Ohio Conference Leadership Team
- February — The concerned pastors' letter is shared in cluster meetings
- Feb. 17 – Mennonite Church USA Executive Board releases the document "Moving Forward"
- Mar 7-8 – The resolution regarding Mountain States Mennonite Conference is tabled at Annual Conference Assembly
- March 20-22 – Constituency Leaders Council discusses Mountain States' decision to license Theda Good
- April 23 – Congregational study process tools are compiled
- May 16-19 – A three-person delegation visits Mountain States Mennonite Conference
- May 21 – Planning for this special delegate session

- June 5 – Written reports are issued in *Delegate News*
- June 17-19 – Ervin Stutzman, executive director of Mennonite Church USA, holds town hall meetings in Ohio
- July 1 – Mennonite Church USA Executive Board releases report
- Sept. 25-27 — Mennonite Church USA Executive Board will meet
- Oct 6-8 – Constituency Leadership Council will meet

**Report of Visit to Mountain States Mennonite Conference** — Naomi Engle, chair of the Credentialing Ministry, reported on the visit of the three-person delegation to Mountain States Mennonite Conference. She reported talking with Theda Good. She said that Conference Minister Herm Weaver reported that Mountain States Mennonite Conference is very diverse theologically. She reported that she sent an email message to Herm after the Executive Board decision not to recognize the credentialing of Theda Good.

Naomi reported that Mountain States was thankful that people from Ohio Conference came to visit, and they would like to visit Ohio Conference.

Matt Hamsher noted that he had initial trepidation about going to Mountain States. The visit was an intense time. He appreciated the welcome and hospitality they were shown. He reported that people from Mountain States said that the decision to license Theda Good was not entered into lightly. Deep convictions were held. They reported paying a lot of attention to the leading the Holy Spirit.

Matt noted a lot of differences between the conferences in how we read scripture together and different ways of organizing ourselves together. In Mountain States Mennonite Conference there is an appreciation of diversity, including theological diversity, and emphasis on relational accountability. He came away with a great deal of sadness, but whatever happens, he will want to bless our brothers and sisters in Mountain States and in Ohio Conference as well.

Bill Seymour reported that he actually volunteered to visit Mountain States. He worked at preparing himself to go. He went expecting to find rebellion and a lack of trust. The sense of welcome and appreciation they experienced was unexpected. He saw a group of people who are working at submitting themselves to Christ. The most important thing we need to make clear is what the expectations are for gathering around the Confession of Faith. What is it that holds us together? Bill also talked about his experience of speaking to Ohio Conference delegates earlier, before losing a lot of weight. He described himself at that time as an “unrepentant glutton,” and yet he was allowed to speak before the delegate body.

**Remarks from Terry Shue of Mennonite Church USA** – He noted that there is a healthy buzz of conversations in the church. The Executive Board put together a task force to deal with the licensing of Theda Good. That task force is meeting 12 times and gave a report in June. The Executive Board adopted 12 actions, and noted that delegates would have to be the ones to make any changes in policy regarding same-sex marriage. Terry noted that there is some exploration of new structural models for the denomination. A survey has been developed and was sent out to credentialed pastors on Friday. The desire is to hear from church leaders in order to make plans for the denominational convention in

Kansas City in 2015. It is clear to him that this is not just a Mountain States-Ohio Conference issue; it affects the broader denomination. Many people have been praying for God's Spirit to be present and recognized here at this meeting.

**Table Groups** – Delegates spent time discussing clarification questions.

**Open Mic Time** – Delegates were given the opportunity to raise questions based on the reports.

Dave Maurer (Table 22) – He is wondering about the counsel given from Constituency Leaders Council and Executive Board to Mountain States. He would like to hear more specifics about differences in interpreting scripture.

Terry Shue's reply: Nancy Kauffman met with the Mountain States Mennonite Conference council and kept Ervin Stutzman informed of the process. The Mountain States website includes a timeline of who was involved.

Matt Hamsher's reply: The leadership of Mountain States and the denomination have different points of view about how the process developed. Regarding differences in interpreting scripture, he noted that in Mountain States there is a tendency to look for themes of welcome and hospitality. There are differences in how we look at unity, how much theological diversity is good, and where the primary place of discernment is.

Kris Nussbaum (Table 15) – She is wondering about the phrase “call Mountain States Mennonite Conference to renew their commitment [to the foundational and guiding documents of Mennonite Church USA at a Mountain States Mennonite Conference Assembly],” as is stated in the June 30 report from the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA.

Regarding the concerned pastors' resolution: What group would send this resolution to Kansas City 2015 if it is passed?

Answer: That process is outlined on the denominational website. The resolution would be vetted by the Resolution Committee and the Constituency Leaders Council.

Todd Martin (Table 7) – How many congregations are in Mountain States Mennonite Conference?

Answer: The conference has 21 congregations.

Does the Executive Board believe that Mountain States Mennonite Conference will repent and reverse their decision to license Theda Good?

Terry Shue's reply: He would not want to presume to answer for Mountain States.

Jeff Kauffman (Table 13) – He would like to hear more about Terry Shue's comment about the over-functioning of the liberal arm of the church and the under-functioning of the conservative arm of the church. What exactly do those terms mean?

Terry Shue's reply: He used the term "over-functioning" to describe the pushing of an inclusion agenda and "under-functioning" to describe backing away in passive-aggressive ways.

Brent Nofziger (Table 5) – How did Mountain States arrive at their decision?

Terry Shue's reply: It was not a quick discernment process. Prayer was involved.

How does the Executive Board report provide the authority to act?

Terry Shue's reply: That idea is being contested, based on the interpretation of the bylaws.

If the resolution is overstepping, who can propose it? Does the proposal have to be made as a conference, or can other groups make a proposal?

Answer: Any person, congregation or conference can propose a resolution. There is discernment by the Resolution Committee, Constituency Leaders Council and the Executive Board.

Jan Wickline (Table 2) – Has Mountain States responded to the Executive Board report?

Terry Shue's reply: Conversation has started with Mountain States. Ervin Stutzman met with the Mountain States Assembly last weekend.

Shannon Martin (Table 8) – Has Mountain States responded to the Executive Board report? At what point does discipline come?

Jesse Johnson (Table 10) – Was our delegation able to have an open and honest conversation with Mountain States representatives? Were people from Mountain States open to hearing a different perspective?

Naomi Engle's reply: The representatives from Ohio Conference did share that they felt differently, but mainly they were working on establishing a relationship with the people from Mountain States.

Nathan Beachy (Table 9) – He wanted to affirm the delegation which went to Colorado. He noted that the second half of the resolution seems pretty harsh. Does the fact that the Executive Board has begun taking steps to deal with the situation now change how we want to proceed?

Harold Mansfield (Table 3) – How long will the Executive Board give Mountain States to reaffirm guiding documents of the denomination?

Terry Shue's reply: A timeline has not been set.

Results of Straw Poll – When delegates registered for this special delegate session, they were asked to participate in a straw poll, indicating how they would likely vote on the proposed resolution. They also were asked for comments, which were compiled and placed in the packet of information that each delegate received when arriving for the special delegate session.

Moderator Dean Beck announced results of the straw poll. Two hundred seventy-nine people are present at the special delegate session, including 269 delegates. The following straw poll results were announced:

- 210 ballots cast
- 129 affirmed the proposed resolution (61 percent)
- 81 did not affirm the proposed resolution
- 63 persons did not respond either way

**Resolution Regarding Mountain States Mennonite Conference** – Matt Hamsher made a motion for the delegate body to take up consideration of the resolution regarding Mountain States Mennonite Conference. The proposed resolution is as follows:

**We, as the gathered delegate body of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA, do hereby call for our staff, our Leadership Team, and any representatives of our conference at the Constituency Leaders Council or other church-related meetings, to first of all urge Mountain States Mennonite Conference to reconsider and reverse their decision to license a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship. Secondly, if Mountain States Mennonite Conference remains committed to this course of action, we call our conference leadership and representatives to request that the Constituency Leaders Council and Executive Board suspend Mountain States Mennonite Conference membership in Mennonite Church USA and bring a motion for the removal of Mountain States Mennonite Conference from membership in Mennonite Church USA at the delegate assembly during the 2015 National Convention in Kansas City.**

The motion to adopt the resolution was seconded by Bridget Troyer.

Moderator Dean Beck told delegates that any proposed amendments to this resolution should be in writing and would be considered by the Resolutions Committee during the lunch hour. Numerous delegates submitted proposed amendments.

## **Lunch**

**Time of prayer and personal reflection** – Delegates spent time alone in prayer and reflection, using a prayer and reflection guide.

Before beginning the time of silent reflection, Fran Mast led the delegates in singing “Holy Spirit, come with power.”

Matt Hamsher reminded delegates that they were coming to a time of discernment. He talked about “Gelassenheit,” or yielding to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He also noted the work of Dana Short, Ohio Conference Prayer Coordinator, in developing these resources, which were adapted by the planning committee. He said that this time should be a time of listening for God to speak to them.

At the conclusion of the time of prayer and reflection, Fran Mast led the delegates in singing “Heart with loving heart united.”

## **Business Session #2**

**Table Groups** – Dean Beck invited the delegates to reflect with each other about the leading of the Holy Spirit during the time of prayer and reflection.

**Open mic time** – Delegates were given the opportunity to speak about this time of reflection.

Jesse Johnson (Table 10) – He senses a call for repentance on our part where we have failed to be the church. We need to examine ourselves. The foot of the cross is level. We should come to this with humility and brokenness.

Linda Yoder (Table 26) – A question came to mind: How often have we spoken the word of love in our discussion?

(Name not recorded) – The Holy Spirit prodded her to pray for Theda Good.

Gary Stuckey (Table 1) – He has struggled with knowing how to vote. Jesus' words were "go and sin no more," but also "neither do I condemn you." He talked about walking outside during the reflection time and seeing a creek with much erosion; major work needs to be done to fix it.

Jim Mullett (Table 26) – Historically the Mennonite Church has sent missionaries to many areas. Is this the message we want to send our converts?

Spencer Cunningham (Table 31) – He reflected about going to a wedding in a Catholic church and experiencing who was allowed to take communion. Who is allowed to "sit at our lunch counter?"

Jan Wickline (Table 2) – She is worried about our discussion. This is not an issue of not loving that community (homosexuals), but rather of accepting someone in leadership. She is not saying that we can't love that community, but people in leadership should be held to a higher standard.

Marilyn Rossiter (Table 24) – We say we are a priesthood of all believers.

John Leunk (Table 30) – He referred to the Gospel of John. The scripture cannot be broken. He noted that the apostle Paul said that as believers we were justified and sanctified. We should live it.

Sean Evans (Table 17) – He quoted I Timothy 3. He said that when his opinions don't line up with scripture, his opinions don't matter.

Bridget Troyer (Table 12) – Not just one church is affected. There should be an opportunity to come back. We should make sure that bridges aren't burned.

(Name not recorded) – How do we deal with polity in the church? We must love people, but loving does not mean condoning behavior.

**Amendments to Resolution** – Moderator Dean Beck said that the Resolutions Committee had taken the amendments to the resolution submitted by delegates and incorporated them into five possible

amendments. Copies of the amendments were distributed, and delegates had a chance to read and discuss them.

**Open Mic Time** – Delegates were invited to make comments on the proposed amendments to the resolution.

Nate André (Table 3) – He asked if delegates could just vote on the original resolution instead of considering amendments.

Carl Wiebe (Table 26) – He noted that delegates have prepared for the original resolution. He said he would like to call for the question and end debate.

It was noted that a two-thirds affirmative vote is required to close debate and bring the resolution to a vote.

Paula Snyder-Belousek (Table 21) – She asked for clarification about what delegates were being asked to vote on. Answer: The vote is to determine whether to close debate and vote on the original resolution.

Bill Seymour (Table 27) – What are we doing with the amendments?

Nate André (Table 3) – He stated that delegates could look at other options if the original resolution did not pass.

**There was a motion to end debate on the proposed resolution and bring the resolution to a vote.**

**M/S/C**

**Motion: We, as the gathered delegate body of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA, do hereby call for our staff, our Leadership Team, and any representatives of our conference at the Constituency Leaders Council or other church-related meetings, to first of all urge Mountain States Mennonite Conference to reconsider and reverse their decision to license a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship. Secondly, if Mountain States Mennonite Conference remains committed to this course of action, we call our conference leadership and representatives to request that the Constituency Leaders Council and Executive Board suspend Mountain States Mennonite Conference membership in Mennonite Church USA and bring a motion for the removal of Mountain States Mennonite Conference from membership in Mennonite Church USA at the delegate assembly during the 2015 National Convention in Kansas City.**

The motion did not pass. Voting results were as follows:

- 163 – yes (61.74 percent, not the percentage required to pass)
- 101 – no

**New Resolution** – Bruce Hummel (Table 17) introduced another resolution. He noted that this resolution, which was developed by Berlin Mennonite Church, was presented to the Resolutions Committee earlier. They did not present this resolution to the delegates earlier because they wanted to

give the original resolution the opportunity to pass. This resolution is offered in the hopes that the delegate body can move forward in a spirit of unity.

**Motion: We affirm the Mennonite Confession of Faith 1995 (Article 19) titled “Family, Singleness and Marriage.” We affirm the belief and practice that “God intends marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life.”**

**We affirm the response of the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA to Mountain States Mennonite Conference’s licensing of a person who is in a same-sex relationship.**

**We request the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA to develop a polity that provides authority to the Executive Board of the Mennonite Church USA to hold conferences and churches accountable to the approved Mennonite Confession of Faith.**

This motion was seconded by Steve Steiner.

**Open Mic Time –**

Jim Bartholomew (Dayspring, Table5) – He has two questions. First, there is nothing in this that addresses the timeframe. Would we be requesting that action be taken at the 2015 convention in Kansas City? Second, does it make sense to have the people writing the polity oversee the accountability of that polity?

Paula Snyder Belousek (Table 21) – Does this include changing the bylaws?

Terry Shue’s response: Bylaws need to be changed by the delegates.

Do we have to pass a resolution, or can we leave this issue to the Constituency Leaders Council and Kansas City 2015?

Dan Hilty (Table 38) – The time frame of this resolution would push things back from Kansas City 2015. One of the amendments proposed would allow action to be taken at Kansas City 2015.

Robb Esh (Table 7) – The polity question his table group had was answered by Terry Shue. Affirming heterosexual marriage doesn’t deal with the question of having a person in a same-sex relationship in leadership.

Carl Wiebe (Table 26) – We really aren’t doing anything new here with this resolution. Several of these items are addressed in the Executive Board statement.

Jeff Linthicum (Table 1) – Why didn’t we get this resolution earlier, since table leaders were told earlier in the week that another resolution was proposed? We don’t have time to adequately consider this resolution.

Onley Heath (Table 13) – Would those who voted no on the first resolution be open to any of the amendments?



Voting on the resolution – The motion did not pass. The results of the vote were as follows:

- Yes – 82 (35 percent affirmative)
- No – 151

Thirteen ballots had unclear or insufficient information, and therefore they were not counted.

**New Resolution** – Kevin Trent (Table 11) made a motion to bring Amendment #5 (as developed by the Resolutions Committee) as a new resolution. This motion was seconded by Haroldo Nunes.

The wording of the resolution is as follows:

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- 1. Mountain States Conference reverses its decision to license a pastor in a committed same-sex relationship, or**
- 2. The Mennonite Delegate Assembly changes the polity on same-sex marriage.**

**Open Mic Time –**

Jim Bartholomew (Table 5) – A procedural question: Do all votes require a two-thirds approval for adoption? Answer: Yes.

Haroldo Nunes (Table 11) – The wording of the new resolution is less harsh. Perhaps some of those who objected to original wording could approve this version. It would keep things moving forward.

Cathy Rupp (Table 31) – Who is going to be defining the terms of suspension of a conference?

Ned Wyse (Table 33) – What does “changes the polity on same-sex marriage” mean?

Jimmy Haar (Table 20) – He likes amendment #4. If amendment #5 does not pass, he would like to propose amendment #4.

Joel Shenk (Table 10) – We’re looking for ways to pass something. We have had six months to prepare for the original resolution, and it failed to pass. Perhaps that’s God word for us today, and we should let this issue be processed in Mennonite Church USA.

**Jeff Kauffman made a motion that the delegate body close the process after receiving the results of this vote and not vote on any more resolutions today. This motion was seconded by many delegates, and a majority voted to close the process.**

**Voting Results for the Third Resolution** – The third resolution did not pass. The voting results were as follows:

- Yes – 141 (56.85 percent)
- No – 107
- Six votes were not counted because of unclear or insufficient information.

**Closing Hymn** – Fran Mast led delegates in singing the hymn “Move in our midst.”

**Closing Reading** – Naomi Engle led delegates in a final reading.

Recorded by Ann Leaman