

CONNECTIONS

MAY/JUNE 2011

THE FIRST WORD

PEOPLE, PROGRAM, LOCATION = SUCCESS

Networking, worshiping, and learning together continue to be the most important reasons to attend Mennonite Health Assembly, according to attendees in 2011. The San Antonio Riverwalk proved to be a strong attraction, and Assembly planners were pleased that attendees took advantage of tastes, sights and sounds just steps from the hotel.

Together, a thought-provoking program, good people and a great location make up this once-a-year opportunity to connect with like-minded peers from across the country.

Mennonite Health Assembly will next meet March 1-3, 2012, in Louisville, Ky. The planning committee meets in May to choose a theme. They will also address the challenge of a shorter Assembly schedule – ending at noon on Saturday – to include all the things that make Assembly worth attending.



Mim Shirk
Vice President

MANY VOICES, ONE SPIRIT: STORY-TELLING AT ITS FINEST

“In fundraising, the shortest distance between a gift and a human being is a story – a story about one other human being,” said Don Yost of Maple City Health Care Center in one of the 23 workshops at the 2011 Mennonite Health Assembly.

That piece of advice could apply to almost every session at the assembly. Many excellent stories were shared in both workshops and plenary sessions, indicating that MHS Alliance organizations are thriving. These organizations are meeting their challenges in creative ways – from the board room to patient care and the physical plant.

During the MHS Alliance members meeting, participants experienced a new, Twitter-like story-telling mode. Prior to the meeting, Vice President Mim Shirk had asked leaders of 14 member organizations celebrating anniversary years ending in 0 or 5 to give one-minute overviews of their work. (Adriel of Ohio and Frederick (Pa.) Mennonite Community topped the list, each having been founded 115 years ago.)

The result? Presenters shared vivid, moving, insightful, and sometime humorous stories that reflected their own organizations, illustrating a range of services, missions, and histories of diverse members. Embodying the assembly theme, they spoke with “many voices, one spirit.” Immediate feedback was very positive, and other members will likely have the chance to tell similar stories at future assemblies.

During the plenary sessions, story-telling was launched by Albert Reyes, president of Buchner International, a global Christian humanitarian aid organization. He painted a picture of a future world in which the modal individual will be a woman with three children living on less than \$2 a day. The population centers will be Shanghai and New Dehli, not New York and Tokyo. “Other countries around the world are not interested in our pastors and missionaries,” Reyes said. “They want engineers, healers, and teachers of English and computers.”

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Isaac Villegas



Ingrid De Sanctis



Hannah Eash and Jenny Castro from the San Antonio Mennonite Church led music at the opening worship service.



Emerson Leshner, Messiah Village, and Wanda Heisey, MHS Alliance board member and board member for Paxton Ministries

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Isaac Villegas, pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, North Carolina, emphasized that weakness is a form of power. He told the story of Ella Baker, a granddaughter of slaves who was a life-long advocate for justice and peace through grassroots

action, especially during civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. She said, “Oppressed people, whatever their level of formal education, have the ability to understand and interpret the world around them, to see the world for what it is, and to move to transform it.”

The third plenary speaker was Ingrid DeSanctis – dramatist, writer, director, and professor at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania. She told many stories in two presentations, stories that grew out of her Swedish-Italian family life, her involvement in a variety of religious communities, and her collaboration with creative artists striving to portray authentic relationships.

In a final worship service, Mennonite Health Assembly participants told their own stories to each other. They sang “My Life Flows On” and broke bread and drank from the cup during a communion service. They reminded each other of the story that unites the Christian community in one spirit: “This is Christ’s body broken for you, Christ’s blood shed for you.”

This article was written by Shirley H. Showalter, MHS Alliance Consulting Associate.




Nancy Hopkins Garris



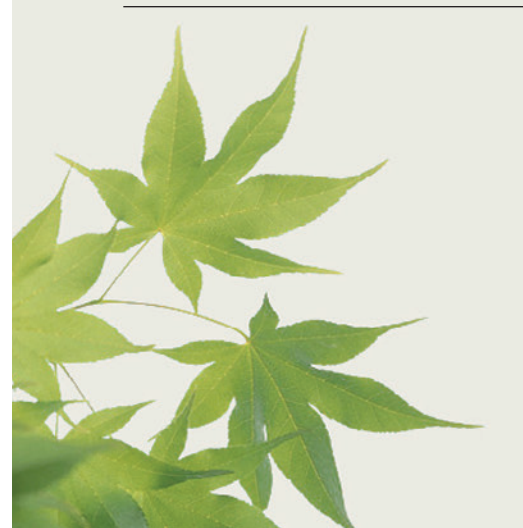
James Krehbiel



Participants who are standing admitted that they had used their cell phone before the meeting.



“They reminded each other of the story that unites the Christian community in one spirit: “This is Christ’s body broken for you, Christ’s blood shed for you.”



MEMBERS REVIEW 2010 ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ANTICIPATE MOVING FORWARD IN 2011

Although not physically present because of recent surgery, the irreplaceable Rick Stiffney, president and CEO of MHS Alliance, appeared via video at the members meeting in San Antonio, Texas, March 10. He exhorted the members to move forward with “a great board and a great staff team.” In a brief review of the year’s accomplishments, he reminded members that they had:

- Connected with each other at deeper and deeper levels, resulting in stronger individual organizations;
- Developed new, beneficial relationships with organizations outside the supporting Anabaptist denominations, particularly with Lutheran Services in America; and
- Paid increased attention to leadership formation, resulting in identifying and preparing future leaders who are “called and committed.”

In Stiffney’s absence, board chair Lee Snyder and Vice President Mim Shirk led the members meeting. Shirk called the meeting “a wonderful opportunity for us to be community to each other.” Participants heard that:

- Approximately 10 percent of the member organizations undergo transitions in executive leadership each year, with five new CEOs appointed in 2010;
- Mike Mullins, president and CEO at Adriel in Ohio, will be retiring in 2011;
- The number of MHS Alliance members remained constant at 72 in 2010; the Mennonite Association of Retired Persons dissolved as an organization, and Lighthouse Vocational Services of New Holland, Pa., joined as a new member;
- The Values-based Leadership Program was again successful, with seven MHS Alliance graduates in the 2010-11 class;
- The organization ended the fiscal year with an operational loss, but remained cash-flow positive because of income from a modest endowment fund;
- Consulting services, led by Vice President Keith Stuckey, have continued to grow. Shirley H. Showalter, former vice president for programs at the Fetzer Institute and former president of Goshen College, has been retained as a new consultant; and
- Registration at Mennonite Health Assembly was higher for 2011.

The members affirmed the re-election of board members Linda Peters, CEO and administrator of Bethesda Home, Goessel, Kan., and Jay Shetler, CEO of Glencroft, Glendale, Ariz. Leaving the board after completing two terms is Marvin Zehr, a pastor representing Mennonite Church USA from Newton, Kan.

Mim Shirk led the members in a table-group discussion session to identify issues and solutions that they see as having high priority in the year ahead. Reports from the tables included these recommendations:

- Help identify and develop leaders by sponsoring internships;
- Work with middle-level managers to develop their leadership skills, taking advantage of webinars and other low-cost training tools;
- Use internet technology to enable affinity groups of managers, such as CFO and development officers, to hold virtual meetings with one another;
- Sponsor governance seminars at state-wide meetings of affiliated organizations, such as continuing care retirement communities;
- Conduct innovation learning tours during which best practices at one organization could be shared with others; and
- Find ways to strengthen interaction and mutual support between member organizations and congregations of the sponsoring denomination within a given geographical area.



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COMING ATTRACTIONS

- May 4** **Kansas Human Resources Network**
10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Moundridge, Kan.
- May 11** **Aging Services Marketing Network**
1- 2 p.m. EDT by Teleconference
- May 25-26** **Executive Circle**
Chicago, Ill.
- June 8** **Aging Services Finance Network**
1- 2 p.m. EDT by Teleconference
- June 16-18** **MHS Alliance Board Meeting**
Goshen, Ind.
- July 7** **Great Governance for Small Organizations**
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. EDT
Audioconference Session 1
- July 13** **Aging Services Marketing Network**
1- 2 p.m. EDT by Teleconference
- Aug. 10** **Great Governance for Small Organizations**
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. EDT
Audioconference Session 2
- Aug. 10** **Aging Services Finance Network**
1- 2 p.m. EDT by Teleconference
- Sept. 7** **Great Governance for Small Organizations**
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. EDT
Audioconference Session 3
- Sept. 14** **Aging Services Marketing Network**
1 - 2 p.m. EDT by Teleconference
- Sept. 21** **Indiana-Michigan Chaplains**
Goshen, Ind.
- Sept. 21** **Great Governance for Small Organizations**
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. EDT
Audioconference Session 4
- Sept. 20-22** **Values-based Leadership Program**
Session 1
Mt. Pleasant, Pa.

THE LAST WORD

Mennonite Health Assembly, from all that I heard, was a really good meeting – one that was painful for me to miss.

I don't want to be too dramatic, but for the first time in my life, I was confronted with a real dose of personal mortality. Before concerns about my vascular system escalated, I thought I was a healthy CEO with a really bad knee. I do have a bad knee that will be replaced in mid-May. The vascular issue is complex but at this point needs monitoring, not intervention.

As for Assembly, I was completely at peace with the knowledge that the MHS Alliance staff and board would do high-quality work. They didn't miss a beat! We have had in place a succession plan that was designed in part to deal with an incapacitated CEO. We worked the plan.

If my health condition goes "south" for some reason, we still have a plan. We are also working with the board on long-term succession issues.

We are building leadership bench strength and overall organizational capacity that will be beneficial when the board determines that transition in long-term executive leadership is indicated, preferably in the distant future. Effective succession planning for any organization is an absolutely critical practice!



Rick Stiffney, President/CEO