

CONNECTIONS

MAY/JUNE 2009

THE FIRST WORD

2009 ASSEMBLY REFLECTIONS

Meeting face-to-face at Mennonite Health Assembly gives leaders a once-a-year opportunity to connect with like-minded peers from across the country. This year, assembly goals included helping participants:

- talk about critical issues and strategies for coping with challenging times;
- learn techniques that help build community through collaboration; and
- gain a stronger sense of community among assembly participants.

Board and staff leaders report that the 2009 assembly exceeded their expectations. They cite the 1:1 consultant meetings, the Open Space time that allowed discussion of current issues, the top-quality speakers, and the many informal conversations.

Such rich experiences happen best when leaders are face-to-face, away from day-to-day concerns. In anticipating next year's assembly, the planning committee noted that financial constraints may limit representation for some organizations. We will explore ways to provide support to those organizations without compromising the quality of the assembly.

Mennonite Health Assembly will next meet March 4-7, 2010, in Norfolk, Va. The call for workshops will be issued in May. What idea for an innovation session do you have? The registration fee is reduced for workshop presenters.

Mim Shirk
Vice President



DISCOVERING COMMUNITY ANEW AT MENNONITE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

The theme of this year's Mennonite Health Assembly was "Building Community in a Sea of Individualism." Participants engaged fully in an action-packed program in Cleveland, Ohio, March 19-22.

Plenary sessions, workshops, worship and even the Friday night entertainment all pointed to ways that people working with health and human services organizations can build stronger communities, both within their organizations and in the neighborhoods where they live.



Maggie Yoder,
Sunnyside, leads an
Open Space Discussion

Lew Feldstein, president of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and co-author with Robert Putnam of *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, emphasized in his keynote address that social capital — the social web that connects us to others — has measureable value for both individuals and organizations.

Among the most valuable people in organizations, Feldstein said, are those who have the strongest connections to others. And research shows that those communities with high social capital are healthier, safer (fewer crimes), better educated, and more prosperous. Among the measures of connection are the percentages of a community's residents who vote, give to charity, volunteer, and go to church regularly.

Building stronger community means building trust within it, Feldstein said. We can begin by bonding with people like ourselves, but to make significant progress in building social capital, we need to create bridges to people who are different from us, he said. He recommended story-telling as one of the strongest ways to bridge across differences.

Assembly participants put theory to practice during Friday's "Open Space" sessions guided by consultant John Engle, also a co-founder of the organization Beyond Borders. He commended the group for having the courage to "have a meeting without an agenda."

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Carol Washko, Penn
Foundation, proposes a
topic for Open Space

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among groups at other times. A volunteer summarized the discussions on white paper, and a group member also wrote a summary that was to be combined with others in a book of proceedings now available at <http://www.mhsonline.org/php/assembly/>.

The final plenary session served as an extended case study of how one organization, Philadelphia Mennonite High School, has become a beacon of excellence in its community. Barbara Moses, the school's founding principal, told Health Assembly participants that "building community is a joint venture in love." She said that achieving excellence at the school, which is the only Mennonite high school in a major city in America, depends on strong relationships among administrators, teachers, and students, and consistent support from parents, the board, the church, and generous donors.

Mennonite Health Assembly meets annually, sponsored by MHS Alliance and MMA. Mim Shirk, vice president at MHS Alliance, serves as the director for the assembly program.

BOWLING AT MENNONITE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

In a seminal 1995 essay titled "Bowling Alone," Robert Putnam laments the decline of social capital. He uses the metaphor of "bowling alone" (as opposed to leagues' dominating bowling in an earlier generation) to make the point that Americans have become less involved in their communities.

Planners of Mennonite Health Assembly flipped the metaphor on its head. They encouraged Assembly-goers to go bowling together on Friday evening at the Corner Alley a few blocks from the hotel.



In the spirit of "the last shall be first," a foursome representing Greencroft, Goshen, Ind., demonstrated its underachieving form. Team members were Ivan Kauffmann, Dee Swartz, Carol Hostetler Borkholder (a chaplain from Kalamazoo, Mich.), and Cathy Beery Berg



Assembly-goers were treated during the final plenary session to inspirational music by the **Gospel Choir of the Lee Heights Community Church, Cleveland** (pictured at left).

Other worship services were led by Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells, associate pastor of Lee Heights, with music led by Gerald Hughes, also a member at Lee Heights.

THE CHANGING CLIMATE FOR NONPROFITS

■ The nonprofit sector in the United States is saturated with 1.4 million organizations, 60 percent created within the last decade.

■ Nonprofits are merging, forming strategic alliances with businesses, purchasing administrative services, and changing in other ways to increase efficiencies.

■ Individual contributions account for 75 percent of the more than \$300 billion contributed to nonprofit organizations annually in the United States. "Put that 'donate now' button on your Web site."

■ Contributions go mostly to religion (33 percent) and education (14 percent). Ranking next highest

are human services organizations (10 percent), foundations (9 percent) and health organizations (8 percent).

■ Be realistic and proactive about your organization's finances – don't just hope that "things will turn around soon."

■ Americans are stepping forward in record numbers as volunteers.

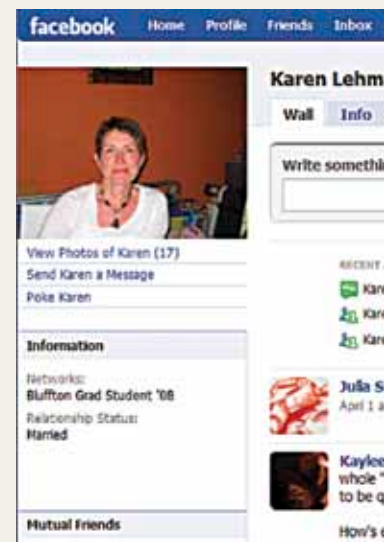
■ In challenging times, your first responsibility is to guard the mission of your organization.

Gems mined from Ann Kent, Vice President of Business Volunteers Unlimited

THE LATEST TRENDS

Migrating Toward Web 2.0

"Electronic Collaboration" in Web 2.0 mode was the focus of a workshop presented at Mennonite Health Assembly by George Lehman, director of graduate programs in business at Bluffton (Ohio) University, and Karen Lehman, a graduate of the Bluffton program and now executive director of the Friends House Retirement Community, Sandy Spring, Md. The workshop described the





Mark King

CHANGING THE CULTURE TO STRENGTHEN SERVICE

Developing managers

has always been a challenge for organizations. That challenge is even more daunting in today's environment, especially for value-focused organizations like those that comprise MHS Alliance.

Consultant Lee Schmucker, Wichita, Kan., and Mark King (pictured above), president and CEO of Greencroft Communities, Goshen, Ind., led a workshop on integrating values into the work experience at Mennonite Health Assembly.

"Employees leave managers, not organizations," said Schmucker. "The No. 1 reason people leave is that they do not feel appreciated. They get too little coaching and feedback."

King looked at this same issue proactively and asked, "How can we take good service by our managers and move it to the next level?" He said he was determined to provide managers with the support they needed to make decisions that reflected the core values of Greencroft Communities.

Changing the culture to strengthen service required a series of intensive meetings and training sessions that are ongoing. At the heart of process, King said, was creating a new vision for Greencroft that shifted the emphasis from "what we do" to "those we serve."

For starters, the leadership team read Bud Bilanich's *Leading With Values: 8 Common-Sense Leadership Strategies for Bringing Organizational Value to Life*. Then they worked together to create a new vision that was built around the core values of Creativity, Respect, Openness, Fairness, and Teamwork (the initial letters happen to spell "croft").

Then the work of championing, building a new framework for service, and experiential training began. Today managers have greater responsibility to make decisions in the context of the organization's values. King said the most exciting outcome for him as CEO is that he is experiencing more freedom in leading Greencroft Communities.



transition from one-way information sharing to the current emphasis on networking and collaborating via sites such as FaceBook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. In a follow-up electronic interview, Karen Lehman reflected on her experience as a CEO:

■ **Briefly describe how electronic social networks are beneficial to you as a CEO.**

Networks and peer relationships are among the most important connections a CEO can have, especially when one works in a small stand-alone organization. Business-

oriented networks and social networks allow me to stay in touch and communicate frequently with others.

■ **What uses do you anticipate employing in the months immediately ahead?**

I do not have a company intranet nor do employees have a mechanism to communicate electronically with management. I hope to set up a platform for communication and feedback that would be easy for all staff members to use. I have busy employees who are students or work multiple jobs—they do not come to meetings routinely. A "wiki" type of platform for posting information would be very beneficial.

■ **What limitations do you see for an electronic social network?**

It is hard to put boundaries on social

networks. Creating a platform for communication and discussion opens an organization to criticism and negative feedback. I can see the organization becoming more vulnerable when social networking is encouraged.

■ **What advice would you have to a CEO contemplating "jumping in" to electronic social networking?**

A CEO must be careful with technology and providing open platforms for immediate communications. These new mechanisms can promote an organization, but they can also work in the opposite direction if the plan is not thoughtful and controlled. The CEO should work with someone who is an expert to help consider all angles of the networking platform. I suggest looking at what other organizations are doing and then creating a model from best practices.





MEMBER NEWS

At the MHS Alliance annual members meeting, the group noted **executive transitions** that have occurred during the past year.

New Executives

- Jen Foster
Central California Mennonite Residential Services, Fresno
- Phil Hess
Phihaven, Mt. Gretna, Pa.
- Leon Hoover
Kings View, Fresno, Calif.
- Jerry Lile
Fairmount Homes, Ephrata, Pa.
- Andrew Maines
Welsh Mountain Home, New Holland, Pa.
- Laura Voth
Mennonite Home Communities of Ohio, Bluffton
- Cindy Vanover
Kidron Bethel, Newton, Kan.

Interim Executive

- Jim Sommer
Maple Lawn Homes, Eureka, Ill.

Executives: Retiring or Resigned

- Jerry Barkman
Hope Village, Canby, Ore.
- George Stoltzfus
Friendship Community, Lititz, Pa.
- Pat Wolf
No Longer Alone Ministries, Lititz, Pa.



COMING ATTRACTIONS

Marketing Network

May 5, Teleconference

Executive Circle, Session 2

May 27-28, Cincinnati, Ohio

Mennonite Church USA Convention

June 30-July 5, Columbus, Ohio

Plains Human Resources

July 29, South Hutchinson, Kan.

Values-based Leadership Program

Sept. 15-17 and Feb. 23-25, 2010
Laurelville, Pa.

Executive Circle, Session 3

Sept. 9-10, Cincinnati, Ohio

Midwest Chaplains

Sept. 23, Goshen, Ind.



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THE LAST WORD

The economic recession had understandable impact on attendance at the annual Mennonite Health Assembly, but participants' feedback was very positive. The MHS Alliance annual members meeting attracted 83 individuals who represented 39 member organizations.

Clearly, our member organizations are facing immense challenges in operating effectively. Yet, they are strongly committed to maintaining and strengthening a core sense of Mennonite-Anabaptist identity.

The Values Integration Initiative continues to mature and soon will offer practical resources to CEOs, senior staff, and boards. They will be better equipped to articulate faith, offer historical perspective, and work at integrating values in many dimensions of organizational life.

Further, the MHS Alliance board and staff are taking steps to increase capacity to provide consulting services and other practical tools to our members to help assess and maximize day-to-day operations. We also want to expand our capacity to assist with strategic positioning, affiliation and consolidation design, and executive and senior leadership coaching.



At MHS Alliance, our primary reason for being is to serve our member organizations. Meanwhile, we continue to have many opportunities to serve other organizations. Such involvement offers us strategic opportunities to extend our witness, learn from other settings, and generate margin that can help keep our membership fees affordable.

Rick Stiffney President/CEO