

## Follow-up Report to Delegates 2015 Mennonite Church USA Convention Ervin R. Stutzman, Executive Director

### Introduction

I have been deeply intrigued by the many reports which I've heard or read following our delegate sessions in Kansas City. They vary so widely that I sometimes wonder if people were attending the same event. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the interest which people have shown in the delegate process, and their commitment to the time and energy it took to participate.

Thank you to the many of you who took time to complete the follow-up surveys. We have looked carefully at them, and are laying plans to make improvements based on your feedback.

Those of you who stayed till the very end of the delegate sessions might remember the moment when I promised a gift—a customized piece of stained glass—to outgoing Moderator Elizabeth Soto Albrecht. In the photo at right, you can see Elizabeth holding the completed piece from Bonnie Stutzman. Thank you again, Elizabeth, for your unstinting service to Mennonite Church USA.



### Following up on the resolutions adopted at KC2015

The Executive Board and staff have carefully engaged the process of follow-up to the various resolutions which we adopted. As delegates, you adopted eight substantive resolutions that functioned as church statements at our convention, three of which were spontaneous statements drafted at the convention itself. Most of them call for specific actions and follow-up on the part of the Executive Board/staff, institutions, congregations or conferences.

We would do well to consider the necessary follow-up, including the cost, when considering our resolutions. Unless we put specific action plans in place to follow through on our commitments, these resolutions will simply help us to feel good about our convictions, without putting them into action.

I'll briefly summarize *who* is being called upon to act in each of the resolutions we adopted, and highlight the actions being taken by the Executive Board or staff for each of them.

*Faithful Witness Amid Endless War.* This resolution “Calls **affiliated congregations** to a renewed emphasis on trusting God and the way of Jesus, not violence, for our security.” It “calls the **agencies, educational institutions and conferences** affiliated with Mennonite Church USA to

ministries of healing and renewal . . .,” and “Directs the **staff** of Mennonite Church USA to actively seek and implement forms of public ecumenical witness. . .”

André Gingerich Stoner is the lead person to follow up on this resolution, working alongside Jason Boone of the Peace and Justice Support Network (PJSN) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) staff to plan for a variety of resource materials to highlight the growing use of drones. Since our convention, the Obama administration has announced that they will significantly increase the use of drones.

*Israel Palestine.* This resolution directs “**representatives of the Executive Board** of Mennonite Church USA along with **representatives from Everence, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network, Mennonite Mission Network and other related agencies** involved in the region” to annually vet the investments of Mennonite Church USA, and to submit an annual report to the Executive Board. Further, it urges “**individuals and congregations** to avoid the purchase of products that enable the military occupation to continue . . .” Finally, in apart from a number of references to a generic “**we**,” it calls for the leader of holistic witness to bring a report to the next convention.

André is also the lead person to follow up on this resolution, which was tabled at the convention. Again, he is working with Jason Boone of PJSN, as well as MennoPIN and MCC. After consultation with our parliamentarians, we suggest the following process, in keeping with the delegate desire that we revise the resolution by 2017:

- Name a three-person writing team.
- Name a reference group of 6 to 8 people from a range of perspectives to offer counsel and feedback in the process.
- Have the writing team meet with the reference group to talk about key elements in a new resolution.
- Have the writing team test their work with the reference group with continuing revisions.
- Make an early draft of the emerging resolution available to delegates, area conferences and the broader church, with encouragement to study it and an invitation to give feedback.
- Use the feedback to finalize a text that to be submitted to the Resolutions Committee for presentation at Orlando 2017.

*Sexual abuse.* This statement has a list of 12 specific “actions and commitments,” six each for “**congregations**” and “**institutions.**” The role of **area conferences** is implied by the mention of credential processes.

The Discernment Group that dealt with John Howard Yoder’s abuse has finished its work, and the monies from the Care and Prevention Fund have been distributed. Some people have expressed concern that our resolution will simply remain as words on the page, rather than being enacted in new policies and practices throughout our denomination. We are in the process of naming a Panel on Sexual Abuse, partnering with other groups to do what is possible with limited funds.

Further, as noted above, Terry Shue and Nancy Kauffmann have worked with Karen Martens Zimmerly of Mennonite Church Canada to update the ministerial policies relating to sexual abuse. This is a significant document that created a “sea change” regarding ministerial discipline across our church when it was initiated. The update will be tested with many readers before it is submitted for endorsement by both Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada.

**Statement on our support of Palestinian and Israeli partners in peacemaking.** This resolution, written spontaneously after the Resolution on Israel/Palestine was tabled, voices the commitment of **delegates** to several specific actions, including prayer and action for peace. No other group is named as being responsible for follow-up to the statement. André Gingerich Stoner is working with the same groups as are named under the Israel/Palestine resolutions to follow up with these commitments.

**Expressions of Lament and Hope.** This resolution calls for **Mennonite Church USA and all its parts** to “continue to build awareness and direct resources and energy to continued anti-racism education among our constituencies and to stand in solidarity with the African-American community as destroyed properties are rebuilt and ministry occurs to broken bodies and souls.”

My staff, and particularly Iris de León-Hartshorn, continues to provide resources on anti-racism and helps to plan the annual Hope for the Future conferences. But the CLC and the agencies of Mennonite Church USA could also play a larger role in helping to fulfill these commitments.

One of the difficulties in following up with the resolutions mentioned above is that all of them are “unfunded mandates.” That is, there is no money or staff time specifically designated in our budget for these tasks, making it difficult to provide substantive responses. As I noted above, I believe we would do well to consider the actual costs and specific action plans before we approve resolutions in the future.

### **Forbearance and Membership Guidelines resolutions**

At the national convention in Kansas City, we took action to approve both the Membership Guidelines and the Forbearance Resolution, two documents which to some seemed incompatible. Now we must engage the hard work of interpreting these two actions in a logically consistent manner. Some of this work is reflected in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which is available to all delegates at the following link: <http://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/frequently-asked-questions-about-kc2015-delegate-assembly-resolutions-part-two/>

In its September 2015 meeting, the Executive Board discussed a few of these implications of the two resolutions, but deferred much of this work until its February 2016 meeting. It also invited the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) to address two questions related to the resolutions, since the CLC is named in the resolutions regarding the Membership Guidelines. You can read about the CLC meeting at the following links:

<https://themennonite.org/daily-news/brokenness-and-hope-meet-at-clc/>  
<http://mennoniteusa.org/news/clc-wrestles-with-role-as-elders-during-first-meeting-of-biennium/>

## **Conclusion**

Thank you again for your service as a delegate. We welcome you to share continued communication with us—whether suggestions, questions or concerns—at [ShelleyB@MennoniteUSA.org](mailto:ShelleyB@MennoniteUSA.org). May God bless you in your life and ministry.