

February 3, 2010

1. Marlene Kropf to retire from denominational ministry work for Mennonite Church USA
2. Planners for Mennonite Church USA Convention 2011 choose theme

Marlene Kropf to retire from denominational ministry work for Mennonite Church USA Long-time assistant transitions to Mennonite Education Agency

ELKHART, Ind.--Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership announces the retirement of Marlene Kropf from her position as denominational minister of worship, effective Sept. 6. The date marks the 27th anniversary of her employment with the Mennonite Church and, since the denominational merger, with Mennonite Church USA. She will continue her work as associate professor in spiritual formation and worship at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind.

“Marlene Kropf’s ministry has nurtured the worship of congregations within Mennonite Church USA in a Spirit-led way,” says Marty Lehman, director of administration and advancement for Mennonite Church USA. “Many church leaders have appreciated her faith-filled leadership and passionate commitment to worship planning.”

Completion of Kropf’s work in denominational ministry has also marked a job change for her administrative assistant. Evon Castro transitioned at the end of November from the Elkhart office to the Mennonite Education Agency at Goshen, Ind. She now works with youth census and enrollment data gathering.

Castro began employment for the church in 1968 as a secretary for the Mennonite General Conference, located at the time in Scottdale, Pa. Through 41 years she worked in the area of congregational ministry, moving to Goshen, Ind., in 1972 to be part of the Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, in 1975 to Elkhart’s Greencroft building and with other Executive Leadership staff as they moved in 2006 to the current Elkhart office at 1601 W. Beardsley Avenue. She began working with Kropf in 1983.

Kropf is a member of Belmont Mennonite Church in Elkhart. Castro is a member of True Vine Tabernacle. Both congregations are part of Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

Planners for Mennonite Church USA Convention 2011 choose theme Pittsburgh convention to focus on “Bridges to (the) Cross”

ELKHART, Ind. and NEWTON, Kan.—Planners for the Mennonite Church USA Convention 2011 focused on their mission and setting during the convention planning committee meetings as they met for the first time Jan. 14 to 16 in downtown Pittsburgh, Pa., site of the next national gathering. Youth and adult planning committees joined together to discern the theme and initiate other convention plans.

After two-and-a-half days of prayer, reading Scripture and small group brainstorming, “Bridges to (the) Cross,” and 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 surfaced as the theme and Scripture text for the next convention. Convention dates are July 4 to 9, 2011.

Pittsburgh, known as the City of Three Rivers, is connected by many bridges. Planners agreed on the importance of being missional within one’s context and surroundings and used the bridges and rivers idea to connect with their theme.

“The committee recognized that the theme is twofold. First, as instruments of Christ’s reconciliation, we too have many bridges to cross. Second, God calls us to shape our culture as ambassadors for Christ, instead of continuing to have our culture shape us. We are called to serve as bridges to Christ,” Rachel Swartzendruber Miller, director

of Convention Planning for Executive Leadership, said.

A high point of the weekend included discussion of a proposal from the Intercultural Relations Reference Committee that suggested convention include a day of showcasing and celebrating the gifts and talents of racial/ethnic members and congregations. Planners welcomed this proposal with excitement and affirmation.

Another high point came after learning that the David Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, where the Mennonites will gather, is one of the largest green buildings in the United States. It is certified with a Gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Building Rating System rating by the U.S. Green Building Council.

“We want to challenge our attendees to partner in our attempts to be the greenest convention this center has ever seen,” said Stephen Kriss, Philadelphia, Pa., adult committee member and Franconia Mennonite Conference staff.

Planners hope the churches within a few hours of western Pennsylvania will be willing to sponsor those at a distance. “The majority of our constituents live fewer than four hours from Pittsburgh,” noted Marty Lehman, director of administration and advancement for Mennonite Church USA. “This majority will have decreases in travel costs to convention. It is our hope they will consider giving 10 percent of their fund-raising dollars to other groups hesitant to attend convention due to cost and distance.”

Committee members encouraged staff to tell the stories of youth and adults who have been sponsored at past conventions.

“I was able to attend San Jose, and I promised to never miss another convention,” Olufemi Fatunmbi, Los Angeles, Calif., adult committee member and a pastor in Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, said. “However, I am from a small congregation and need financial help in order to bring more participants from my church.”

Committee members ended the weekend with prayers of thanks and praise for the Lord’s leading and for the opportunity to be involved in this work for the broader denomination.

Each committee includes 12 volunteers from across the denomination, including several from Pennsylvania, the hosting state. Rachel Swartzendruber Miller chairs both committees.

Members of the committee planning adult sessions and activities are Darrell Baer, Chambersburg, Pa., Marilyn Handrich Bender, Pittsburgh, Pa., Erin Clymer, Pittsburgh, Pa., Sue Conrad, Lancaster, Pa., Tory Doerksen, Denver, Colo., Olufemi Fatunmbi, Los Angeles, Calif., Makmur Halin, Highland, Calif., Karen Howard, Pittsburgh, Pa., Paula Killough, Elkhart, Ind., Stephen Kriss, Philadelphia, Pa., Donna J. Mast, Leola, Pa., and Donna L. Mast, Scottdale, Pa. Executive Leadership staff on the adult committee include Marty Lehman, Carol Epp, Ken Gingerich and Nancy Kauffmann.

Members of the committee planning youth sessions and activities are Marisa Aleman-Cantu, Rock Island, Ill., Alyssa Cable, Johnstown, Pa., Joy Cotchen, Johnstown, Pa., Thomas Dunn, Kidron, Ohio, Andrew Gordon, Lansdale, Pa., She’ Tenique Hall, Hampton, Va., Jon Heinly, Lancaster, Pa., Shelly Miller, Walnut Creek, Ohio, Clark Oswald, Newton, Kan., Grace Pam, Corona, Calif., Jason Widmer, Wellman, Iowa, Derek Yoder, Cassopolis, Mich. Jeremy Ours of Kalona, Iowa will serve as worship logistics coordinator and Tonya Keim Bartel of Hesston, Kan., as seminar coordinator. Executive Leadership staff members Glen Guyton and Scott Hartman are part of the youth committee.