



## Moral Dilemmas in Healthcare A Report on Annual Gathering 2013 By Twila M. Albrecht

*When despair for the world grows in me... I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship’s Annual Gathering took place June 21-23, 2013 on the campus of Goshen College. The theme for the

weekend was “Moral Dilemmas in Healthcare.”

Folk musicians, Gwen and Les Gustafson-Zook, set the tone at the first plenary session on Friday, June 21, by leading in worship and singing. Gwen opened with a reading of Wendell Berry’s poem, “The Peace of Wild Things.” “In the midst of troubling realities, let us rest in the grace of the world,” said Gwen.



Joseph Longacher,  
President of the  
Mennonite  
Healthcare

Fellowship (MHF) board, welcomed the group to a weekend of discussion and prayer. Longacher suggested replacing the word ‘dilemma’ with a new word, polylemma, since in many cases there are many aspects to an issue, not just two poles. As faithful caregivers in the midst of a rapidly changing healthcare system, there are many predicaments that demand our attention.

Following a brief introduction, Longacher welcomed Timothy Stoltzfus Jost, guest speaker for the evening. Jost holds the Robert L. Willett Family Professorship of Law at the Washington and Lee University School of Law, and is co-author of the major casebook *Health Law*. In his presentation, “Challenges of a Changing Healthcare System,” Jost discussed the complexities of the new Affordable Care Act, focusing on how national policy influences access to care and affordability. Jost challenged the audience to consider how we might improve access and the quality of healthcare while maintaining a sustainable economic system by tapping into Mennonite values of service to “the least of these” and doing more with less.



Jost also acknowledged that with these rapid changes in our nation’s healthcare system, instability is expected. Questions arise: Can we find common cause with global systems? How

do we eliminate waste expenditures? How do we transform the educational process and influence future students to consider incorporating a team approach to healthcare? These questions inspired what became a weekend of constructive conversation and reflection.



On Saturday morning, Patricia Ebersole Zwier, a social worker and counselor at Oaklawn Psychiatric Center in Goshen, provided lessons on overcoming fear and anxiety in her presentation, “Don’t be Afraid.” “Within the healthcare profession, the weight of well-being of others is on our shoulders,” said Zwier.

“Anxiety is within all of us, to some degree,” said Zwier. “As we name and respond to anxieties in our own lives, we can better serve

others.” She went on to note moral dilemma of how we transform fear into greater health in a culture of anxiety. She lifted up the faith component and the importance of community. “We are not alone – God’s plan is for community,” said Zwier. We need to recognize anxieties and the need for each other and for community.

Following Zwier’s presentation, participants were invited to attend workshops, some following up on the plenary presentations from Jost and Zwier, and others ranging from the practice of gazing prayer to the formation of international partnerships.

Dan Schrock, co-pastor at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana, led the workshop “Enhancing Our Compassion: The Spiritual Practice of Gazing.” Looking at someone long enough engenders love in us, just as we can behold the glory of God through the person of Jesus, said Schrock. The challenge is keeping our eyes open to perceive the image of God in others.



Glen E. Miller, retired physician and author from Goshen, led in a workshop entitled, “Everyone Deserves to Die Well.” He shared from his own personal and professional experiences, talking about the role of practical planning for a “good death” that includes the application of theology and values to healthcare decisions made in the process of dying.



Willard Swartley, Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), shared material from his most recent book in a workshop entitled “The Church’s Mission in Healing and Health Care.” Swartley shared an overview of Biblical perspectives in healing and healthcare, noted some aspects of church’s mission in healing and healthcare through the years, and shared from his own personal health experiences as they related to present-day challenges in healthcare.



Lora Nafziger, a clinical social worker at Oaklawn, led the workshop “Trauma and Spirituality.” Spiritually, someone experiencing trauma may feel emptiness, cynicism, and loss of apathy or growth, to name a few. An individual may feel that God is punishing them or some other sort of disconnect that causes a lack of spiritual intimacy with God, said Nafziger. The challenge is seeing, and helping others to see, the evidence of God’s love, trust and protection in these experiences.



Murray Nickel and John Martens, from International Mennonite Health Association (IMHA), led a workshop titled, “Transnational Partnerships for the 21st Century: Joys and Challenges.” Special guest, colleague and friend, Gaspard Mahuma, a physician and Mennonite leader from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was able to join Nickel and Martens for their presentation on successful partnerships and their experience in the DRC.

The IMHA leaders have been working with Mahuma for seven years to help assess the discrepancy between need and resources within the Congo. IMHA supports initiatives that seek to narrow this gap. Using the DRC as an example, Nickel asked, “How can we put together a tool to help people tell us what they’re doing?” Nickel also explained the importance of the community in the process. The goal in this partnership is to fill another avenue for people to promote what they’re doing through community of faith.



“Problems have to be solved by people on the ground,” said Martens. “We [in North America] can help, but we can’t fix the problem.” In other words, the solution for healthcare issues needs to come from the context and setting of the culture, not from powerful organizations “dumping money out of an airplane.” “Relationships are key,” said Martens and Mahuma.

On Saturday evening, Nelson Krabill, President-Elect of Mennonite World Conference, led a panel of five local health care leaders in a discussion on, “Healthcare Access for All.” The panel included James Nelson Gingerich, co-founder of Maple City Health Care Center; Randy Christophel, President and CEO of Indiana University Health Goshen; Clare Krabill, Executive Director of the Center for Healing and Hope; Darrin Miller, Director of Access & Risk Services at Oaklawn; and Mark King, President and CEO of Greencroft Communities.





Each of the panelists noted a particularly pressing dilemma regarding healthcare access in their own work. “Closing the gap is critical,” said Christophel. He noted ways in which the hospital has built creative partnerships with other organizations to address community healthcare needs.

Affordability, availability and continuity are three major dilemmas that need to be addressed right here in this community, explained Clare Krabill.

“Income disparity is a justice issue,” said James Nelson Gingrich. “We need to continue treatment without regard to status.” He noted some creative ways in which Maple City Health Care Center worked with patients with financial issues during the economic recession.

Mark King spoke from not only his perspective as Greencroft CEO, but also as Board Chairman of IU Health Goshen Hospital. He pointed out that there is a market that the community competes with for the best talent. “We need to pay more money for certain specialists. How do we keep up with need for physicians while keeping salaries at the justice standpoint?”



Closing the discussion, Nelson Kraybill asked the question, “What do you wish for the church’s role or responsibility to be?” “Needing help bears a social price,” said Darrin Miller. “There’s a stigma.” If the mission of the church is to help your neighbor, then knocking down stigma issues is important.” Clare Krabill echoed Miller’s concern. “Fifty percent of our patients struggle with a mental health issue, and yet for a working adult to walk into a charitable clinic is hard,” said Krabill. Gingrich pointed out that Maple City HCC is “a community of reconciliation and our entry point is through medical care,” He cited the need to continue neighboring beyond racial and economic barriers. Finally, King brought up the importance of teaching youth that the church needs them in these positions.

“We need leaders with a vision of justice, compassion and healing,” said Kraybill in conclusion. “God has called us to do reconciling, healing work in the world.”



On Sunday morning, Ervin R. Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, brought the message in a joint worship service with College Mennonite Church. In his sermon entitled “Healing as a Gift of God’s Grace,” he proclaimed out that God’s grace allows us to work through the polylemmas we face in the health care system.

“Jesus doesn’t need to be persuaded of who deserves healing,” said Stutzman. “We are not deserving of God’s healing, but we are worthy of God’s grace.”

As the weekend came to a close, one final question was presented in the wrap-up session: “What signs of God’s grace have you recently seen in

your work?” Participants joined in sharing their morning offering with the local Center for Healing and Hope as well as Mennonite Central Committee’s Menno Sante project in the Congo. A concluding communion service was led by Stutzman and MHF Executive Director, Paul Leichty.

The weekend theme fit well with the larger mission of Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship to be an organization in which Anabaptist healthcare workers can integrate their faith and their professional life. MHF was formed in 2011 when Mennonite Medical Association and Mennonite Nurses Association joined to form the new organization open to all types of healthcare workers. MHF announced that next year’s Annual Gathering will be held June 13-15 at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania.

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