

Mennonite Chaplains Association Disbands

Mennonite Chaplains Association (MCA) joined with the Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship (MHF) for their Annual Gathering which met at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center June 23-25, 2017. Representatives from both MCA and MHF planned the 2017 event.

The Chaplains Association met in a special business meeting on Friday, June 23, prior to the beginning of the Annual Gathering. This group of chaplains represented seven states (Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Florida) and seven kinds of chaplains (hospital, retirement community, hospice, fire department, international airport, CPE supervisor/seminary professor, retired). Three former presidents of MCA were present (Vickie Yoder, Chet Yoder, and Kenton Derstine). A time of re-connecting was given for introductions and sharing a spiritual ministry highlight. The purpose of the business meeting was to discuss and discern the future of MCA as a national organization with officers and dues-paying members. After an open discussion, the group decided to discontinue Mennonite Chaplains Association as a distinct organization.

Many factors went into this decision. One factor was the emergence of Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship in 2011 as "...a professional organization for all Anabaptist individuals working in or interested in addressing the challenges of healthcare from an Anabaptist perspective." The group noted that the purpose statement of the Chaplains Association overlapped with that of this new organization. Furthermore, the chaplains present noted the value of interacting with other professionals in the field of healthcare.

There are over 200 persons connected to an Anabaptist faith tradition serving as chaplains in various settings in the United States. Historically, MCA usually met annually as part of Mennonite Health Assembly. Going forward, Mennonite chaplains will have several options for professional support and networking. In addition to the Annual Gathering sponsored by MHF, occasional regional events are also sponsored. Furthermore, chaplains are encouraged to participate in the regional meetings sponsored by MHS (Mennonite Health Services).

There was a note of sadness as well as celebration regarding this decision. The Mennonite Chaplains Association was established in 1962 when there were just a handful of chaplains. At that time they were pioneers in this new context of ministry. For many years MCA fruitfully sustained its purpose of providing chaplains a context for "...followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the Anabaptist faith perspective, providing fellowship, support, collaboration, collegiality, educational opportunities and resources for ministry." Nevertheless, the group gathered in Laurelville determined that while this need remains, new forms and opportunities have emerged to fulfill this need.

J. Melvin Janzen, final President of Mennonite Chaplains Association

Kenton Derstine, past President of Mennonite Chaplains Association