

PRESS RELEASE

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Menonite Healthcare Fellowship Gathers to Discuss Their Faith at Work
By Kayla Berkey

Our faith moves us to new places, new ideas, and new visions. This idea was a focus during the recent Menonite Healthcare Fellowship (MHF) 2014 Annual Gathering that took place June 13-15 at Laurelville Menonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.. The weekend's speakers shared challenging and heartfelt explorations of how God is moving, guiding, and sending people of faith throughout the healthcare field.



“Sometimes God moves us geographically, and sometimes God moves us into new vision for the neighborhoods where we are already located,” Jen Leaman shared in the Saturday morning worship session where she and her husband Tim were speakers.

Tim and Jen Leaman’s story powerfully described how their faith guided their decision to move with their three children into the rapidly growing and ethnically diverse Oxford Circle neighborhood of Philadelphia where Tim grew up.

Tim is a family physician and a site medical director at Esperanza Health Center, and Jen is a trained social worker who volunteers regularly in their children’s public schools. Both are actively involved with Oxford Circle Menonite Church’s ministries and its non-profit community development corporation, which offers community programs and resources.

The Leamans chose to move into the Oxford Circle neighborhood because, beyond programs, they wanted to invest in the community as their home: “We can more readily engage with our neighbors in the daily work of building a healthy community by using its schools, by playing in its parks,” Tim explained.

Tim and Jen Leaman were among several presenters at the MHF Annual Gathering who offered valuably different perspectives relating their faith with healthcare disciplines. The variety of occupations represented included physicians, nurses, social workers, dietitians, chaplains, dental and medical students.



Many MHF members and attendees have spent time overseas, and most of the weekend's speakers referred to their cross-cultural experiences as formative for shaping their vocational goals.

However, as there are more locally trained physicians around the world, medical missions have shifted away from overseas work, explains MHF Executive Director Paul Leichty. People like the Leamans demonstrate a shift toward creative involvement in their local communities.

"I think it's an inspiration to the older generation that really valued mission-mindedness but saw it as a more overseas thing to also realize that our young people are still thinking in those terms," says Leichty.

One way that MHF continues to support cross-cultural experience is with the scholarships they offer for Student Elective Terms (SETs). These are available for medical and graduate-level students in any healthcare-related field who seek to gain a 4-8 week term of healthcare experience in a developing country.

John Stoeckle, a first-year family medicine resident at Thomas Jefferson University, gave a presentation about his recent SET experience working with malaria research at Macha Mission Hospital in Zambia. "The experience informs both our faith and our careers for the rest of our lives," Stoeckle said.



The weekend-long MHF Gathering provided space for people in healthcare disciplines to connect, network, support each other, and learn. The organization also holds regional meetings throughout the year in various locations. MHF invites anyone to become a member who works within a healthcare-related field and embraces Anabaptist values. They are hoping to involve more young people as members.

Leichty seeks for the Annual Gathering to capture and strengthen links between people's faith and their professional lives: "Together we can encourage each other, support each other in living out our faith, and raise some new possibilities for how the church can use the gifts of people in the healthcare field."



Kayla Berkey lives in Pittsburgh and works at the non-profit Consumer Health Coalition as a Health Insurance Navigator for federal- and state-based health insurance programs. She attends Pittsburgh Mennonite Church, has a Masters in English from Duquesne University, and currently writes at LitPitt.com.