

**“Stories of Healing” Highlight Healthcare Gathering  
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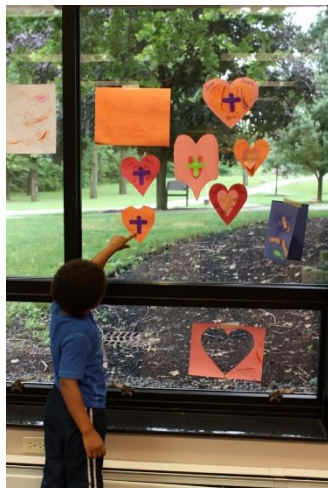


“Connecting as human beings is a source of healing.” These words from plenary speaker, Beth Toner, set the tone for the entire weekend of Menonite Healthcare Fellowship’s (MHF) Annual Gathering. On June 22-24, about 60 Anabaptist healthcare professionals and their families gathered at Bluffton University in Ohio under the theme of “Stories of Healing.” Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals and administrators shared stories from their lines of work around the world, demonstrating that everyone, patient and practitioner alike, has a story of healing.

Following dinner and initial networking on Friday, the gathering began with spirited worship and beautiful harmonies led by singer/songwriter Daryl Snider and music and worship leader Louise Ranck. J. Alexander Sider, a Religion and Peace and Conflict Studies professor from Bluffton University, then offered insights into how our language concerning “miraculous healing and heroic suffering” tend to ignore the



discrimination that peoples with disabilities face in our society. The opening evening ended with the reminder from Dr. Sider that “justice work is never justice work unless it is justice-for-all work.”



As the children in attendance shared time together reading stories, doing artwork, and working together on a service project, the conversation continued Saturday morning with a presentation by Beth Toner, senior communications officer at Robert Woods Johnson Foundation and a registered nurse with clinical experience in long-term care and community health settings. Her presentation focused on the healing power of intersecting personal stories with those of patients/clients. In our healing practices, she called on those present to ask “What if?” What if we looked up from our charts and monitors to listen to our patients’ stories? What if we avoided labels

and assumptions? What if we viewed illness and disabilities as assets? What if we focused on relationships and acknowledged our interconnectedness with each other and our planet?

Three workshop sessions then offered participants the choice to dive deeper into the various aspects of stories within the healing process.



Anna Kauffman, a family physician in Bluffton, explored what happens when healthcare providers become the patients while her husband, Ross Kauffman, the Director of Public Health at Ohio Northern University, led a more interactive session, using a virtual reality experience to bring the history of public health to the forefront, demonstrating how modern society can learn from the healing communities of the past. Their brother, Rudi Kauffman, used his background in political science to look at how allowing patients to pay directly for their primary care can create a system

in which whole-body wellness becomes the “treatment,” relationships rather than “productivity” become the measure of success, and the well-being of communities becomes the focus.

Sharing from their personal experience with the treatment of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, Sarah and Herb Myers discussed the life-building tools that helped them go “from surviving to living.” Doug Graber Neufeld, a professor of Environmental Sustainability and the director of the new Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions at Eastern Mennonite University, used stories to demonstrate the impact of climate change on human health. The final workshop offering featured Gail Weybright, nursing professor at Goshen College and chaplain Clair



Hochstetler sharing how their lives intersected during the death of Clair’s brother to show them the ultimate healing that can occur in death, a view quite opposite to culture’s view of death.



A day spent learning and networking, including with representatives from Mennonite World Conference’s new international health initiative, the Global Anabaptist Health Network (GAHN), climaxed with the Saturday evening worship and plenary session. William Swartley, a nurse anesthetist from Newton, Kansas, told moving stories of serving as a Mennonite pacifist in a forward surgical hospital with Samaritan’s Purse in the war zone of Mosul, Iraq. An ice cream social, as well as original music and stories with

Daryl Snider, rounded out the busy day.



Sunday morning began with the opportunity to fellowship over a meal and meet the board of MHF, led by Executive Director, Paul Leichty, and MHF President, Lyubov Slashcheva. A final time of singing, scripture, and communion began a plenary session led by Mr. Leichty, in which he related the healing words and stories of Jesus to his own personal recovery from a severe heart attack in December 2016, showing the connection between salvation and therapy, cure, and health. Also on Sunday morning, nurse

midwife Miriam Godshall, recently retired from a lengthy career in Aibonito, Puerto Rico, shared briefly on her experience of living through Hurricane María, and an offering was received to assist in a cooperative project to address post-traumatic stress issues on the island.

From all of the planning that went into the 2018 Annual Gathering, MHF allowed attendees to walk away confidently in the knowledge of the core convictions of the gathering: Biblical stories strengthen faith, patient/client stories inform care, public health stories provide context, and personal faith stories inspire hope. MHF's Annual Gathering 2019 was announced for June 21-23, 2019 at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania.

Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship (MHF) is an interdisciplinary community of Anabaptist health professionals which seeks to nurture the integration of faith and practice, to provide opportunities for dialogue on health-related issues, and to address specific needs through education, advocacy, and service. MHF was formed in June 2011 when Mennonite Medical Association (MMA) and Mennonite Nurses Association (MNA) joined to form a new organization open to all Anabaptist healthcare professionals. More information about MHF and the Annual Gathering is available on the web at [www.mennohealth.org](http://www.mennohealth.org).

Photos by Emily Spateholts

Captions:

1. Beth Toner shares "Stories of Healing" at Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship Annual Gathering 2018.
2. Daryl Snider leads music at MHF Annual Gathering in Bluffton.
3. Children share their own "Stories of Healing."
4. MHF Board member, Indigo Miller, tries out the virtual reality glasses as workshop leader, Ross Kauffman, explains the historic public health significance of the scene.
5. Chaplain Clair Hochstetler and Goshen College nursing professor, Gail Weybright, co-lead a workshop on Healing and Death.
6. William Swartley presents on being a "Pacifist in a War Zone."
7. Paul Leichty explores words in Mark's Gospel describing Jesus' healing ministry.