

**Wednesday, July 25, 2007**

## Young adults hoped to bridge convention age gap, with support from college

*A version of this article was published July 3, 2007 in mPress the official daily newspaper of the 2007 convention of Mennonite Church USA.*

GOSHEN, Ind. – Beyond singing hymn number 118 (better known as “606”), discussing some of Menno’s stranger stances and seeking alternatives to name hyphenating in the hopes of protecting future generations of Yoder-Graber-Miller-Roths, young Mennonite adults are defining their place in the church as more and more 19- to 30-year-olds join in official church decision-making. Ten such young adults were able to act as delegates at the biennial Mennonite Church USA convention in San Jose, Calif., (July 2-6) thanks, in part, to the support and encouragement of their college or alma mater.

Responding to a broader call from Mennonite Church USA to develop Mennonite leaders, Goshen College set aside several thousand dollars to send three current students, four 2007 graduates and three recent alums to San Jose 2007, requiring only that they participate in the delegations — registering themselves with Young Adult Delegate to Assembly (YODA) — and spend an hour or two at the Goshen College booth.

YODA is an initiative that began in 2003 to provide orientation to first-time young adult delegates. Led by p Dave Maurer of Bluffton, Ohio, and Amy Nissley of Mountain Lake, Minn., YODA provides meetings and c for young adults to ask questions about the delegation process, meet each other and learn from other chu members.

Nissley, a youth minister, notes “a healthy increase” in young adult involvement. She said, “In Charlotte w about 30 YODAs. This time we have 43.”

Goshen College had high hopes for the 10 first-time delegates it provided support to, according to Bob Yo campus minister at GC who helped seek out the delegates. “We hope that our students and recent alums greater ownership in Mennonite Church USA and want to be part of the church in these leadership ways,” Yoder. “The other hope is that students walk away knowing that we as a college are strong supporters of church.”

Matt Troyer, a delegate from Shickley, Neb., graduated in 2005 from Goshen College. Like Yoder, Troyer value of young adult leadership. He believes “it’s important for young adults to feel like they belong to the c And to belong, you need to participate.”

Since he was 18, Neal Friesen, a 2007 Goshen College graduate from Henderson, Neb., has been partici a regional delegate for the conference he and Troyer both represented, Central Plains Mennonite Confere (CPMC).

To both Friesen and Troyer, one important role for young adults is to act as a bridge between the Mennoni generations.

“There’s a big 50-plus group, and a token youth delegate from each congregation that can find one, and ve us in between,” Friesen said. “We need those people in between, gleaning wisdom from that older crowd, keeping the church as a whole relevant to changing times.”

“It’s important to create opportunities for the different generations to interact with each other,” Troyer said. are rubbing shoulders with adults and many of them have experienced similar things, and have asked sim questions about identity and belonging that many young adults ask.”

Goshen College sophomore Hillary Watson, from Seattle, Wash., was another delegate. She acknowledg church can learn from her age group as well. “Young adults must be involved in the church because we a

### GC speakers at San Jose 2007

Youth worship speakers:



**John D. Roth,**  
Professor of History ;  
Tuesday, July 3, 200

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**James E. Brennem;**  
Goshen College Pre  
Thursday, July 5, 20

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than the future of the church,” she said. “We are a population with a unique perspective and we are invest bringing the Kingdom. We must find ways to share our vision of the Kingdom.”

Many of the young adult delegates found encouragement to share what they could from their home congregations when those also offered financial support. This was the case for Troyer. He said, “I had been hoping to go, but didn’t figure I’d be able to afford it unless I received some funding.” Then both his conference and his alma mater approached him offering funds.

Watson was glad to have the church where she is interning with the Ministry Inquiry Program, Salem Men’s Church, cover the rest of her expenses, but she said, “I would have found a way to come without the money because ... I decided there was no way I would miss this beautiful, diverse, massive meeting of people with something very deep and very dear in common.”

Nissley, a YODA leader, had hopes for all the young adults that are participating. “We hope that through this program we are creating a place for young adults to connect with their peers, but also to connect with others who also love the church,” she said.

“I think as a larger church we have a responsibility to tend and nurture those who will lead us in the future. Making sure that young adults have a place at the table, we begin those conversations early, building relationships and planting seeds that will serve us well,” said Nissley.

“I do think this is significant for an institution to do this. There are 10 young adults saying ‘I want to be part of the church.’ And that’s exciting,” Yoder said. “I’m glad that in our own meager way, we can help support that in young people wanting to be part of the church and to take ownership of the church and be leaders in the future.”

### **The 10 people Goshen College helped to support attend San Jose as delegates were:**

#### RETURNING STUDENTS

- Krista Ehst a junior from Bally, Pa., was a delegate for Perkasio Mennonite Church.
- Hillary Watson, a sophomore from Seattle, Wash., represented Salem Mennonite Church, where she works with the Ministry Inquiry Program.
- Randy Keener, a junior from Lebanon, Pa., was a delegate for Gingrich Mennonite Church.

#### 2007 GRADUATES

- Neal Friesen is from Henderson Neb., and was a delegate for Central Plains Conference.
- Bethany Wright is from Riverside, Calif., and was a delegate for the Pacific Southwest Conference.
- Kristine Bowman is from Millersburg, Ind., and was a delegate for Waterford Mennonite Church
- Anna Yoder is from Goshen, Ind., and was a delegate for Central District Conference.

#### RECENT ALUMNI

- Matt Troyer, a 2005 graduate from Shickley, Neb., was a delegate for Central Plains Conference.
- Kent Yoder, a 2002 graduate from Goshen, Ind., was representing Assembly Mennonite Church.
- M. Elizabeth Miller, a 2006 graduate from State College, Pa., was representing University Mennonite Church.

– by

**Editors: For more information about this release, to arrange an interview or request a photo, contact College News Bureau Director Jodi H. Beyeler at (574) 535-7572 or [jodihb@goshen.edu](mailto:jodihb@goshen.edu).**

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Goshen College, established in 1894, is a residential Christian liberal arts college rooted in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. The college’s Christ-centered core values – passionate learning, global citizenship, compassionate peacemaking and servant-leadership – prepare students as leaders for the church and world. Recognized for its unique Study-Service Term program, Goshen has earned citations of excellence in *Best Buys in Education*, “Colleges of Distinction,” “Making a Difference College Guide” and *U.S. News & World Report’s* “America’s Best Colleges” edition, which named Goshen a “least debt college.” Visit [www.goshen.edu](http://www.goshen.edu)

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