

# YODAs get place at table

Jodi H. Beyeler  
Goshen College

There are YODAs among us, walking around the convention hallways and even voting during adult delegate sessions. But they aren't Yoders from Boston or short, green and withered mentors known to gurgle "Use the force" on the movie screen.

These YODAs are Young Adult Delegates to Assembly, a program to encourage congregations and conferences to send young adults – ages 18 to 30 – as delegates to assembly, as their numbers have been historically low.

"The idea for YODA came from the Executive Board and staff ... we need more young adult delegates," said Jim Schrag, executive director of the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board.

Jesse Smith is a YODA from Iowa City Mennonite Church who has missed only one convention – Eugene '91 – in his 20-year lifetime. When his church's elders

nominated him as a delegate to Atlanta, he said he was "a little surprised to be asked, but honored." After returning from a convention that he attended as a child, Smith told his mother, a pastor, that he wanted to be moderator of the Mennonite Church. His YODA status could be a first step towards that goal.

"Being involved [as a delegate] has helped me to understand the church's work better and the ways my gifts can fit into the church's mission," said Smith. As part of the YODA program, he was assigned a mentor, pastor Randy Roth of Des Moines (Iowa) Mennonite Church, who welcomes young adults. "We need their enthusiasm, their idealism, their energy and their vision because it is vital to the rest of the church," he said.

Sarah Sales, a 24-year-old YODA from Lombard (Ill.) Mennonite Church prepared for the week of meetings and voting by reading the entire delegate book before coming – every page.

"Bylaws are really hard to read," she said.

This year, there are 38 YODAs, but there are more young adults who are not part of official program. Two conferences also decided not to assign mentors.

Special YODA sessions are offered to young adult delegates to gain background information on issues to be voted on, ask questions of the MC USA Executive Board, reflect on their experiences and talk about their hopes and dreams for the church.

The acronym for the program is a "bit of a stretch," admits its creator, the Associate Executive Director for Mennonite Church USA, J. Ron Byler, but it's hard to miss the humor and appropriateness of the name.

However, said Shana Peachy Boshart, who coordinated the program with David Mauer, "We have done nothing to play the name up. We are very sensitive to not wanting young adults to feel in any way minimized."

## Abortion from p. 1

was no call for anti-abortion legislation because abortion is an individual choice and because outlawing abortion would not eliminate the issue.

"Illegalizing abortion places additional burdens on people, especially women," Alcazar said, noting that illegal abortions potentially could lead to even greater harm for the women and

children involved.

Alcazar said it is the place of the church to encourage dialogue on the issue, especially by educating young people and helping place sexuality in its proper marital context.

The proposed amendment failed on a paper ballot, 486 votes to 356, with 16 abstaining — a 58 percent majority.

The approved document states

in part that abortion should not be used to interrupt unwanted pregnancies, and calls for a commitment to caring for infants who are brought to term. The statement also calls for the church to act with compassion toward those who choose to have an abortion and to find ways to "walk with individuals seeking guidance as they deal with unexpected and unwanted pregnancies."

## Prayer highlights 'Satisfaction'

Lynda Hollinger-Janzen  
Mennonite Mission Network

How does a preacher follow such vibrant acts of worship as an ambassador from the world of hip-hop and rap and actor-comedians recounting improbable stories about Jesus causing their businesses to fail? Mark Vincent, a stewardship educator and one of the chief architects of the First Fruits Giving plan, didn't try to outdo them. Instead, he prayed.

"Only from our knees can we find our Savior's power," Vincent said.

As he sat down time and again to prepare a sermon on the "Table of Satisfaction" theme, Vincent said, God kept calling him to pray for the Mennonite Church.

Vincent began a 20-minute prayer by thanking God for the vision of the "upside-down kingdom" and for the current period of jubilee given to MC USA to recover its purpose and witness.

He then beseeched God to guide the delegate discussion.

"We are a disunited people who seek to be united," Vincent said. "We are plagued by schism. Churches with histories of two centuries are seeking to leave us. New bodies, that are not Mennonite, are seeking to join us."

Referring to the passage that



**Powerful prayer:** Mark Vincent used his message time during Saturday's adult worship to pray for the church.

precedes the morning's text in II Kings 7:3-16 – an account of a famine so severe that Samaria's inhabitants turned to cannibalism – Vincent prayed, "Some of us are reluctant to leave valley, prairie or 'hood. What would you say to us from this hideous and desperate story?"

After imploring God to have mercy on MC USA for its sins, Vincent asked God to impart a spirit of repentance, to create a culture of permission and to give grace. He asked worshipers to place their hands on those around them so all might receive grace.

Mennonites from all corners of the country responded to the morning worship by "dancing" their gifts to offering baskets and clapping a syncopated benediction, beginning to learn that, perhaps, satisfaction comes when surprises add spice to daily fare.

mPress

mPress is published by Goshen College faculty, students and alumni, together with volunteers from other Mennonite agencies (noted below) on behalf of the Atlanta 2003 conventions. Find us on the Web at [www.goshen.edu/mpress](http://www.goshen.edu/mpress)

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Printed in the U.S.A. by ProGraphics Communications Inc., Atlanta, Ga.  
Publication dates: July 4-8, 2003.  
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