



**Central  
District  
Conference**  
A conference of  
Mennonite Church USA

# Reporter

**KNOWING  
CHRIST'S LOVE  
– ANSWERING  
GOD'S CALL**

**JULY 2012**

## **Annual meeting activity**

Delegates (right) ponder seeds of corn that represented Boaz, wheat representing Naomi, barley representing Ruth and soybeans representing Orpah. Using these seed types, delegates placed selected seeds in jars to express how they see themselves in the Ruth-Boaz story.



## Annual meeting: Congregational Peace Pledge approved **CDC defined by our stories**

Central District Conference delegates pondered each others' stories and congregational stories, comparing those to the biblical story

**Preaching on Thursday, Tim Schrag said that Ruth's story is "a story of nobody from nowhere." In spite of that, Schrag said that he finds it relevant for the time in which we live.**

of Ruth and Boaz, during the 56th annual CDC meeting in central Illinois on June 22-23.

Delegates were invited to respond to the decision made by the Ministerial Committee following a credential review process.

The sessions at Mennonite Church of Normal also involved reporting of Reign of God grants, acceptance of St. Paul Mennonite Fellow-

ship, St. Paul, Minn., into CDC and a resolution on a congregational peace pledge.

A 2012-13 proposed spending plan of \$209,258 was approved.

### **Three worship services**

Stories from the Book of Ruth were themes in three worship services.

Preaching on Thursday evening, Tim Schrag of Mennonite Church of Normal, explained that Ruth's story is "a story of nobody from nowhere." In spite of that, Schrag said that he finds it relevant for the time in which we live. "So many people are adrift, lonely and cut off (just like Ruth)."

"Why can't I move mountains? Why can't I speak in tongues? Why can't I heal with a prayer on hearing God's voice?" he asked worshippers.

Schrag insisted that as Mennonites we have two choices in the Ruth-Boaz story. The first is a choice of Ruth's loyalty and love. "Ruth's choice was huge," he said, "as history hinged on

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## Defined by our stories - continued



**The group “Those Guys,” from Carlock, performed during the annual meeting. They are from left, Ken Schwoerer, Bob Waller and Ron Schieber.**

a simple and profound act of love: Where thou goest I will go.”

The second is a choice of individuals and communities going through the motion of faith. “Sometimes we all have habits we hang on to and we just go through the motions....” Despite that, God’s story continues.

Schrag said that God works in all things. Those ways include working in every habit a community holds and working in all ways for the good of those who love God.

“Even if God seems absent, the story of Ruth as a nobody from nowhere, is our story as well,” he said.

Following his sermon, delegates lit candles at their tables and were asked to think inwardly of the question, “Where is God at work in the world, in your church, in your conference and in your life?”

On Friday evening, Emily North of the Shalom congregation told worshipers that we each have stories and we must listen to each other’s stories. Adding

### **Naomi-Ruth story: Their bond was very deep. It is friendship born out of pain and joy.**

that we are beloved children of God, North used an example from her own faith story and told worshipers that she has not a

shadow of a doubt that God has been faithful to her.

Describing Naomi as the stranger, Ruth as the friend, and Boaz as the host, North said that the Ruth-Naomi relationship started as in-laws, but it is clear that their bond was very deep. “It is friendship born out of pain and joy,” she said.

“We choose to, or are compelled to host strangers. We do it because we know what it is like to be a stranger. God, our host, invites us to be family. That

is how God works,” said North. “We also live out this love of God to tell the Good News that Jesus Christ has broken down barriers between strangers. God, our host, invites us to be family.”

“May the story of Ruth remind us in our lives where God has been faithful to us,” she concluded.

Following her sermon, delegates took seeds of corn that represented Boaz, wheat representing Naomi, barley representing Ruth and soybeans representing Orpah, the daughter-in-law who did not follow Ruth. Using these four seed types, delegates placed selected seeds in jars to express how they see themselves in the Ruth-Boaz story.

Michael Crosby of First, Urbana, preaching on Saturday morning, asked delegates to consider the question, “What defines me?” as it relates to the Ruth-Boaz story.

“In this age of loneliness, we are pretty good at thinking we have people pegged. People have been profiled in this story. Ruth, for example is always The Moabite,” he said.

“The truth is that most of these (profile) labels say who we are not, rather than who we are. We are people of God, the spirit of all creation. Praise God for Ruth’s testimony and for Boaz’s faith in God,” he said.

Crosby urged worshipers to take some of Boaz’s courage, because Boaz sees Ruth as courageous.

The community that first read Ruth was in a debate like us, Crosby said. “That early debate was: Which scripture? Which interpretations?”

Crosby continued: “At one level the Book of Ruth is clear. And at a different level, the community grapples with the question ‘What does it mean to be faithful?’ It is like us today. As I read it, the Ruth and Boaz of Bethlehem invite us to evaluate true faithfulness in the context of our relationships.”

Referring to our own stories, Crosby said that our salvation story focuses on the new covenant of love established to carry on the ministry of Jesus.

“It’s tempting to get up from the table when we are in variance with each other. But when we don’t, we discover we are children of God and are filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit,” he said.

### **Reign of God grants**

CDC’s Missional Church Committee reviewed with delegates its first-ever series of Reign of God grants. The grants involve CDC congregations partnering together to spark new initiatives or new additions to existing programs.

Those grants have launched a Congo Cloth Connection, which enabled a delegation to go to The Congo.



**Cindy Ropp**

## CDC annual meeting

# Defined by our stories

Participating congregations included Florence Church of the Brethren-Mennonite, Silverwood and Kern Road.

Other congregations sent funds to support the trip.

Mennofolk is a celebration of contemporary Mennonite faith and culture through music and song. Participating congregations included Columbus, Shalom Community, Grace, and First, Bluffton.

A Peacebuilders Family Camp, planned next year, will take place at Koinonia Partners in Americus, Ga., Participating congregations include Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, Paoli, Emmaus Road and Mennonite Fellowship of Asheville.

### **Congregational Peace Pledge**

Delegates supported, through resolution, “A Congregational Peace Pledge: A call to intentionally encounter the realities of war.” The complete resolution is found on CDC’s website.

Speaking for the Resolutions Committee, David Moser said, “This resolution is an invitation to reflect deeply on the society in which we live.”

It invites congregations to commit themselves to actions such as the following:

- Send members to conflict zones with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Witness for Peace, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Mission Network or other organizations dedicated to providing a nonviolent presence nationally or internationally.
- Sponsor events that ask youth to question participation in war.
- Bring speakers to congregations who have worked at peace building with victims of war, are former combatants, or are persons who have participated in alternative service.

### **St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship**

By an 88 percent margin, delegates welcomed St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship, St. Paul, Minn., as a member congregation of Central District Conference. A two-third affirmation was required. The action culminates a three-year quest by the small fellowship to join CDC. The fellowship of eight members was previously a member of Central Plains Conference.

### **State of the conference**

Joyce Schumacher, CDC president, shared with

delegates her family’s first-ever attendance of a CDC annual meeting. It was in 1980 when she and her husband brought their five young children to the meetings. The experience involved an awkward spilling of a banana split three times in their car on the way home, which was resolved as the family laughed together.

Relating that experience to CDC, Schumacher said that the conference is “something like a family. Its diverse opinions challenge us to stay together as a family. Our call is to follow Jesus Christ. That call challenges us to work together at our differences. In the face of disagreement it is my hope that we stay at the table.”

“I am confident that the life of our conference will continue to be very good,” she told delegates. “We continue to grow as we seek a deeper understanding of God’s story.”

Listing several ways CDC congregations share Christian witness, Schumacher named over a dozen missional activities published in recent issues of the *Reporter*. These included a sister care workshop, support of MCC relief sales, creation of health kits, Reign of God grants, worshiping in parks, promotion of the arts, pastor sabbaticals, creation of community gardens and support by congregations of activities in their communities.

### **Congregational stories**

Continuing a CDC tradition over several annual meetings, three congregations shared their stories with delegates.

Jayne Byler, pastor of First, Sugar creek, shared about her congregation’s creation of 20,000 apple fritters made annually during the community’s annual Swiss Days in late September. The church tradition, started in 1952, invites members of the Sugar creek community to help in the process.

“It’s an opportunity to host friends, family and to reach out and work side-by-side with members of our community who may not be members of our congregation,” she said, indicating that persons who taste the fritters obtain a little slice of heaven.

Matt Hickman, assistant pastor of Mennonite Church of Normal, shared about his congregation’s involvement with a local mission, Home Sweet Home Mission. Members of the congregation have worked and contributed to the mission’s food pantry. They helped remodel a warehouse and helped in construction of a recycling drop-off barn owned by the mission. As a result today the mission has several positive programs in place including retail, recycling and repair of goods.

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2012 annual meeting in pictures

# God's story ...Our stories!

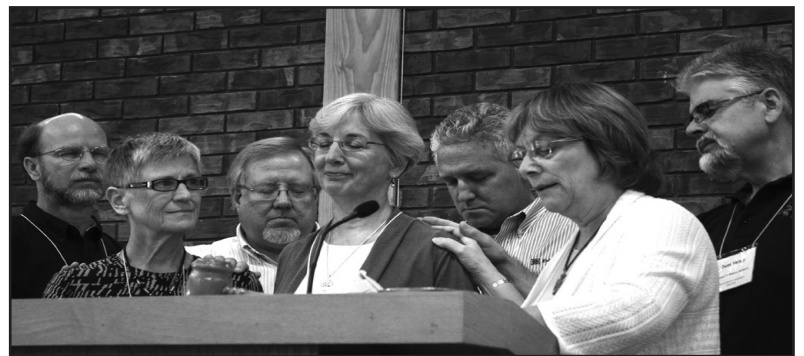


**Top row:** Gerry Schrock portrays Naomi and Holly Zehr portrays Ruth.

**Second row left:** Joyce Schumacher and Sara VonGunten; **right counter clockwise:** George Lehman, Gwen Reiser, Carl Yoder, Amy Weishaupt, Emily Weaver, Mia Engle and Bob Fitzwater.

**Third row left:** J Augspurger and Deron Brill-Bergstresser lay hands on James Rissler; **right:** podium communion table setting.

**Bottom:** J. Denny Weaver, Steve Yoder, Walt Paquin and Gerald Mast.



**Top row left:** Glenn Wilson performs at pastor appreciation dinner; **right:** Ken Hawkley lights candles remembering Russell Welty, William Gering and John Hockman.

**Second row left:** Matt Hickman explains Menno-nite Church of Normal’s native prairie rain garden; **right:** Chuck Neufeld and Cindy Breeze, lead singing.

**Third row left,** three CDC pastors Cyneatha Millsaps, Mark Vincent and Ron Adams; **right:** MC USA denomination representatives laying hands on Joyce Schumacher and Lois Kaufmann, from left, Steve Carpenter, MennoMedia; Tim Stair, Mennonite Health Services Alliance; Jeff Swartzendruber, Everence; Dean Heisey, Mennonite Mission Network; and Nancy Kauffmann, denominational minister.

# Defined by our stories - continued

Miriam Zehr, Oak Grove associate pastor, explained how the pastoral team held a special focus on the Bible and prayer related to youth of the congregation. The purpose was to allow youth to see: the overarching Bible story from Creation to Revelation, how the Old and New Testaments fit together, and how music reflects our faith and that lyrics do matter and tell a story.

## Ministerial Committee report

While it did not require delegate action, a report by the Ministerial Committee provided much discussion.

During the Committee's report to delegates, members explained in detail the process involving a review of Megan Ramer's credentials. Ramer, pastor of Chicago Community Mennonite, conducted several same-sex covenant ceremonies in 2011. The Ministerial Committee's review in this issue lasted nearly one year before it came to the annual meeting.

## The Committee made the following decisions:

1 – The committee affirms Megan Ramer's ministerial gifts and her pastoral work at Chicago Community Mennonite Church.

2 – The committee will note in Pastor Ramer's Ministerial Leadership Information form (MLI) that her actions in performing same-sex unions are at variance with MC USA's Membership Guidelines.

The delegate report book included the Credential Review Report and a letter sent to pastors of CDC from Lois Kaufmann, Conference Minister.

Several open mic comments reflected mixed delegate sentiment on the issue. Ramer explained her actions and answered questions from delegates during Friday's lunch.

Nearly one hour of delegate group discussion and reporting to all delegates from table groups took place on Friday afternoon. Each of the 20 table groups was permitted one minute to share its responses to the delegates.

Jep Hostetler of the Ministerial Committee, told delegates during the discussion, "At issue is biblical interpretation." From the floor, many delegates affirmed the process of the Committee.

Questions from delegates included: "What does this mean for CDC?" and, "In what way should CDC inform the wider church?"

Concern was expressed over the possibility of CDC losing congregations as a result of this action. Several delegates asked for a definition of the word "variance."

## CENTRAL DISTRICT REPORTER

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Delegates had the opportunity to offer written opinions on the Committee's report through a response form. Questions asked of delegates included: What about the Credential Review is positive and helpful? Why is it helpful? What about the Credential Review gives you pause or is troubling? Why is it troubling?

## Plenary Session

Janeen Bertsche Johnson's plenary session on church polity provided an overview of the past 10 years of MC USA. In a talk titled "The Framework that Shapes Us: MC USA and CDC," she reviewed how the church works at conference and denominational levels. A video of her presentation is available on DVD for all CDC congregations.

## Workshops

Five workshops were held. These included "An Unbroken Circle of Care," presented by Ted Larrison and Doris Weaver; "How Churches Change People: Spiritual Formation and Social Mission," by Gerald Mast; "Many Voices, One Story: Enhancing Worship with Global Music," by Jon C. Peterson; "Tearing Down Racial and Cultural Walls," by John Powell; and "Seeking God Together: Youth and Adults," by Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau.

## Trailblazer

Sara VonGunten shared with delegates the story of Anne Neufeld Rupp, now living in retirement in North Newton, Kansas. Neufeld Rupp was the first woman to pastor a church in CDC. And, with her husband, Ken, the two were the first Mennonite co-pastoral husband and wife team. The couple pastored the former Pleasant Oaks congregation in Middlebury, Ind.

## Slate of officers

The following officers for 2012-13 were elected at Normal:

- **Board of Directors:** Roger Nafziger, Eighth Street, treasurer; Gwen Reiser, Columbus, member at large.
- **Ministerial Committee:** Ron Adams, Madison; Joel Miller, Cincinnati.
- **Missional Church Committee:** Mary Biddle, First, Urbana; J.P. Masih, Asian Mennonite Community; John Powell, Shalom Community.
- **Camp Friedenswald:** Wendell Badertscher, Grace; Virgil Claassen, Hively Avenue; Brenda Wiebe, Eighth Street.
- **Bluffton University Board of Trustees:** Kent Yoder, Silverwood.

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