



**Central
District
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

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

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014

CDC women came together to dance, worship and celebrate at retreat

More than 150 women gathered together for mid-September for Black Mennonite Women Rock!, this year's annual Central District Conference women's retreat.

At this year's CDC annual meeting, Cyneatha Millsaps, pastor at Community Mennonite Church of Markham, explained during the Mennonite Women's meal that not many women of color attend the women's retreat because it's at a camp and they have an inaccurate idea of what camp is like and don't see women's retreats as applying to them. She gave a preview of what was to come at the women's retreat and spoke about her inspiration for the retreat's theme: "finding self-identity through the lives of black women."



Cyneatha Millsaps

Ruth Lapp Guengerich explained on her Mennonite Women Voices blog that Millsaps' challenge for the retreat "was to plan a weekend that would speak to women of color, but also make white women feel welcome and involved. The theme caught the attention of many African-American women from the east coast to Illinois."

According to Lapp Guengerich, about a third 1/3 of the more than 150 registrants were women of color.

The weekend included worship services led by Hyacinth Stevens, pastor at King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx. Stevens focused on Gen-



esis 16 and 21, Psalm 139 and the dilemma of Hagar and Sara.

"We were challenged to recognize that as women we are all grafted together," Lapp Guengerich wrote in her blog. "We cannot be separated, and need to learn to overcome our discomfort with differences, celebrating our need for each other."

A variety of other women spoke during the weekend, which also included plenty of time for being in nature, discussion, spoken word and dance performances and even a group dance.

Friday evening included "a uniquely joyful chance," as attendee Barbra Gant from Columbus Mennonite described, "to dance and move

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CDC sponsoring young adults to head to MWC Global Youth Summit

Summer to be filled with fellowship

Next summer will be rich with opportunities to engage our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Central District Conference's annual meeting is being moved up to June 11 through 13, and will be hosted by the Goshen-Elkhart CDC churches. The annual meeting will take place on the campus of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Mennonite Church USA's biennial convention is in Kansas City, Missouri from June 30 through July 5.



By James Rissler

And then Mennonite World Conference is in Harrisburg, PA from July 21 through 26. For those of us who enjoy fellowship with the wider church, it's going to be a summer full of rich interactions.

Congregations should have received packets with information about Mennonite World Conference, and you can also look here: www.mwc-cmm.org. I want to highlight two ways in which CDC is hoping to encourage participation in MWC, by sponsoring young adults to attend the Global Youth Summit just prior to MWC Assembly, and by responding to MWC's invitation to help congregations with large numbers of recent immigrants in sending people to MWC Assembly.

Just prior to MWC Assembly, there is a Global Youth Summit (GYS), a gathering of young adults ages 18-30, at nearby Messiah College from July 17 through 19. It is described by MWC

as "an oasis for young leaders of the church," meeting together around the theme, "Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts." Information and registration is here: www.mwc-cmm.org/gys.

In an effort to encourage young adults to attend the GYS, CDC is offering a \$500 grant to six (6) young adults, ages 18-30. Selections will be based on achieving a balance of ethnic diversity, gender and geography.

Expectations for grant recipients include:

- **Attendance at the 2015 CDC Annual Meeting. This will give the recipients an opportunity to get to know each other and to receive a blessing from the delegates.**
- **Attendance at the GYS 2015**
- **Sharing their experience with their congregation**
- **Sharing their experience with the conference by responding to an interview by Marlys Weaver-Stoesz, CDC Editor**
- **Sharing their experience in 'real time' by sending photos and comments to the conference office that can be posted on the conference's Facebook page**

For details and to apply for the grant, download an application form or apply online at www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net.

MWC has also invited area conferences to help with registration costs for recent immigrants who would like to attend MWC Assembly, but are not able to pay the full cost. The full registration cost is \$575, which includes meals. MWC will subsidize \$150 of this cost, and will help attendees find lodging in homes for only \$25/night. MWC is inviting conferences to also offer \$150, so that the registration cost for the person attending is only \$275.

Mark your calendars NOW
for the
2015 CDC ANNUAL MEETING
June 11-13, 2015
AMBS, Elkhart, Ind.

Twelve Scriptures Project brings new summer series to Columbus

This summer's worship series at Columbus Mennonite Church walked through our choices for the Twelve Scriptures Project.

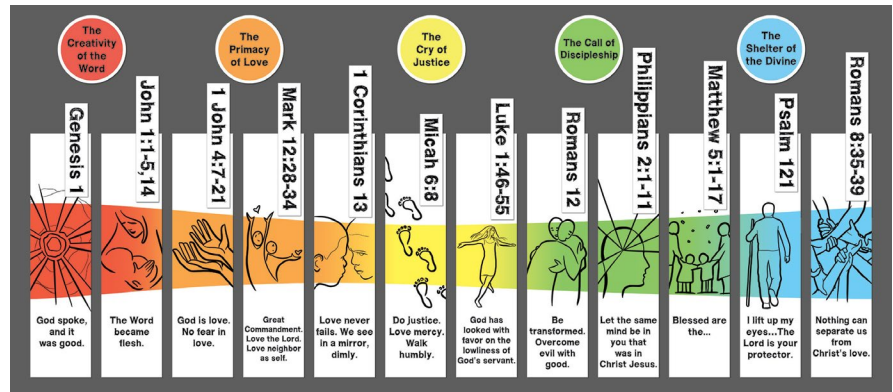
Each week we focused on one of the scriptures, including a time after the sermon for someone to give a personal reflection on that scripture's significance in their own life. One of the highlights of the series was the worship visual installation.



By Joel Miller

Each passage was represented on an eight foot tall panel which included the reference, a short summary of the text, and an image/icon.

All twelve panels were present at the front of the sanctuary throughout the series. We organized the scriptures under five different themes, and each theme was given a color. The worship installation started out black and white and each week the text of the day was given color until we ended with a full rainbow ribbon across the front of the sanctuary. It perhaps sounds slightly complicated, but it was actually a wonderful simplification of the Twelve Scriptures we had cho-



sen.

We received comments from parents of young children who appreciated the use of imagery associated with each scripture. One person commented that one of the images had served as a profound source of contemplation throughout the weeks. The panels allowed one to mentally review highlights of what had been covered and what was yet to come.

Now that the series is completed we have received encouragement from many members to keep the Twelve Scriptures visible in our consciousness and in the church building. Some of the ways we are doing this: Dedicating a page of our website to the Twelve Scriptures; each Sunday school class now has a poster of the Twelve Scriptures; smaller posters have been made available for people to take home and hang on their refrigerators; we are creating an eight foot wide banner of the Twelve Scriptures to hang in our foyer.

The project has been a reminder to me both of the importance of naming our core values and scriptures, and of the power of images and physical design to focus and lift our hearts in worship.

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Because CDC does not have many primarily immigrant congregations, CDC is inviting congregations to consider whether there are such congregations in their area, even if they are not part of CDC. If a CDC congregation is able to work with an immigrant congregation to help send some of their community to MWC Assembly, paying at least \$75 per person to help them with that, CDC will match \$75 per registrant.

I always find deep joy in gathering to worship

with people who are joining together across cultural, ethnic, and theological differences. I hope that many of you will join me at these gatherings this summer, and that with your help, CDC can facilitate the attendance of people who otherwise wouldn't. Please tap shoulders of young adults who might apply for the grants to attend the Global Youth Summit, and if you are near other Mennonite or Brethren congregations with large numbers of immigrants, please explore whether we can help them to attend MWC Assembly.

Assembly celebrates 40th anniversary, publishes collective church history

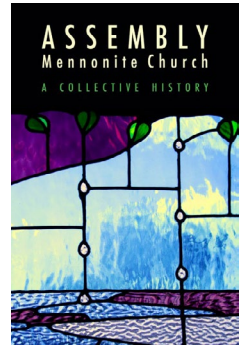
Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., spent Saturday evening, Sept. 27, celebrating, sharing stories and recognizing the changes in the congregation through the last four decades as a part of the church's 40th anniversary celebration.

In anticipation of the church's 40th anniversary, several current and past Assembly attendees came together to produce *Assembly Mennonite Church: A Collective History*, a published book soon available on Amazon.com.

Sally Weaver Glick, one of the book's organizers, explains in the introduction.

"Rather than a single author telling the chronological tale of this congregation, this book holds essays by a dozen people, all current or former

members of Assembly. While this approach inevitably means some overlap and repetition, it allows the reader to get a sense of the interplay of perspectives and events that have gone into making Assembly the congregation it is today. . . ." Weaver Glick writes. ". . . A Collective History is not only a collection of essays and memories, but also our attempt to understand the story of this collective gathering of individuals and small groups, one body with many members, assembled into one congregation."



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our bodies in celebration of being the women God made us."

"As one of the leaders said, 'Our bodies were made to move!'" Gant continued. "Some of us moved very easily, some not so much, but we all had fun."

Saturday morning included a screening of *Dark Girls*, a thought-provoking documentary exploring the deep-seated biases and attitudes about skin color, particularly dark-skinned women, both outside of and within the Black American culture. The women then split into groups of women of color and white women in order to create a safe space for frank and authentic discussion, Gant said.

Gant said she especially appreciated being able to see the film *Dark Girls*.

"For the white Mennonite women present," she said, "the movie provided a view into the experience of African-American women that many did not know and the discussion afterward allowed us to talk and share with each other our varying degrees of awareness of the white privilege we carry and what we can/must do to work toward dismantling racism."

Saturday afternoon included three workshops, along with multiple other activities, the women could attend.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker presented a workshop on the intersection of food, faith, and female empowerment, entitled "All Natural: healthy mind, body, and soul." Sarah Thompson presented a workshop from her own life experience, entitled "Black and Ethnic Mennonite" about "the joys and struggles of having two seemingly opposed identities, like being a black ethnic Mennonite". Pastor Cyneatha Millsaps led a discussion workshop entitled "Who do they say that I am?". Participants were encouraged to reflect and share about answering this question for themselves in light of being the witnesses we are to be for others.

Saturday evening was the retreat's banquet, where Ivorie Lowe and Sarah Thompson were honored as two Black Mennonite Women Who Rock!

Ivorie Lowe, a long-time, patient, influential and great Black Mennonite Woman leader (and women's retreat participant of many years) was honored and graciously gave advice for those following in her footsteps. Sarah Thompson, a young Black Mennonite Woman leader was honored for her vibrant ongoing work in promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation.

During the retreat, the quilt completed by Community Mennonite of Markham and Hively Avenue Mennonite, portraying the **4** history and potential future of African-

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Americans, was on display. Blending the inspiration of the quilt and the focus on identity throughout the weekend, women at the retreat were also encouraged to produce a block of fabric that represented themselves.

Gant said she was grateful for the thought given in planning the weekend.

“I deeply appreciated the extraordinary care that was given to create a retreat that did, indeed, celebrate Black Mennonite Women, with opportunities for increased understanding across boundaries of race and ethnicity, while allowing for each woman present to reflect on and celebrate her own identity,” she said.

Another significant experience for Gant was Hyacinth Stevens’ words during worship, especially Sunday morning when she touched on the subject of suicide and encouraged all who experience thoughts of suicide “to keep on living with the knowledge that God is at work and has a plan for each of us,” Gant said.

“I loved meeting women who have never been to women’s retreat before,” Gant said, “and I plan to keep in touch with some of them. I enjoyed the presence of young women and the intentionality of the planners in including and mentoring them.”



Ivorie Long (third from left) and Sarah Thompson (fourth from left) were honored at the women’s retreat Saturday night. Also pictured (from left to right) are Grace Leatherman, Mertis Odom, Long, Thompson, Nekeisha Alexis-Baker and Joanna Shenk (immediately above); worship at the women’s retreat (below).



Thank you to Barbra Gant for contributing to this piece.

2014 Men’s Retreat at Camp Friedenswald “The Hike of Life”

Central District Conference Men, don’t miss the annual men’s retreat at Camp Friedenswald, Oct. 17 through 19.

“The Hike of Life” will feature insight from Gareth Brandt, author and returning speaker from last year’s retreat. The weekend will also include the Friedenswald Mennathon: a one-mile kayak journey, 10-mile road bike ride and a 5K run. Other events during that time will be skill events, archery and Frisbee throw.

Visit www.friedenswald.org for more information.

Pastoral transitions

Randy Smith ended his interim at First Mennonite, Wadsworth, Ohio, on August 10. A pastoral search is in process.

Gloria Hernandez Bucher and **Lavon Welty** (below left) were commissioned on August 31 as interim pastors at First Mennonite, Bluffton, Ohio.

Louise Wideman resigned as co-pastor of First Mennonite, Bluffton, and will begin as pastor at Vineland Mennonite Church in Ontario in late September.

Mark Rupp (below right) was installed as associate pastor at Columbus Mennonite on September 21.



Rich Bucher, a retired CDC pastor, who now lives at Maple Crest Senior Living Community in Bluffton. Maple Crest held a resident talent show and he performed on the accordion.



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