



Introducing Raleigh Mennonite Church

Raleigh Mennonite Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, has asked to join Central District Conference. Brenda North Martin and Melissa Florer-Bixler, RMC's pastor, were present at the CDC Annual Meeting in Bluffton, Ohio, and introduced the congregation in a business session. Now *focus* shares some of that introduction so all of us in the conference can learn about the congregation during a year of discernment before we vote on their membership in CDC.

Raleigh Mennonite Church is a congregation of approximately 70 members. In 1986, a group of youngish adults living in Raleigh and worshipping with the Mennonite church in Durham—with the blessing of that congregation and their pastor—began planning for a new church in Raleigh.

With John and Marilyn Bender as the founding pastors, the congregation began worshipping in the YWCA in Raleigh and then moved to the old Barbee School building, which was home to Building Together Ministries, a neighborhood ministry supported by RMC. That building remains our home. We share it with a charter elementary school whose mission is to provide education and support for at-risk children.

RMC is at least half Mennonite by choice rather than birth. Being an urban congregation

in a region filled with universities, we see our membership ebb and flow as folks come to study, stay for a few years, begin their families and then move on to new jobs or to be closer to their families of origin. Our worship style is informal, blending singing from the Mennonite song books with contemporary Christian worship songs, many of which our youth brought back from Mennonite conventions.

We hold an annual covenant service in which each member is invited to make an intentional recommitment to be involved and connected within congregational life. While our congregation has not been without conflict, we have worked hard to maintain our vision as a congregation that welcomes all—each person



*Our congregation is trying new ways to engage children and adults in worship. We've created a **prayerground** with small tables and chairs with quiet activities for children. We also have a table for grown-ups that will periodically have hands-on activities for adults to engage in while worshipping.*

an important piece that contributes to the unique quilt that is our faith community.

Our ministries

Over the years, we have sent out two groups who began new congregations: Peace Covenant Fellowship, a Church of the Brethren congregation, and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship. We've also seen many ministries formed out of the vision and passion of small groups and individuals—ministries that have touched the lives of many in our neighborhood and city:

- We began an annual on-site Ten Thousand Village Christmas sale and eventually helped start a stand-alone store.
- We supported Sripakash Myasandra who formed a Friends of the World ministry to international students at North Carolina State University.
- We were home to a peace center for several years.
- We hosted Service Adventure units for 17 years.
- We support a community development ministry founded by one of our members.
- We ordained Hugh Hollowell as pastor to the homeless community in Raleigh and support his work.
- We helped form a food co-op at our neighborhood senior housing complex.
- We support a preschool run by one of our members for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds,
- We participate in Mennonite Disaster Service rebuilds in Eastern North Carolina,
- We host community events such as bystander training and Christmas coloring and cookie decorating parties.
- The house that served as our Service Adventure home is now a home for refugees resettling in North Carolina.

Recent emphases

In the spring of 2016 we called Melissa Florer-Bixler to be our third full-time pastor. Along with her family, Melissa brings energy and vision for



Raleigh Mennonite Church conducts business during our Church Life Meetings in a large circle following a fellowship meal. Decisions are made through reaching consensus rather than a vote.

ministry to those on the margins to her role as our pastor. We have always been a congregation looking to become involved with folks in need who are experiencing injustice in its many forms. Two years ago, we developed a statement of ministry that welcomed gays and lesbians to be active members of our congregation. During our last church life meeting we broadened that statement to welcome individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity to become part of our church family.

Our most recent process of congregational discernment led us to look more closely at our connection with the broader Mennonite church. While we began as a church plant supported by Virginia Mennonite Conference, we feel that CDC is a better fit as we understand the role of congregational autonomy and decision-making within the mission and vision of the broader Mennonite Church.

Raleigh Mennonite Church invites anyone from CDC to be their guest for worship when you are in the area. Sunday School is at 9:30 am, worship begins at 10:30. The street address is 1116 N. Blount St. in Raleigh. Melissa Florer-Bixler's email address is melissa@raleighmennonite.org

We look forward to this next year of exploring membership within Central District Conference.

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