



**Central
District
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

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

JANUARY 2015

CDC churches embracing MCUSA call to education, ministry on immigration issues

In 2003, Mennonite Church USA issued an official Churchwide Statement on Immigration, including a call to educational and ministerial activities. That document was updated in February 2014 to include a longer list of more specific activities and more context about current immigration issues.

Several Central District Conference churches have taken the call to a “radical hospitality” to heart.

What is your church doing in response to Mennonite Church USA's formal Statement on Immigration? Share your stories with CDC Editor Marlys Weaver-Stoesz at marlys.weaver@gmail.com.



Photos from the rally organized in Columbus, Ohio, for Angél Bustos Rodriguez. (Supplied by Austin Kocher)

COLUMBUS MENNONITE CHURCH

Columbus, Ohio

After MC USA released its 2003 statement on immigration, Columbus Mennonite held a study on the statement itself. The church has also held a few “Immigration Sundays,” one Sunday hearing from a DREAMer (usually a young person brought into the U.S. without documentation who generally meets the requirements of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act), while another Sunday hearing from Austin Kocher, a Ph.D. student at Ohio State University in the department of geography, focusing on immigration enforcement.

*“Citizenship is important... but that can't be the first or only way we decide who is in our community.”
-Austin Kocher*

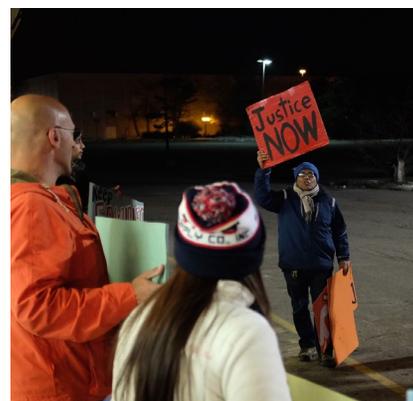
“In general, we've tried to make (immigration) a topic at church, to engage people to see this as a

faith issue,” Austin said.

Much of Columbus' work in immigration issues has stemmed from Austin's involvement, while Austin has also continued to work in immigration policy partly because of encouragement from the church.

“It didn't start with me, but the church had a big impact with me getting involved in this work,” he said.

Through his doctoral work, Austin is interning with a Columbus immigration attorney. He and a small group of people also founded the Central Ohio Worker Center, which



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Beyond the “red, blue, green and purple books”

A LOOK AT TWO CDC LEADERS’ HYMNAL COLLECTIONS

Many Central District Conference members may have the blue “Hymnal: A Worship Book” on a home bookshelf or piano. Some may also have the older, red “The Mennonite Hymnal” or the “Hymnal: Worship Book” supplements, the green “Sing the Journey” and purple “Sing the Story.”

For Ron Guengerich and Janeen Bertsche Johnson, their lists of hymnals and interest in the hymns themselves goes far beyond that.

Janeen, who is chair of CDC’s missional church committee, began collecting hymnals in 1989 after the music professor Orlando Schmidt at what is now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary put several hymnals from his collection up for sale. Janeen purchased them. A few years later, she purchased more when the Mennonite Historical Library in Goshen was selling extra copies of items. While pastoring at Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church in Wichita, Kan., several older members of the congregation gave them their old family hymnals to add to her collection.

She now has 103 hymnals. More than 50 are Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren hymnals, but she also has Amish, Apostolic Christian, and German Baptist hymnals.

“The rest are primarily non-denominational hymnals (many of them in the German language) which were once owned by Mennonite congregations or individuals, although I have a smattering of other de-



Photo credit to Kurt Groetsch via Flickr

nominational books, including a Jewish hymnal,” Janeen said.

She has focused on collecting older hymnals, so that most of her collection was published before 1920. Many of the hymnals from before 1900 have beautiful artwork or molding on the covers, she mentioned.

Of her more than 100 hymnals, several have some interesting histories.

“The oldest hymnal in my collection is Unparthenisches Gesangbuch (Nonsectarian Songbook), which was published in 1854 by The Brotherhood of the Mennonite Congregations, and printed by Johann Baer & Sons in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.”

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Mark your calendars
NOW
for the

2015 CDC ANNUAL MEETING

June 11-13, 2015
AMBS, Elkhart, Ind.

**DON'T MISS
THE UPCOMING
2015 REGIONAL GATHERINGS.**

This year's gatherings will be held 9:45 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Feb. 7: Lima Mennonite Church, Lima, Ohio

Feb. 21: North Danvers Mennonite Church, Danvers, Ill.

April 18: Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

Two CDC leaders heavy with hymnals, continued

nia,” she said. “I have a Gesangbuch that was published in 1888 by Mennonites in Elbing, Prussia, and another one that belonged to the Danzig (Prussia) Mennonite Church and was found in the deserted church by Mennonite “sea-going cowboys” after World War II. It is missing its cover and has a small hole partway through the book, as if someone picked it up with a trash stick.”

She noted that she really only sings out of her modern hymnals, though, if she knew German, she would likely use more of them.

Ron, who is CDC’s current president of the board of directors, began his collection of hymnals while he and his wife, Ruth, were on a service trip to Japan from 1968 to 1971.

He came upon a few Japanese hymnals, including a hymnal with Japanese hymns in English, and later gathered some hymnals from Taiwan and Korea.

After returning to the U.S., he began adding several Mennonite hymnals, then started exploring Brethren hymnals.

“Slowly, that expanded,” he said.

He now has more than 400 hymnals and songbooks.

Even before he began actually collecting hymnals, he was very interested in music and hymnody.

Ron was a music major in the 1960s at Eastern Mennonite College, where they sang out of the Yale

Hymnal, which included a little paragraph of history about each hymn in the back of the book. A part in *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot about Thomas Becket while attending EMC opened up Ron’s interest in Gregorian chant.

“I was just curious about the old and the new of music,” he explained.

Ron enjoys looking into the history of hymns, how words or tunes change over time and how the text and music “become wedded,” he said.

“I love to just explore what people do with hymnals and how they are organized.”

That includes how hymn traditions change from denomination to denomination or even congregation to congregation.

“Wonderful grace of Jesus,” for example, is usually very “robust” in Mennonite churches, but at a recent worship service in another denomination, the worship leader called for the hymn to be sung “as though we’re sharing a secret.”

Along with looking to hymnody’s past, he is also interested in its future.

“Who are the new, maybe younger hymn writers?”

At a recent wedding at a Presbyterian church, Ron looked through the new Presbyterian hymnal, “Glory to God,” and noticed that Goshen-based Mennonite hymn writer Adam Tice has several hymns included

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Help a young person experience the Global Youth Summit with CDC grant

Know of a young adult interested in leading in the church?

CDC is offering a \$500 grant to six young adults, ages 18-30, to attend the Global Youth Summit at Messiah College July 17 through 19, just prior to the Mennonite World Conference Assembly.

The summit is described as “an oasis for young leaders of the church.” This year, the theme of the event is “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts.” Information and registration is here:

www.mwc-cmm.org/gys

Interested? Learn more at www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net

Churches respond to immigration issues, from page 1

works for “social justice through worker justice.”

Many from Columbus Mennonite were involved this past fall when the worker center organized a number of events and activities to help Angél Bustos Rodriguez, an undocumented man, not be deported, but stay in Columbus, where his wife and son, both citizens, live. Because of that petition, rally and additional media attention, Angél was released on a temporary stay.

Austin pointed out that Anabaptists especially have interesting historical and cultural connections to immigration policy.

“Mennonites have been shuffled around,” he noted. Even today, many Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups don’t have passports or recognize the federal government’s authority in the same way many U.S. citizens do.

“The question of who belongs where has been an ongoing question of humanity,” he said. “People who aren’t supposed to belong are marginalized.”

“Citizenship is important,” Austin said. “...but that can’t be the first or only way we decide who is in our community.”

HIVELY AVENUE MENNONITE CHURCH, Elkhart, Ind.

Hively Avenue Mennonite has joined together with Southside Mennonite Fellowship (CDC), Prairie Street Mennonite and Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Elkhart, all in Elkhart, Ind., to offer free classes for English as a Second Language. Those classes have been happening for more than 20 years, said Sueann VonGunten, chair of Hively’s witness and caring commission. Though not begun because of MC USA’s statement, offering English classes is a suggested action on the 2003 statement.

Sueann has taught classes for about seven years, she said. She became good friends with one woman in the class in particular. They would meet weekly outside of class to talk, one half hour in English and one half hour in Spanish.

“It’s focused on helping people learn English and building relationships,” she said.

Hively is also using a would-be empty lot by their building as a community garden. Many of those

using the garden plots have been students in the churches’ English classes, further developing relationships between immigrants and Hively.

Sueanne noted that Hively’s congregation also works to keep each other informed about lectures or meetings going on related to immigration issues.

Hively has also hosted some of their own such events.

In late November 2014, President Barack Obama gave a speech announcing his plan to reform some aspects of immigration policy, largely by allowing undocumented parents of documented U.S. citizens who pay taxes, pass a background check and have been in the U.S. more than five years to temporarily stay legally in the U.S. In

response, Hively Pastor Charles Geiser organized an event where two local Latino lawyers shared as much as they knew at that time about the policy changes.

More than 100 people attended. Sueann spoke with a woman that night who had driven more than hour to attend the event.

She also complimented Charles’ passion for “welcoming the stranger.”

“He’s a pastor who definitely models for us,” she said. “He often brings recommendations to the witness and caring commission. He questions us and pushes us.”

Along with local efforts, Hively is planning to take their understanding of immigration issues to the border. This summer, several members from Hively and Southside will be attending a five-day learning tour focused on learning about the issues and challenges that immigrants face as they come to the U.S. The tour, called “Welcoming the Immigrant,” is hosted by Borderlinks, an educational organization located in Tucson, Ariz.

“It is clear that immigration is a major justice issue that cuts through our society in divisive ways,” Charles Geiser, pastor at Hively Avenue Mennonite, said soon after the groups received a Reign of God Grant from CDC for the trip. “We are called as the church to stand with the marginalized and powerless and offer them a welcome in a context where that too often is not their experience.”

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--Hively Pastor Charles Geiser*

**Take the next step
and explore
one of the most
pressing issues of
our time.**



Radical Hospitality: Responding to the issue of immigration

Use this free resource in your adult Sunday school classes, small fellowship groups and congregational in services.

It is specifically designed to be flexible and accessible; all materials are available below for download and the curriculum can be customized to meet your group's needs. The core curriculum is based on five videos (each 15-20 min.) and an accompanying Resource Guide, which includes tips for facilitating a successful experience, discussion questions, and a robust list of support materials.

The curriculum can be customized to be 6 to 13 weeks long, depending on your group's preference. Learn more about the Radical Hospitality six-week core curriculum at <http://www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net/>

Chicago Community celebrates MLK Day through joint service

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Chicago Community Church continued its tradition of gathering with La Iglesia Cristiana Roca de Esperanza and First Church of the Brethren for a bilingual service of singing, Scripture, story-telling, challenge, and celebration - honoring the legacy of the Rev. Dr. King and worshipping together.

Hively preschool hosting 45 students

Hively Avenue Mennonite's preschool features several innovative programs to help children be better prepared for their K-12 educations, all right in their church building during the week.

According to a Hively January newsletter, enrollment is steady at 45.

Hymnal collections, cont. from page 3

in the collection. Adam's work is also included in multiple other denomination's hymnals.

Along with the history and future of hymns, Ron is also interested in hymns around the world. As he travels, he's always on the lookout for interesting hymnals. During the 2003 Mennonite World Conference in Zimbabwe, Ron picked up a few hymnals, for example. He and Ruth also had the opportunity to attend a music retreat on the Island of Iona, where John Bell and Alison Adam, both members of the Iona Community, introduced them to a variety of global music.

"It's a very life-giving hobby," he said.

New milestones for four CDC ministers

In the past two months, Central District Conference has seen two licensings, one ordination and a farewell to one minister.

Deb Byler, Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, was licensed toward ordination for her pastoral care of MMN mission workers. January 11, 2015.



Tara Hartman, Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Sarasota, was licensed toward ordination as their new pastor. December 7, 2014.

Celeste Groff, Chicago Community Mennonite, was ordained for her chaplaincy work. December 13, 2014.



Barry Schmell ended his ministry at Maplewood Mennonite, Fort Wayne, with a farewell celebration on January 4. He has begun full-time ministry as a chaplain with Parkview Randalia Hospital. In addition to this major transition, he and his family are grieving the death of his wife Deb Schmell, who died after a three and a half year journey with cancer.



AMBS invites visitors to explore

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary will host two Seminary Preview Days this spring for people wishing to explore study.

March 27 and April 24 are visit days with opportunities to meet faculty and students and to sit in on classes, a chapel service and community gatherings. Admissions staff are available to answer questions about study both on campus and at a distance, and about financial aid.

People interested in attending should register at www.ambs.edu/visitAMBS.

AMBS also welcomes visitors at any time if these dates are not convenient. Contact the admissions department to schedule a visit: admissions@ambs.edu or 800.964.2627.

Emmaus Road sponsors green event

Emmaus Road Mennonite and the Hoosier Environmental Council partnered together to host the first "Greening Your Community" weekend on Jan. 10, where people could learn about environmental issues that may arise in the legislature, and discuss the kinds of initiatives people may like to see happen.

Cincinnati looks at issues of racism

For Peace Sunday, Feb. 1, Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship is focusing its worship service on *Addressing issues of racism: locally and nationally*, hosted by the Peace, Justice, Outreach and Service committee. The speakers are Alphonse Gerhardstein and Iris Roley, who were both involved in helping to form and implement the collaborative with the City of Cincinnati and the Police Department after the 2001 riots.

They will address current issues such as how it is that blacks and whites view justice differently, i.e. the Trayvon Martin and Ferguson cases, and how to speak up/act when issues of racism occur in our lives.

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