



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

Reporter

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

NOVEMBER 2015

Bluffton area families building community, simpler lives through sustainable farm

Several families, mostly from First Mennonite Church of Bluffton, Ohio, have spent the last 13 or so years growing their own food and, in turn, have grown closer in their relationships with one another, the greater community, the land, and God.

Largely spurred by his longtime interest in gardening and sustainability, Ray Person, along with his wife Elizabeth Kelly, purchased a 20-acre farm between Bluffton and Pandora in Ohio in 2002. They joined with a few other families to establish a farm cooperative, together planting, tending, and harvesting fruits and vegetables, and caring for animals and other aspects of the farm.

This past fall wrapped up the farm's 13th growing season, with 17 families working together on the farm. The farm includes a large garden with more than 50 varieties of vegetables and a large strawberry patch. The farm's orchard includes a variety of fruit and nut trees and plants, including raspberries, cherries, pears, grapes, hickory, and black walnut. The farm also raises goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, and pigs. Two dogs and a cat, and, of course, a



variety of other wildlife wanders the farm, explained Person.

Steve and Monica Harnish, along with their three sons, have been involved on the farm coop for ten years.

"Besides the fresh food that the kids have learned to appreciate, we also enjoyed being a part of the farm community," Monica Harnish said. "It also has

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The CDC Reporter will be highlighting Central District Conference congregations and individuals' efforts focused on creation care.

Have a story to share?
Contact the CDC Editor at
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A Note from the Treasurer: *Let's start with the underwear*

By Roger Nafziger,
CDC Treasurer

When you get dressed in the morning, what do you do first? You don't put on that nice, new pair of pants your spouse bought you for your birthday first, do you? Or that favorite outfit that you like to wear when you're going to be in an important meeting? No, likely you put on your underwear first as you are getting dressed for the day.

This article is about stewardship and giving, so what in the world does underwear have to do with supporting the organizations you care most about and want to see continue? Well, all organizations have specific and special needs or projects that often require funding and some donors like to give to these special projects. That's wonderful. However, funding the annual operational needs of an organization like Central District Conference, while not glitzy or exciting, is like putting on our underwear.

In my work in development and fundraising, I sometimes hear from donors who would rather not give "to help keep the lights on," preferring to give to something more specific. That kind of giving is important, but if you think of the work of CDC, much of it is not all that glamorous. When Emma provides outstanding administrative oversight to the work of the conference, it doesn't make the news. Or when Lois supports a CDC congregation by assisting in a pastoral search, or walks with a CDC pastor who is experiencing difficulties in their work, that too often goes unnoticed by many of us.

But isn't supporting the annual funding needs of CDC like putting on our underwear first? It's maybe not exciting or showy, but so foundational and important. Congregational giving to Central District Conference through October 31 is about \$5,000 behind what our plan calls for and additional giving—giving from individuals, beyond the congregations—is about \$3,000 less than planned. Fortunately, expenses are under the spending plan by more than \$7,000. As we approach the midpoint of our fiscal year, our financial health could be stronger. Please consider an end-of-year gift to CDC.

Mennonite Arts Weekend set for Feb. 5-7 in Cincinnati

Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship is again planning the bi-annual Mennonite Arts Weekend, a weekend event where artists and art enthusiasts join together for pre-



Photos by Cara Hummel

sentations, workshops, performances and worship.

This year's theme is "Transformation: Reseeing, Reshaping, Renewing."

Presenting artists include: Andreas Baumgartner, mixed-media artist; Anthony Brown, baritone soloist; Dan Charles, writer, NPR correspondent; Allan Rudy Froese, worship planner; Scott Holland, theologian; Mike Horner, puppetry; Mark Nafziger, ceramics artist; Zachary Nafziger, stained glass artist; Elizabeth Pixley-Fink, singer/songwriter; Keith Ratzlaff, poet; Kris Shenk, worship artist; Rebecca Slough, music leader/worship planner; and Randy Spaulding, accompanist/composer.

The event began in 1992 and grew out of "a conversation that explored the need for a gathering that would bring Mennonite artists together in an effort to help them 'reclaim their identity/relationship with the church,'" according to the event's online description.

To learn more and to register to attend, visit mennoniteartsweekend.org.



Milwaukee Mennonite youth "Sleep Out for Homelessness"

Submitted by Ben Hochstedler and Martin Luther Lutheran Church

On Friday, October 30, at 4 p.m., a burning barrel and load of wood rumbled into the back parking lot at Martin Luther Lutheran Church in Milwaukee,



Wisc. Slowly, piles of cardboard, rolls of duct tape, tarps, and teenagers appeared, along with sleeping bags, blankets, hats, mittens, and open minds. Tonight, they would be "homeless."

The Milwaukee Mennonite Church (who shares space and worships at Martin Luther Lutheran Church) invited youths in sixth through eighth grades from their junior youth group to learn about homelessness in Milwaukee in a new way: by sleeping outside all night!

The starting temperature was a chilly 45 degrees Fahrenheit. The kids worked in two groups, girls versus boys, in a challenge to build a structure out of cardboard, tape, and tarps that would keep them warm and dry for the night. The youth had only one hour to build their shelters for the night - one hour until the sun sunk below the horizon and things got even colder. After their "homes" for the night had been completed, the youth went into the church building for a three-part educational session. They watched video clips about urban homeless persons and about a homeless youth experiment. They shared their past encounters with homeless people, made emergency kits for the homeless, and donated 35 canned goods for Freiden's Food Pantry. After a supper of cold cheese pizza, the kids returned



outside, where adults from Milwaukee Mennonite Church had built a fire. Huddled around the fire, they played "Would You Rather - the Homeless Edition," with questions ranging from "Would you rather have a blanket or a sleeping bag?" to "Would you rather sleep in a box, a homeless shelter, or on a city bus all night?" The real lesson began around 2:30 a.m., when the rain started. Two youths, who had chosen to sleep in lawn chairs near the fire, then chose to escape the rain, one into a nearby car and the other into a room inside the church building. At 4:30 a.m., the boy's cardboard shelter collapsed, sending five more young people fleeing into the youth room in the church. At 6:30 a.m., breakfast was served, and two girls - the only ones who remained dry in their shelter the whole night - actually had to be woken up! The morning debriefing of tired, cold youths resulted in more sharing, and in planning for next year, including their resolutions to invite more people to "Sleep Out for Homelessness."



Families form farm coop, continued from page 1

saved on our food budget- a benefit when our three boys were all teenagers!”

She added that they have learned farming techniques by being part of the coop, but also how to use and cook many vegetables they hadn't really used before, such as turnips, rutabaga, daikon, and chard.

In a piece set for publication in a collection out in 2016 —*Sustainable Agriculture and the World's Religious Traditions* edited by Todd LeVasseur, Pramod Parajuli, and Norman Wirzba— Person and Mark H. Dixon explain how the farm not only brings the families closer to the production of their food, but embodies a simple lifestyle.

While the families rely too heavily on gas-powered

vehicles for farming and transportation, Person explained, much farm work is done by hand and many of the families often ride their bikes to the farm and back. Between a third and a half of the farm's electricity is offset by a hybrid solar/wind system. The farm also uses organic fertilizers, such as manure, blood meal, bone meal, and greensand, and encourages the creation of holistic microenvironments that mimic what would otherwise be found in nature. For example, wrote Person in the article, the “barn not only houses the livestock, but also bats, barn swallows, and for a fifteen month period a screech owl. The bats and barn swallows are welcomed to reduce the fly, moth, and mosquito populations. The screech owl was an important part of rodent control.”

“The farm is a place where friendships have been made and strengthened among the farm families as they work, eat, and play together, but the farm community extends far beyond its twenty acres,” Person wrote in his chapter. Along with relationships with local vendors and businesses, multiple international friends and visitors have assisted on the farm.

“What we hope we have conveyed is that to live in the fullness of our own being in the world is impossible in isolation,” reads Person and Dixon's chapter closing. “Being is a nexus that encompasses communities within communities within communities, each with inseparable connections to the others—connections ecological, biological, social, philosophical, theological, and spiritual.”



Mark your calendars for the CDC Regional Gatherings

The Central District Conference Regional Gatherings provide a time for CDC congregations to meet with regional neighbors for a time of worship and reflection.

This year's theme is "Abounding in Love... Abiding in Grace."

The 2016 Regional Gatherings are set for:

CDC West Regional Gathering: Feb 13, 2016 at Community Mennonite Church, Markham, Ill.

CDC Central Regional Gathering: Feb 20, 2016 at Faith Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

CDC East Regional Gathering: March 5, 2016 at Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, Berne, Ind.

Reflections on the Constituency Leaders Council from CDC Conference Minister Lois Johns Kaufmann

Recently the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) of MC USA met in Archbold, OH. Reps from all the conferences, agencies and constituency groups met to clarify our role as "elders" of the church. This task came as part of the Membership Guidelines resolution passed by delegates at KC2015.



We were blessed by the insightful input from Jack Suderman, former director of MC Canada to deepen our biblical understanding of the role of elders. Along with his teaching, he exuded a

patient trust in God's guiding presence and in the work of CLC over the years. He called the CLC "a gem in our MC USA polity."

Suderman described one aspect of the role of elder as "sitting together" to tend to the good of the whole. Over the past years I have valued sitting at table for worship and hard conversation with fellow Menno Jesus-followers. I have had to let go of stereotypes. I have come to love, even while disagreeing. What warm places there are in my heart because of CLC. That depth of respect and care made the farewells to Lancaster, North Central and Franklin Conferences so hard.

While Suderman noted that shepherds need to pay attention to the flock's terrain, I wrestle with the challenge of tending to the good of the whole when the terrain is rocky for one part of the flock and grassy

for another. I wrestle with holding together the discernment of our congregations and conference leadership with the discernment of the denomination. I keep hearing the voices of anxious sheep who feel they are "losing"--whether that anxious voice comes from a "traditional" sheep or an LGBTQ sheep. And sometimes I wonder if the ripple effect of choices CDC has made might result in no denominational structure to support my conference ministry.



In the midst of wrestling, I trust that God is at work. And so I entrust to God the fruit of decisions we, the various parts of the church, have made. We entrust to God the watering and ripening of our discernment, imperfect though it is. Time and grace will reveal the nature of the harvest to come.

In the meantime, we go back to the bedrock of our faith. Our decision to be Jesus-followers is a commitment to love God, neighbor and enemy/other. It is love of enemy, enabled by God's abundant love, that shapes our faith and makes us who we are as Mennonites. When we own that we have enemies among our own Mennonite followers of Jesus, we can begin to own the spiritual work of truly following Jesus who invited and urged, but never coerced.

It is time to begin asking, "How am I doing at loving my Mennonite enemy?" The healing and hope we desire for MC USA begins with the transformation of our own hearts by loving our enemies. The healing and hope we desire for ourselves begins with CDC inviting and urging, but never coercing. By this shall all know that we are Jesus' disciples.

Pastoral happenings across CDC

Several Central District Conference churches have welcomed new pastors or had pastors receive new credentials in the last several months.



Tim Peebles was commissioned at Chicago Community Mennonite in Chicago, Ill., as transitional pastor on October 18.

Wanda Stopher was installed at First Mennonite Church of Bluffton, in Bluffton, Ohio, on October 4.



Linda Short was commissioned as interim pastor at Lima Mennonite in Lima, Ohio, on September 6.

Rachel Nolt was ordained at Silverwood Mennonite in Goshen, Ind., on September 20.



Brian Johnson was licensed as pastor at North Danvers Mennonite in North Danvers, Ill., on August 23.



Eric Martin was ordained at Silverwood Mennonite on June 21.



Julia Gingrich was licensed at Eighth Street Mennonite in Goshen, Ind., on July 12.



Rebecca Kauffman was ordained at Paoli Mennonite Fellowship in Paoli, Ind., on July 19.



Mark Rupp was licensed at Columbus Mennonite in Columbus, Ohio, on July 26.



Dianne Schmidt was licensed at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio, on March 15.



Southside Fellowship in Elkhart, Ind., celebrated 50 years on November 15. Pictured above are CDC Conference Minister Lois Johns Kaufmann and Southside Pastor David Moser.

Southside Fellowship's first worship service was November 14, 1965. According to information from Southside, J.R. Burkholder, assistant professor of religion and philosophy at Goshen College at the time, was the guest preacher.

Southside meets in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount on the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) campus.

Camp Friedenswald Winter Retreats

Mark your calendars for the winter retreats at Camp Friedenswald.

January 8-10	<i>Senior High Winter Retreat</i>
January 15-17	<i>Junior High 1 Retreat</i>
January 22-24	<i>Junior High 2 Retreat</i>
February 12-14	<i>Family Winter Retreat</i>

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