

Art helps congregation see and know “who we are”

by David Moser, pastor, Southside Mennonite Fellowship, Elkhart, Indiana

One way that art is very important in our life together at Southside Fellowship (SSF) is in our yearly Commitment Service.

Every year, toward the end of January, at Southside Fellowship we have a special service that includes sharing a meal, communion, and committing ourselves to the life of the fellowship for the coming year.

At this service we reflect on our role in the life of the congregation, we remember those who have left the congregation over the past year either by death or having moved away, and we acknowledge those who have joined our congregation over the past year. People share words of gratitude and reflections on their experience of being a part of the fellowship.

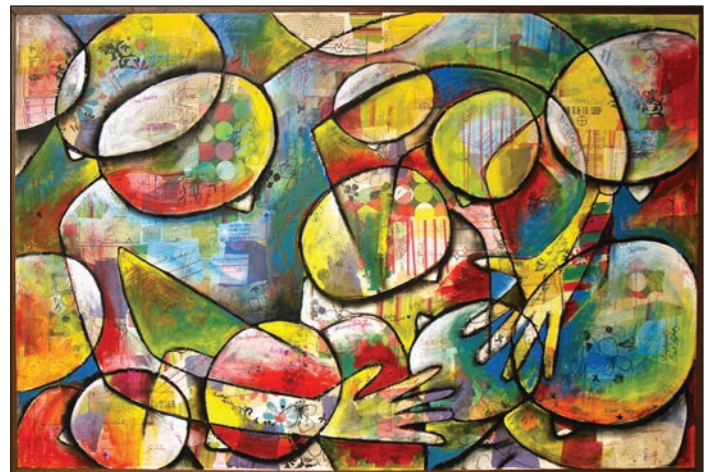
After sharing communion, the highlight of the service is when we all sign a piece of art that in some way expresses who we are as congregation. By signing the piece of art one expresses willingness to share the faith journey with the community for the coming year. Children and adults are all invited to sign, all of us are each on a faith journey even if not all at the same place developmentally. All who sign the artwork are therefore members of the congregation.

(Given that membership is held in this way, that also has implications for how we talk about baptism. Baptism is not the door one passes through to obtain membership into the community at SSF. Rather, baptism is when one joins the larger prophetic

work of carrying on Jesus' work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. I could write a lot more on this point alone.)

As for the artwork we sign, that is something created by a member of our congregation each

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Members of Southside Fellowship sign this year's artwork as the covenant of their membership. The piece, "Gathered #2," was created by David Kendall.

Art helps congregation (continued)

year for this special service. We are fortunate to have a number of artists in the congregation who have created many wonderful pieces for us.

Every year, usually the Sunday after the Commitment Service, a person in our congregation is asked to create a piece of art for the next Commitment Service.

We ask the person 12 months in advance so they can be thinking through the year: What is it about this community of faith that speaks to me? What is it about our life together I want to express as meaningful? How will I do that in a piece of art? By asking this far in advance it gives people time to think and create a meaningful piece of art.

The piece of art we are living with this

“We do love our music”

“Music helps give space and can lead to deeper connections with God,” Karen Hershberger, music coordinator for Eighth Street Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., believes. “Music has the ability to move people like nothing else, and I think 8th Street has embraced this notion for a long time.”

The congregation has used an organ in their worship services since the 1930s—first a pedal organ, then an electronic organ, and since 1997 a pipe organ. “Maybe using the organ was one way to incorporate into worship the belief in the

year is titled “Gathered #2” by David Kendall. It is currently hanging in the new foyer in the Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount. It beautifully expresses our coming together to share our ideas, our faith and our lives.

Over the years we have had a wide variety of paintings. One year someone made a beautiful Celtic cross out of wood and we signed one side of this cross. One year someone made two pottery communion cups which we all signed. We still use these items in worship.

At Southside Fellowship art has played a very important role in helping us understand who we are, and has served an important role in unifying us in community. ☺

value of instrumental music as a way of praising God,” Karen surmises.

When the electronic organ needed to be replaced in the 1990s, the congregation began raising funds, and the result was the pipe organ (from a Methodist congregation in Wisconsin) along with a budget for organ maintenance ... and a 1922 Steinway piano, too.

“I think the change the pipe organ brought was simply one of greater satisfaction and joy. We do love our music and being able to soak in

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Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., has used an organ since the 1930s. The pipe organ and grand piano were dedicated in 1997.

“We love our music” (continued)

the beauty of the pipes, the variety of sounds, registers and timbers—sounds that I think we’ve concluded an electronic organ just can’t produce in the same way—it’s quite moving.”

The congregation is fortunate to have structures and people who can take full advantage of the instruments and musical gifts in the congregation. Karen, a former music educator, chairs the congregation’s music committee. This group arranges for special music each Sunday, including the choir two times a month during the school year and soloists or ensembles the other Sundays. Having these groups be multi-generational is a goal to help so young people see their musical gifts contributing to worship.

Karen also is a member of the worship committee, so she knows what is planned for upcoming Sundays. She communicates that to the musicians, and each service is a careful interweaving of music, Scripture and preaching all around one theme.

In addition, Karen chooses a “hymn of the month,” a pattern that began when *Hymnal: A Worship Book* was new. Now hymns from *Sing the Journey* and *Sing the Story* are part of the selections. Then on the Sunday after Epiphany each January, the congregation revisits all the selected hymns from the previous year. “We intersperse the hymns (done in a variety of ways, using a variety of instruments and voices) with the lectionary texts for that morning. This has become a tradition for about 20 years,

because, as Karen says, “If you do something once and the congregation likes it, you can expect you’ll be doing it year after year.”

All of this reflects a careful and deliberate, attention to music in worship.

“Music is one of the aspects most frequently named by new members and attendees as a reason they chose 8th Street,” Karen said. A guest pianist told her, “The music matters here; it matters what I play.”

In addition, the organ has become a way of extending the congregation’s love of music to others. Christmas eve services, in a lessons-and-carols format, include four or five special music pieces. These annual services and occasional concerts draw people who do not usually attend Sunday worship. “These recitals always bring good attendance, as there is a group of people in our community who really yearn for and value quality organ music.”

However, even with the organ and piano available, other instruments are sometimes used—strings, brass and drums—and hymns are sometimes sung without accompaniment. Karen emphasizes: “As much as we love our organ, I’d say we value variety in music more.”



Karen Hershberger, music coordinator for Eighth Street Mennonite Church

Pastor retreat focuses on finances

Eleven pastors and their spouses participated in a “Pastors Time Away” retreat in Shipshewana, Ind., October 21–23. The event was made possible by a Lilly Endowment grant received by Everence to provide pastors with financial education, debt relief and financial planning assistance. Workshops were led by Everence representatives Craig Foor and Chris Scherer and focused on developing financial goals and planning for retirement. Steve Bustos, church relations representative from Everence, provided overall leadership for the event. The

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retreat ended with “Morning Prayers” led by Doug Luginbill, conference minister.

Doug commented, “I am grateful that pastors and their families have been given this opportunity from Lilly and Everence. The educational events and the Financial Assistance Program are ways the broader church can support our pastors.”

Pastors and congregations can learn more about financial educational opportunities and debt reduction by contacting Doug Luginbill at confmin@mcusacdc.org.

November 2016

Doug's Mug

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

My mug is full of words. Some have settled to the bottom like molasses on a cold, winter morning. Others float on top like sweet cream. Still others hang suspended like salt crystals.



Where do all these words come from? Many are flung like flaming marshmallows from my TV screen and news feeds on my computer as political candidates degrade their opponents. Other

words come from the books I read or listen to as I drive the roads between Bluffton, Goshen, Chicago, Normal and other communities where CDC churches reside. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest* by Gordon Oyer is reminding me that any political action must be deeply rooted in the good earth of God's love and story. *Lone Wolf* by Jodi Picoult sketches the edges of ethical debates around end-of-life issues and family systems while explaining the fascinating habits of wolf packs. And I continue to work my way through *Faith in Ferment*, a history of CDC. S.F. Pannabecker identifies the roots of our strong congregational polity that stretch back more than 150 years.

I also have been blessed with the words of many good sermons by our pastors; Charles Bontrager of First Mennonite in Wadsworth, Emily Hedrick of Lima Mennonite, Jeremy Shue of Silverwood Mennonite and Wanda Stopher of First Mennonite in Bluffton have nourished my faith over the past month with their good words of justice, hope, transformation and spiritual leadership.

There were lots of words at the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC), a gathering of 70 or so conference ministers, conference leaders and MC USA agency representatives. Most of the words spoken there rose out of a deep desire to be faithful to the MC USA Vision: Healing and Hope statement. Yet, knowing how to live faithfully into this vision continues to be bogged down by long-standing debates on human

sexuality, membership guidelines and what it means to give and receive counsel. Some young-adult leaders called us to move beyond these debates (words) and live faithfully into Vision: Healing and Hope. I was grateful that our words were interspersed with worship, singing and silence. (See additional reflections on the CLC gathering on page 5.)

Sometimes I feel like there are too many words, too much debate and an over-abundance of theological wordsmithing. Sometimes I wish we could dump out the overflowing mug of words and drop in just three: *Jesus is Lord*. Sometimes, like the Prophet Jeremiah, I wish we had the words of salvation simply "written on our hearts" (31:31-34). I know it's not that simple ... but still I long for the incarnation of the lyrics to Leonard Bernstein's "Simple Song":

God loves all simple things,
For God is the simplest of all.

As long as there are words in my mug, I hope for plenty of space between them so that they go down smoothly and so that I can taste and relish each one. ☺

Financial report

August 31, 2016

Year-to-date giving	
from congregations	\$55,515
Year-to-date plan	\$61,667
Difference between giving and plan	-\$6,152

Year-to-date giving	
from individuals	\$1,220
Year-to-date plan	\$10,167
Difference between giving and plan	-\$8,947

Expenses continue to run less than what we planned (\$5,563 fiscal year-to-date). As we approach the end of 2016, please consider supporting CDC as you plan your year-end giving.

Report provided by Roger Nafziger, conference treasurer

Peer Review Report given at Constituency Leaders Council

by Doug Luginbill

On October 17, CDC Board President Lisa Weaver, President-elect Arman Habegger, Ministerial Committee Chair Ron Adams, and Conference Minister Doug Luginbill told the story of licensing Pastor Mark Rupp. The 70 or so members of the Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) listened respectfully and intently throughout our presentation. Immediately following our presentation, the Peer Review Team, represented by Mary Etta King (Mountain States Mennonite Conference) and Terry Zehr (New York Mennonite Conference), briefly shared some of their reflections on the Peer Review process and summarized their written report. Then, in a change of agenda, the CLC was invited to spend the next half hour not in discussion around the tables but rather in silent prayer and reflection. This led into an additional half hour break. This allowed people to process their feelings, give their thoughts to God and come back to the table with objective voices.

People were then asked not “what did you think,” but “what did you hear and learn” and “what recommendations do you have for the future of Peer Reviews?” The discussions around tables seemed respectful, engaging, honest and helpful. An additional exercise over the next day and a half was to make statements on sheets of paper with the following headings:

1. What rationale do you offer for continuing the Peer Review process?
2. What rationale do you offer for not continuing the Peer Review process?
3. What changes would you suggest to the Peer Review process?
4. Are there other instances when a Peer Review is needed?

Statements could be written only after receiving affirmation from at least two other people. It was significant, I believe, that question #1 above received zero comments while question #2 received the most comments.

Also significant was the number of comments suggesting that perhaps peer reviews could be requested by conferences who are desiring guidance, input from an outside set of ears, or encouragement when making difficult decisions.

Such a suggestion was included in our CDC report and was a direct result of comments made at our October 1 CDC Leadership Council meetings at Camp Friedenswald.

The Peer Review team will write a final report to the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA, including what they heard at the CLC meeting. The Executive Board will receive the report and discern next steps regarding future Peer Reviews.

During informal, one-to-one conversations during breaks, several people expressed appreciation for how informative the report was and the tone in which it was presented.

I am grateful for the excellent leadership provided by retired Conference Minister Lois Johns Kaufmann, the CDC Leadership Council, the Human Sexuality Task Group and others who have prayed, listened, discerned and worked faithfully in guiding this process.

To read the report given by CDC at the Constituency Leaders Council meeting and the Peer Review Team’s report, visit www.mcusacdc.org/resources/conference-documents.

Plan to attend a regional gathering

Three regional gatherings for CDC members are set for early 2017:

February 25: Southside Fellowship (Lambright Center, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.)

March 4: First Mennonite Church, Urbana, Ill.

March 11: First Mennonite Church, Wadsworth, Ohio

Regional gatherings are opportunities to hear the latest developments and work in progress and to learn to know others who share your interest in the conference. They are intended for any and all in the conference—not only leaders in congregations or the conference.

Transitions



Steve Thomas (left) was commissioned by Doug Luginbill, conference minister, as transitional minister for Shalom Community Church, Ann Arbor, Mich., on Sept. 18. Paul Versluis had served as pastor for 15 years.



Emily Hedrick was licensed toward ordination at Lima Mennonite Church, Lima, Ohio, on Sept. 25, during the morning worship service. Emily began as pastor of Lima Mennonite on June 1 of this year.



Donna Mast was installed as Pastor of Worship and Pastoral Care at Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on October 30. Donna previously served as conference minister for Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

Fulfilling our mission through financial gifts

The mission of Central District Conference is to know Christ's abundant love in who we are and how we live, and to answer God's persistent call to share that love with one another and the world. It is summarized simply: *Knowing Christ's love ... Answering God's call.*

Like every household and every institution, financial resources are essential in helping to fulfill goals and missions. Because of the generosity of churches and individuals, CDC has been able to finish the past fiscal year with a positive bottom line! That is something to celebrate. We trust that this year will be the same.

Approximately \$180,000 of the \$234,500 Spending Plan comes directly from congregations. Thank you! The balance is received primarily through individual giving, Annual Meeting offerings and some earned interest. Here are two ways we hope to meet the individual giving portion of the Spending Plan and meet our ministry goals:

- **Major gifts:** 50 individuals/households contributing \$500 each
- **Every member gifts:** 1500 gifts of \$5.00 each

We encourage those able to make a major gift of \$500, to do so before the end of December.

We are celebrating CDC Sunday on February 5 (or a date works best for congregations.) We encourage every household in CDC to consider a \$5.00 gift by February 5. (Some can give more and some less. Every gift is celebrated!)

Thank you for considering a gift to your Central District Conference.

Roger Nafziger, Treasurer

Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister 

Central District Reporter
Volume 60, Number 6, November 2016
Editor: Mary E. Klassen
Email: cdceditor@gmail.com

Reporter is published six times a year. It is the official organ of communication among the churches of Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. It is distributed free to CDC congregations through the CDC spending plan.

Central District Office:
Doug Luginbill, conference minister
Emma Hartman, administrator
1015 Division St., Goshen, IN 46528
Toll-free: 800.662.2264
Phone: 574.534.1485
Fax: 574.534.8654
Email: office@mcusacdc.org
Web: www.mcusacdc.org