



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

Reporter

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

JANUARY 2010



Dedication of 40 bicycles donated to Imara from Salem

Salem purchases 40 bikes for Tanzania ministry

It began with the purchase of a new piano for the Salem, Kidron, Ohio, congregation in 2003, according to Jay Augspurger.

“Darrell Ediger, our pastor, challenged us. He said we could do something for someone else, if we can afford to buy a new piano,” said Augspurger.

That challenge resulted in a relationship between Salem and a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) program in Tanzania.

“Salem has had the joy and privilege of relating to Imara, a medical mission supported by MCC in Tanzania,” said Ediger.

In 2006, four members of the Salem congregation visited Tanzania to see the needs there. One of the needs was transportation for volunteers working with Imara.

This fall the church sent a contribution of \$6,000 to assist the Imara program. The donation resulted in the purchase of 40 bicycles. The bikes will be used by volunteers who travel to homes of families suffering from HIV/AIDS. Along with the bicycles, much-needed medical supplies were also purchased.

The photograph was taken during the dedication ceremony that Imara held upon receiving Salem’s donations.

MMA Journey Award to Shalom member

Joe Lapp (right) of Mennonite Mutual Aid presented MMA’s Journey Award to Tom Benevento, a member of Shalom, Harrisonburg, Va., for his work with New Community project in Harrisonburg.

Benevento’s work centers on making healthy food available for people, especially immigrant populations, through community gardens. He works with marginalized and homeless people by training them to plant, harvest and sell fresh produce at the local farmers market. He is also working to create a shuttle transportation service between Harrisonburg, Washington, D.C., and



Charlottesville, Va. He visits churches and organizations to teach techniques for more energy efficient buildings and practices.

From CDC Board of Directors

Recognizing each other as brother and sister

One of the things that I enjoy most about being a pastor is the opportunity to get to know and work with so many faithful followers of Christ. In joining the board of directors, I have been struck by how blessed our conference is in its leadership. Lois brings grace and wisdom to her work, and calm encouragement to those around her that facilitates people sharing the best of themselves. Karl has the pastoral double-vision of keeping the big picture in view while bringing thoughtfulness and compassion to the particular issue at hand. Emma is a gifted administrator with a heart for the mission of the Church. Each of these persons, and many others that I've had the pleasure of beginning to know, brings great gifts and great commitment to serving God within our conference. I hope you'll thank, support, perhaps even join persons in your congregations working to enrich our conference.

Jesus' teaching that whenever two or three of us gather together, He is among us, and Paul's frequent teaching that we, the Church, are Christ's body, are important to my theology. When we gather together as Christians, there is an important sense in which we are bringing each other into the presence of God. Of course, we are never apart from God (at least not by God's choice!). But in coming together, we also represent each other to God, because we are promised that Jesus joins our meetings, and because each of us, as a small part of Christ's body, presents an understanding of God to each other. So our worship, our prayer, our fellowship, our struggles with church budgets, whatever brings us together in Christ's name, are holy, because they occur in God's presence.

One of the things that I appreciate most about Central District Conference is that we're trying to reflect this sense of being Christ's body, and of Christ being present in our conversations and relationships. We recognize that each of our congregations is an important part of Christ's body, and thus represents an important part of God's kingdom. We will not all feel called to represent God's love in the same way; we may even sometimes wonder if another congregation has appropriately understood God's desire for the Church, or instead has some growing up into Christ to do. But when we meet together, we

do so joyfully, recognizing each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, sharing a basic unity of body and Spirit, of hope and faith. We celebrate our Christian faith and our shared desire to understand and live out God's will, and when we disagree, we do so with a commitment to having the truth spoken lovingly, so that we might all, the whole body of Christ, be built up.

This is how I understand our polity, our commitment to relate to each other as member congregations of CDC. This is the vision of CDC that our board, and many other gifted and dedicated leaders within our conference, are working to encourage. I like the vision statement that CDC and MCUSA share.¹ I appreciate the emphasis in this vision on growing as communities of faith and God working through our communities. This points us towards building relationships rather than guarding boundaries, and trusting that as we focus on our relationship with our Lord, God's Spirit will not only move us to grow in grace, joy, and peace, but will equip us to share God's healing and hope with all people.

The regional meetings that we've been having throughout CDC are a step towards realizing this vision, and living into our polity. I'm excited about the opportunities they provide for us to worship with, and listen to, and learn from each other, as we represent God to each other, and trust in God's presence among us. I'm hopeful for what might come of these meetings: encouragement, relationships, ongoing conversations, trust. I pray that whenever we are able to meet together, Christ's loving presence will enable us to grow in grace, joy, and peace, so that we might be known by our love for each other and by the ways we share Christ's healing love with others.

– James Rissler
Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship
Member of CDC Board of Directors

Footnote

¹ God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world



Boynton ministry using You Tube

Boynton, Hopedale, Ill., has updated its church website. One of the steps is to place a You Tube link on the site for videos. The present video includes Jason Birkey, worship coordinator from the congregation, singing “Second-Hand Clothing.”

The primary goal of the update is to make the website more useful as a ministry tool for the congregation.

Its address is:
www.boyntonmennonite.org

Chicago Community

Members of the Chicago Community congregation, Chicago, Ill., had the opportunity to read aloud the Gospel of Luke. The reading took place on the evening of Jan. 6. Megan Ramer, pastor of the congregation, plans to hold additional readings as the congregation progresses through the gospel for this liturgical year.

Paoli Fellowship

Paoli Fellowship, Paoli, Ind., launched a worship series in preparation for Covenant Sunday on Jan. 24. The series has as its emphasis “Believing, Belonging, Behaving.” The intention is to help the congregation see Jesus as the center of faith, the community as the center of lives, and reconciliation as the center of work.

Oak Grove

Oak Grove, Smithville, Ohio, celebrated its 20th year for “Search for the Christ Child,” in December. The 45-minute indoor-outdoor walk-through experience assists “People to People,” a local agency.

Salem, Kidron

The 2009 Thanksgiving sale/offering, an annual event at Salem, Kidron, Ohio, realized \$12,814, according to Darrell Ediger, pastor. Of those funds \$10,010 was raised from the auction. This year’s funds are distributed seven ways. Among recipients are four families in the Kidron community, Every Woman’s House, People to People and the church SYF/CAMO project.

Library donation

“Sizwe’s Test: A Young Man’s Journey through Africa’s AIDS Epidemic,” by Jonny Steinberg, is a recent donation to the Assembly, Goshen, Ind., church library.

The book was recommended reading on Joe and Anna Liechty Sawatzky’s blog recently. The couple serves as Mennonite Mission Network workers and are daily affected by the AIDS crisis. They are supported in part by Assembly and are former youth leaders at Assembly.

Penny power

During Advent Cincinnati Fellowship, Cincinnati, Ohio, supported Mennonite Central Committee’s Penny Power. Children “passed the hat” to collect change for this program. Penny Power raises money for MCC’s projects of peace, relief and development around the world.

Carlock dedicates Caring Corner in honor of missionaries

Carlock, Carlock, Ill., dedicated its Caring Corner this fall. The corner includes information about helping agencies in the community, a mobile of Mennonite Mission and Service agencies, volunteer opportunities, a food collection corner, a world rug emphasizing children of diverse racial and national backgrounds, a board listing names of persons in the hospital and with other needs.

The corner was dedicated in honor and memory of Merle and Dorothy Schwartz of the congregation. The couple served in the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in the Congo for 25 years.

James Bertsche, retired missionary and member of Silverwood, Goshen, Ind., preached the sermon during the dedication service.

North Danvers

Women of Worth from the North Danvers, Danvers, Ill., congregation celebrated Christmas at the Tea Room at the Depot in Mackinaw on Dec. 10.

Cincinnati

Members of the Healthcare Access Task Force of Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, Cincinnati, Ohio, held a fitness activity hike through the Cincinnati Zoo during its Festival of Lights on Nov. 29.

Community

A New Year's Eve play and prayer event was celebrated on Dec. 31 by members of Community, Markham, Ill. The congregation tradition includes an evening of games and food with a prayer service in the sanctuary at 11:30 p.m.



Come to the Stable

First, Bluffton, Ohio, held its second annual Come to the Stable event during Advent. Over 240 manger scenes belonging to members were on display in mid-December. Donations accepted for the exhibit were donated to the Bluffton Community Assistance food pantry. One of the scenes was this one, created by Anita Lehman.

Pie night for university students

First, Bluffton, Ohio's Education Commission invited Bluffton University students to the church for a break from studying for exams in mid-December. The event, called "pie night" enabled university students to have some pie and ice cream on one evening prior to exams.

Ivan Friesen guest speaker

Ivan Friesen, author of the Believer's Church Commentary on Isaiah, was the guest speaker at the Dec. 20 evening service of Brazo en Brazo, a service of Lima Mennonite, Lima, Ohio.

Longest night service

The congregation of Chicago Community, Chicago, Ill., held a "longest night service" on Dec. 20 at the church. The meditative evening marked the coming of winter and naming some of the loss and grief associated with the Christmas season.

Mexican Christmas tradition

Members of the Faith, Goshen, Ind., congregation held its annual Las Posada (The Inns) on Dec. 19. The event is a Mexican Christmas tradition, which reenacts Mary and Joseph's search for a room in Bethlehem. Children dress up as Joseph, Mary and the three kings, shepherds and animals and go from house to house asking to be let in so that Mary may give birth to her baby. After searching and caroling around the neighborhood, members gathered at the Faith House, where they were finally welcomed in.



Mennonite Arts Weekend Feb. 5-7

The Art of Place: Sacred Spaces and Common Ground, is the theme of the Feb. 5-7 Mennonite Arts Weekend hosted by Cincinnati Fellowship, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Featured artists include House of Doc, contemporary folk band, Juanita Yoder, painter, Ted Swartz, actor, Naomi Pridjian, digital artist, Dennis Maust, ceramic artist, Sidney King, filmmaker, Ken Nafziger, musician, Todd Davis, poet, Daniel Hess, writer and Jayne Holsinger, painter.

Persons wanting additional information may go to the event website www.mennoniteartsweekend.org



Madison celebrates

Members of the Madison c congregation, Madison, Wisc., celebrated Tonya Ramer Wenger's 10th anniversary as pastor of the church

A reception followed the worship service. She was presented a book which included comments, thoughts and poems from the congregation.

Shalom commissions Ressler Horsts

Shalom, Harrisonburg, Va., commissioned Nate and Lara Ressler Horst and their family for a three-year MCC assignment in Burundi. They will work on reforestation projects as and peace building initiatives.

Steven Estes had served Illinois CDC churches

Steven R. Estes, 53, of Gridley, Ill., and a former pastor in Central District Conference, died Dec. 19, 2009, at his residence.



Funeral services were Dec. 23, 2009, at Salem Church, rural Gridley. Burial will be in Oak Grove Cemetery, LeRoy, Ill. Estes

was born Dec. 10, 1956, in Peoria, Ill. He married Jacqueline S. Polson on Aug. 21, 1982, at Bloomington. She survives.

Estes served as pastor at Boynton Mennonite, Hopedale, and later at Meadows Mennonite Retirement Community as chaplain. He was also interim pastor at Flanagan Mennonite Church and Prairieview, Flanagan. At the time of his death he was senior pastor at Salem Church, rural Flanagan, and chaplain at Meadows Mennonite Retirement Community.

He authored over 12 books on Mennonite history.

Memorial contributions may be directed to Salem Church, Meadows Mennonite Retirement Community or Salem Ranch.

Online condolences may be sent to his family at www.ruestmanharrisfuneralhome.com.

Eighth Street congregation supporting food pantries

Eighth Street, Goshen, Ind., members volunteered at a Goshen's community food pantry on Jan. 4. The congregation collected several pieces of food items for the pantry as well as mittens and hats. On Christmas Eve, the congregation collected White Gift contributions to support the Harvest of Hope Food pantry. Eighth Street's January Giving Box recipient is the Center for Community Justice. The Center holds offenders accountable for their past actions.



CDC calendar

January 2010

- 25-28 Pastors Week at AMBS
 25 Pastoral Care Workshop at AMBS
 28 Mid-States Conferences Meeting at AMBS, 4:30 p.m.

February

- 6 Indiana Regional Meeting, Silverwood, Goshen, 10 am
 10 Chicago Area Ministries, 10 am
 East Ohio Pastor Peer, 11 am
 11 Central Illinois Pastor Peer. Mennonite Church of Normal, 10 am
 22 Board of Directors conference call, 7 pm
 28-3/1 Journey Weekend Learning Event

March

- 10 Chicago Area Ministries, 10 am
 13 Chicago Metro Regional Meeting Milwaukee Mennonite, 10 am
 15-17 Constituency Leaders Council
 22 Ministry Resource Day - Illinois
 24 Ministry Resource Day - Ohio Columbus Mennonite
 26 Ministry Resource Day - Indiana

April

- 14 Chicago Area Ministries, 10 am
 16 Board of Directors at Camp Friedenswald, 9 am - 5:30 pm
 Stewardship Committee, 6:30 - 9:30 pm
 Ministerial Committee, 6:30 - 9:30 pm
 17 Leadership Council, 7:30 am - 12:30 pm
 Missional Church Committee, 1:30 - 4:30 pm

June 24-26

- Annual Meeting, Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio

CDC men's retreat

Jim Heiks directs the men's choir during the fall men's retreat at Camp Friedenswald in November. Camp Friedenswald is busy this winter. Two senior high and two junior high weekend retreats are planned in January. Among resource persons are Lynn Miller, Tig Intagliata, Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau and James Krabill.

Other news from Camp Friedenswald

Spring Scrapbook Retreat, March 5-7

The retreat includes door prizes and freebies, show and tell, workshops, vendors and a spring cleaning sale. Call Portia Amstutz at 269-476-9744 or email her at info@friedenswald.org for more information or to register.

New staff

Eric Martin joined the staff as Program Coordinator. He is from First, Berne, Ind. He has also served on summer staff. Joe and Cara Pfeiffer, from the Mansfield, Ohio, area are AMBS students and are Guest Hosts along with Derek and Joy Yoder who recently moved from Hesston, Kansas, where Derek was a youth pastor at Whitestone Mennonite Church.

6 months, 2009-10 year-to-date report

Income	\$97,796
Expenses	\$95,660
YTD deficit	\$2,136
Spending Plan	\$100,000
Difference from Spending Plan	-\$2,204

Thank you for your prayers and generous support of our mission together as Central District Conference.

— Chris Habegger, treasurer

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