



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

Reporter

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

NOVEMBER 2010

Two Oak Grove members Join CDC journey program

The Oak Grove congregation, Smithville, Ohio, witnessed the covenant-signing of church members, Gladene Hershberger and John Hanlon, with Doug Zehr, pastor, on Oct. 17, to publically recognize their participation in Journey.

Journey is a leadership development program jointly sponsored by CDC, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Zehr will serve as mentor to Hershberger and Hanlon through the three-year program. Areas of focus include spiritual disciplines, theological and biblical studies, character



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Story barn project extends Lanctot's sabbatical

A passion for barns and their stories is one of the outcomes of a recent sabbatical for Nina B. Lanctot, pastor of Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite, Constantine, Mich.

In the coming year she will interview local residents to learn the stories of their barns.

In order to understand the evolution of farming in the Constantine area, Lanctot will visit barns of all types in the next year. Through photography, taped interviews, a blog, and gatherings of interested people, Lanctot will share the Story

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Mennonite Church of Normal thinking outside the box

Roelie Homan and Meredith Schroeer have a knack for helping their church family at Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.) to think outside the box when buying Christmas gifts.

For two Sundays in November, they lead an alternative gift fair that gives people the opportunity to donate to MCC's work as Christmas gifts for family and friends. Between the church service and Sunday School, after Sunday School and in conjunction with a fellowship meal, people can peruse through MCC projects and make donations.

"It makes the holidays more meaningful when you help poor people all over the world, donating to health issues, or education, or food, or clean water or AIDS projects," says Homan. "You do two things: it's a gift, and you help people in other countries."

Schroeer brought the idea for the fair from her time as interim pastor at the St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship. Homan and Schroeer began in 2004 by using materials from Alternative Gifts International, which included a handful of MCC projects. Today, the fair combines Alternative Gifts International materials and MCC projects.

"It makes the holidays more meaningful when you help poor people all over the world."

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From CDC Board of Directors

CDC's three interconnected strengths

As I drove from Atlanta to the first of this year's regional meetings, at Salem Mennonite Church, I passed a billboard in South Carolina that read:

**It's not complicated.
One Lord, one Faith, one God.
Ephesians 4:5**

That message seems to me to capture the feel of the regional meeting at Salem, and a sense of the strength of our conference.

At this year's regional meetings, our CDC Board is inviting us to focus on those things we hold in common, as Mennonites, and more fundamentally, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Last year, as we held valuable discussions of our polity (the ways in which we relate to each other) and the membership criteria we adopted at Bluffton last summer, much of our discussion was about how to relate to each other well when we have differences. That's incredibly important, but even more important are the fundamental faith, hope, and love that we share in Christ, because of which we can commit to working together even when we disagree about particular issues.

Our conference rests on three interconnected strengths:

- Our similarities (what unifies us)
- Our differences (what helps us see a new or larger perspective)
- What we can do together (mission)

Our regional meeting at Salem began by articulating this framework, and we were invited to look for further announcements soon about a new initiative from the Missional Church Committee in which grants will be made available to encourage missional activities that CDC congregations undertake together.

We kept this framework in mind as we engaged in *Dwelling in the Word*, hearing and listening for what God was saying to us in 2 Corinthians 5:16-20, the focus text for next summer's Mennonite Church USA Convention in Pittsburgh.

We heard a historical vignette that articulated these interwoven strengths, composed of passages from editorials calling on the church to seek the unity that Jesus prayed for, and to work together, rather than being drawn apart by our differences. These editorials were written by:

• I.A. Sommers in 1910, a preacher at First Mennonite, Berne, and the editor of *The Mennonite*, then the official publication of the General Conference Mennonite Church

• Albert Rutt in 1911, the editor of *The Christian Evangel*, then the official publication of the Central Illinois Conference, which later joined with the

Middle District to form CDC

• Gordon Houser in October of this year, editor of *The Mennonite*, now the official publication of Mennonite Church USA

It's remarkable to hear voices from a century ago calling us to the same things we are focused on today.

To help us reflect on our similarities, we took time to talk about and artistically render how our own congregations emphasize various Mennonite shared convictions:

- worshiping and discerning scripture together
- building community
- service
- making new disciples
- peacemaking/justice-making
- connecting with the global church

We did this in table groups with people from different congregations, and then each table created a quilt block that represented these relative emphases for their table, providing a snapshot of how they saw these areas emphasized in the East Ohio region. (Look for the quilt combining all of these blocks at our 2011 annual meeting at Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen!) These quilt blocks didn't all look the same, of course, but there were obvious similarities.

After lunch (including desserts from each congregation, representing something about the congregation that brought it), we took time to talk about immigration, an issue that has been of significant concern to our denomination recently.

Here too, the emphasis was on sharing stories and experiences and looking for things we might agree on, even while recognizing that there is much about the politics of the issue that people throughout CDC will disagree about.

And we were invited to pray for each other and our denominational leaders as we continue to reflect on how we are to be the body of Christ, recognizing that we have many brothers and sisters who are recent immigrants to this country.

It's hard to convey through descriptions of activities the fellowship and good will that permeated our gathering. There was much laughter, and also much reflection; God's Holy Spirit was certainly present with us. As regional meetings are held throughout the rest of CDC in January – March, please do think about whether you might attend.

**By James Rissler
Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship
Member of CDC Board of Directors**

Thinking outside the box

From page 1

According to Homan, about two-thirds of the money now goes directly to MCC projects.

In 2009, the fair raised nearly \$7,000 for MCC.

Homan distributes “shopping lists” of the projects in church mailboxes, so families and individuals can look through the many choices ahead of time.

Some children’s Sunday School classes, committees and other groups select a project and make a display for their booth at the fair. Participants are then invited to walk around the fair and make their purchases. “They get a Christmas card to use for Christmas gifts to family members and friends, instead of buying things that people don’t need,” says Homan.

And they have a lot of fun along the way. Homan hung a thermometer on the wall, showing the progress of how much money had been donated. “We started off with the strips representing \$100 or \$200,” she says. “But it got too high with the smaller amounts, so we had to change it to \$500 per strip.”

And what would a Christmas gathering be without song? The congregation sings its own version of the “12 Days of Christmas,” with lines like “two wells for Bolivia” or “three latrines for Mexico.”

-Story by Jennifer Steiner, communications coordinator for MCC Great Lakes.

Remembrance Sunday at Sugarcreek

First Mennonite, Sugarcreek, Ohio, commemorated Remembrance Sunday on Nov. 7. It is an annual observance to recognize friends and family members who have died.



Mennonite Church of Normal holiday celebration

Ecuador missionaries worship with Lima congregation

Chuck and Anita Howard, missionaries in Ecuador, spoke during Brazo en Brazo’s Clase Biblica and the Adoracion (worship) this summer. The service was at Lima Mennonite, Lima, Ohio.

The Howards have more than 40 year’s experience in the Spanish language mission field.

Atlanta hears update on Palestine

Sheila Conners was guest speaker at Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, Atlanta, Ga., in August. She shared about her study tour to Palestine and Israel, which included Mennonite-related peacemaking activities.

In September members of the congregation and friends from other congregations viewed the film “The Visitor.” It depicts issues involving illegal immigration. A discussion of immigration and detention issues followed. The next day, a group traveled to Lumpkin, Ga., and visited a number of immigrant detainees at Stewart Detention Center.

According to David Rensberger, member of the congregation, those who participated found it a meaningful and moving experience.

Phoenix listening report at Southside

Southside Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind., members heard a report from Lloyd Miller who reflected on his experience serving on the MC USA Racial Healing Task Group. He related his experiences to the congregation in October. The discussion that followed his remarks centered on two questions: Should we meet in Phoenix in 2013?; What kind of church will MC USA become?

In another Southside event, Jamie Hollis reflected on her participating at Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today, the Centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference.

Boynton tee-shirt project underway

The Boynton, Hopedale, Ill., congregation is taking orders for Boynton T-shirts, a recent project of the congregation. A family night soup supper is planned for Nov. 26. Afterward those attending will decorate the church for the Christmas season.



Terri and Charlie Geiser

Charlie Geiser new pastor at Hively

Charlie Geiser joined the Hively Avenue, Elkhart, Ind., congregation as its pastor on Aug. 29. He was licensed toward ordination on Oct. 3. He recently completed a master of divinity degree at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart.

Geiser began his first term at AMBS in 1979 and then served with Mennonite Central Committee before returning to complete his degree. His wife, Terri, is currently an AMBS student.

Between 1980 and 2008 Geiser spent 12 years with MCC in Central and South America. During this period he worked with refugees, doing literacy work, accompanying congregations and congregational leaders, assisting with and coordinating construction projects, preaching and leading workshops.

From 1991 to 2003 he worked for MCC Great Lakes in the Kidron office. Both he and his wife spent time in El Salvador and Colombia from 2003 to 2008 before returning to seminary.

Several adult education choices at First, Urbana

Five adult education and fellowship opportunities were available this fall during the Sunday school hour at First Mennonite, Urbana, Ill.

These included:

- *How the neighborhood church is transforming the faith.* The class used the book by the same title written by Diana Butler Bass.

- *Being read by the Word.* The class focused on guided exploration of selected biblical texts using the practice of lectio divina.

- *Coffee and conversation.* Participants discussed current issues and how people relate those to religion and faith.

- *Knit and nurture.* Members knit for Mennonite Central Committee and other charitable causes including providing dish clothes for the church's Empty Tomb food deliveries.

- *Young adults.* Open to anyone beyond high school age, the class focused on discussion, fellowship, support and occasional extra events.

In other First, Urbana, news, Wallie and Evie Shellenberger, recent MCC workers to Iran, shared with the congregation in late October.

Kroeker speaks at Paoli

Marlene Kroeker, development associate with Mennonite Mission Network, Elkhart, Ind., provided the meditation during the Oct. 24 worship service at Paoli Mennonite, Paoli, Ind.

Peacemaking workshop held at First, Wadsworth

Peacemaking in the home and community: a workshop on conflict transformation, was held Nov. 6 at First Mennonite, Wadsworth, Ohio.

The interactive workshop offered practical communication skills to turn conflicts in families and community into energy for growth.

Leading the workshop were Mark and Mary Hurst, Anabaptist Peacemaking Services, Sutherland, Australia.

Missio Dei co-founder guest speaker at Cincinnati

Mark Van Steenwyk, co-founder of Missio Dei, an Anabaptist intentional community in Minneapolis, was the featured speaker Nov. 6-7 at Cincinnati Mennonite. He spoke on "Community." The event was part of a larger series of monthly talks going on around Cincinnati called Formed. Each gathering highlights a different practice of Christian discipleship.

Atlanta small group topic: peacemaking

A small group at Atlanta Mennonite, Atlanta, Ga., is focusing on topics around peacemaking. The discussion centers on a theme of what our peacemaking actually looks like, and what forms of peacemaking we feel most drawn to.

Story barn project extends Lanctot's sabbatical

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Barn project with the local community and churches. Pole barns, centennial barns, remade barns and abandoned barns are all of interest as part of the story of changing farm culture. A final multi-media celebration of the project will take place on Nov. 20, 2011.

Barns built by George Sherck are of special interest to Lanctot. Sherck, a farmer and barn builder, was also the first pastor of Florence Church, from 1929-1947. A dozen or more Sherck barns still stand in St. Joseph and Cass Counties. In 2011, as Florence celebrates the 80th anniversary of its official founding in the Church of the Brethren, its rural heritage will be honored as part of the Story Barn project. Florence also joined Mennonite Church USA as a member of CDC in 1999.

As a recipient of a Lilly National Clergy Renewal Grant, Lanctot explored Vibrant Rural Churches and Communities.

In Lanctot's sabbatical away from the congregation in February and March, she lived and worked on small farms in Costa Rica. After studying Spanish as a child and through college, Lanctot's life

long dream was to gain fluency. After two months in Costa Rica on her own, Lanctot returned for two weeks in the summer with her family to find that indeed, conversational Spanish flowed with ease. Spanish language is used frequently at Florence Church and in the local community.

Lilly Endowment awarded 133 grants in National Clergy Renewal Program in 2008. Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite was awarded \$45,000 to be used for both pastor (\$30,000) and congregation (\$15,000). Funded by the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment Inc., the program gives pastors and congregations the opportunity to create their own sabbath journeys.

Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite and their pastor, Nina B. Lanctot, explored the theme "Vibrant Rural Churches and Communities."

During Lanctot's absence Florence Church enjoyed the preaching ministry of Fridbert August, a Brazilian seminary student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

In addition the congregation

experienced a World Cup Celebration, a canoe trip on the Fawn River and a retreat weekend at Amigo Centre. The grant enable



A George Sherck barn built in the 1930s to 1940s. It stands less than a mile from Florence Church.

the congregation to share locally grown food including freezer beef from White Yarrow, One Straw and Bair Lane Farms of Marcellus, Mich. A board retreat at the Hermitage, Three Rivers, Mich., in January completes the sabbatical projects.

Shalom Advent focus: think about time differently

Shalom, Harrisonburg, Va., launches Advent with a theme centered on how this month of waiting, anticipation and discernment invites members to imagine and think about time differently.

Emily North, pastor, has invited members to bring to the church clocks or time keepers of all kinds as visuals. In a message to members, she said, "If you have a clock that you could loan us for Advent/Christmas let me know. The more unusual the better. It needs to be able to stand on its own and not be too big or too small. We're also looking specifically for a sun dial."

North said that she is collecting one to two minute reflections on time that will be shared during worship services.

"This writing may be prose or poetry. The Advent theme for writing is "Time to wake up!"

Oak Grove/from page 1

development, mentoring and community gift development and leadership skills.

Hershberger is an active, long-time member of Oak Grove. She retired from teaching and is exploring new ways to use her gifts and develop other avenues of leadership within the congregation. Hanlon, a relatively new member, is responding to a call to equip himself for leadership and service, however that may present itself in the future.

Historically, Oak Grove, has been a strong supporter of leadership development and mentoring, within the congregation and educationally by providing financial support to Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. The congregation continues to encourage persons to be sensitive to a call and supports them in pursuing it.

Silverwood Outreach Fair part of Mission Sunday celebration

The Outreach Committee of Silverwood, Goshen, Ind., hosted an Outreach Fair as part of its mission Sunday celebration on Nov. 7.

Organizations and agencies from the Elkhart County area displayed their work in reaching out to others.

The goal of the fair was to develop interaction between the Silverwood congregation and local agencies and for individuals to explore what volunteer opportunities are available locally. Nearly 15 agencies participated.

During the Mission Sunday worship service Joe Yoder, director of Mennohof, Shipshewana, preached.

In other Silverwood activities, several members from the congregation participated in a Nov. 13-20 Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) trip.

MMN workers in Australia guests at North Danvers Harvest Mission event

Harvest Mission Sunday was celebrated Nov. 14 at North Danvers Mennonite, Danvers, Ill. Mark and Mary Hurst, serving with Mennonite Mission Network in Australia, were the guest speakers.

They have served as resource people and pastors in Australia and with Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand.

According to Rich Bucher, pastor, they seek to build Anabaptist networks, provide services to members of the association and other interested in Anabaptism, conduct workshops on conflict resolution and produce and provide Anabaptist resources.

Celebration honors those 75+ at First, Bluffton

All members of First, Bluffton, Ohio, 75 and older, were invited to a seniors celebration on Nov. 7. The afternoon Thanksgiving event titled "What Gift Can We Bring?" featured reflections on faith and the arts by Anita Lehman, Ruth Naylor, Carolyn Rich and Lois Wetherill.

Special focus during Assembly ad ed hour

On Nov. 7 Peter Carney presented "Conflicts from the Past, Lessons for the Present: Dr. Alice von Platen vs. Dr. Karl Brandt." The presentation was during the adult education hour at Assembly, Goshen, Ind.

CDC financial facts: four months 2010-11 report

Income	\$55,500
Expenses	\$60,751
YTD difference	-\$5,251
Spending Plan	\$61,419
Difference from Spending Plan	-\$5,919

Thank you for your prayers and generous support. As a board, we look forward to our time together with you at the upcoming regional meetings.

-Chris Habegger, CDC Treasurer

CDC calendar

December

1-4 – Conference Ministers Meeting, St. Petersburg, Florida

6 – Conference call, 7 p.m.

Regional meetings

Jan. 22 - Central Illinois, Mennonite Church of Normal

Jan. 29 - Michiana, Silverwood, Goshen

Feb. 12 - West Ohio, Lima

March 26 - Chicago Metro, Chicago Community

April

15-16 - Leadership Council, Camp Freidenswald

June

23-25 – CDC annual meeting, Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

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