



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

Reporter

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

MARCH 2011

Valentine's Day event

Twenty volunteers from First, Bluffton, and Grace, Pandora, spent Valentine's Day knotting comforters for Mennonite Central Committee.

From left are Phyllis Suter, Linda Suter, Elizabeth Shelly, Virginia Theis and Rose Hostetler. The group gets together twice a year. On Feb. 14, 15 comforters, each measuring 60 by 80 inches were knotted.



Where is the spirit bubbling up in your midst? Missional Church Committee offers grants for congregations

*Where do you see God's Spirit at work in your community?
How is your congregation joining in this work?
What resources might conference provide to encourage and
support your efforts?*

These are the kinds of questions posed by members of the Missional Church Committee when we called to interview a representative of each of our member congregations.

The first round of interviews was done in spring and summer of 2010, followed by a second round early this year. Out of a total of 48 congregations (including three emerging congregations), we have been able to interview 33.

**Reign of God
grants encourage
missional activity
among congrega-
tions.**

Topeka pastor Robert Martz jailed ... for a good cause

Topeka pastor Robert Martz already has a life full of experiences, and now he can add "jailbird" to his resume.

In late January, members of the Topeka congregation received this message from Martz: "I really need some help here. I really don't have a lot of time to get locked up, and if you want me available, please contribute."

He agreed to be locked up in a Muscular Dystrophy Association fundraiser. Martz's bail was set at \$1,600.

Martz said that he was excited to tell his congregation that he chose to serve as an MDA Jailbird, but in order to be released on good behavior he needed friends to help raise his bail.

See page 5

From CDC Board of Directors

Where are we headed?

As I reflect on my three years of exciting and at times, tough work with the Board of Directors of the Central District Conference, I have experienced a deep sense of devotion on the part of each person present to make Jesus Christ the center of all our endeavors.

Furthermore, I am indebted to each person for giving me new insights and interest in the activities of Central District Conference.

I have also come to realize, painfully at times, that our work over this span of time has not been a guarantee for great successfulness. We have contended with difficult issues of conference polity and local church autonomy. The wide range of scriptural interpretations within the conference body caused some congregations to withdraw, while other churches have asked for membership within the fold.

The paradox of our times seems to be that we live in an extremely diverse culture, with the world around us changing rapidly.

We read daily of protest against power taking place both at home and abroad. For many in church, the tendency is to narrow our view of church worship to the past. Meanwhile, we see a high-tech world emerging, which offers great opportunities, yet we observe that individual verbal discourse is disappearing.

The urgent question for the church is: "Where are we headed?" The trend seems to be that we are growing older and smaller as a conference. My basic concern is about the 20-to-40 age group. How does this critical age group look at the church? What can we do, which enables them to encounter the living Christ in our churches? There are no easy answers.

In preparation for the Lenten season I have been reading through the book of Mark and am amazed by the tremendous amount

of Jesus activity over a three-year period! Perhaps it is instructive for us, in this age of anxiety, to see how Jesus chose his disciples. Certainly it was not for their great harmony or diplomacy, but because He saw in each one a stupendous potential for growth. This is the stance the Board of Directors takes toward all CDC churches.

Our confidence is that each congregation, whether more focused on discerning scripture together, building community in fellowship, making new disciples, doing peacemaking or connecting with the global kingdom of God movement, will be motivated "to occupy till Jesus comes," as communities of grace, joy and peace. As one of our Mennonite pastors said long ago: "I feel as though we have been magnifying our differences until we can see no longer the great unity that still exists among us." Jesus Christ is still the focal point of all our endeavors as a conference.

We need to remember again this Lenten season that Jesus had every right to be discouraged with the lack of unity among His disciples. Need we be reminded also that Jesus stood abandoned by his closest friends and, was falsely accused by the people he came to save? Finally, we know Jesus was unjustly sentenced to death by the Roman officials. If ever God's people deserved wrath, if ever ruling powers deserved to be smitten, it was then. But our Savior did not respond in kind. As we pay careful attention to his response, we will learn the more excellent way of love.

- Carl D. Liechty
First Mennonite, Lima, Ohio
CDC Board of Directors
Member at large

Shalom says: “Thank you, Faye Yoder”

This winter, Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va., thanked Faye G. Yoder for her many years of service.

She was a founding member of the congregation in 1986. She was worship assistant to pastor Earl Zimmerman from 1993-97. From 1997 to 2010 she served as minister of music.

Although she was paid on a very part-time basis in these positions, she and her husband, Emery, were involved in the visuals, set up and overall care for the worship space.

Faye said that being part of a small congregation one just did what needed to be done.

“For Emery and me that meant anything from opening up and closing the worship space, putting out hymnals and putting them away, and providing most of the food for pot lucks when other Shalom regulars weren’t there,” she said.

In recognizing her, the congregation marked in a copy of the Hymnal: A Worship Book with individuals’ favorite hymns. A special song was written for her and a member on the congregation decorated a cake to look like a hymnal.

It’s game night at Oak Grove

Members of the Oak Grove congregation held a game night at its Fellowship Center in February. The “game of the night” was Crazy Bridge. The Fellowship and Service Commission served hot creamed chicken sandwiches and beverages.



Faye Yoder with her husband, Emery, hold the “cake” hymnal

Salem preparing for 125th anniversary

As the 125th anniversary celebration of Salem approaches “save the date” postcards are begin distributed by members. The celebration is June 18 and 19. The postcards are distributed to members of the congregation to send to family members and friends.

Service-volunteer week takes local focus

Paoli Mennonite Fellowship’s service-volunteer week from Feb. 5-12 took on a hometown focus. During the week, members of the congregation worked on several community projects.

Also this winter, members conducted study response to a three-part worship series “Growing Lay Leaders: Centered in the Spirit.” The study response took place during three Sundays in January.

Paoli’s winter retreat was Jan. 29-30 at Mt. Saint Frances Retreat Center. The theme was “Redeeming Human Sexuality. Keith Graber Miller, professor of Bible at Goshen College, was the presenter.

CDC provides misconduct reporting procedure

The Ministerial Committee of CDC is committed to providing a safe place for persons who have been victims of pastoral sexual misconduct to report. Should such an incident occur, calls can be made to Karen Weldy (574-536-8598- evenings) or to Rachel Siemens (330-334-1863 - mornings). These initial contact persons will receive the basic story of the complainant and determine how to proceed.

Mennonite World Conference visitor to Florence

Cisca Ibanda visited with members at Florence this winter while on a tour across the United States.

She serves on the Executive Committee of Mennonite World Conference. Suzanne Lind of the congregation, traveled with Ibanda to a Mennonite Central Committee gathering in Ghana.

Nina Lanctot, pastor of the Florence congregation, (with Ibanda in the photo) met Ibanda in Paraguay while at the MWC Assembly.



Faith's "Seed Money" project underway

As part of a Faith "Seed Money" project several members hosted an evening of Ethiopian cuisine in February. The menu included spicy hot chicken stew, Ethiopian vegetable stew, lentil salad and Ethiopian tea, among other items. The seed money project in which members were invited to "grow" \$20 is an effort to raise funds to reduce the mortgage on the Faith House.

Assembly focuses on NT communities

This winter Assembly is involved in a worship series that compares and contrasts several New Testament communities with Assembly's faith community.

The series allows members to compare, for example, leadership, mission, decision-making, conflicts and gifts. Small groups led worship during this series, and according to the Assembly-Line newsletter, "We discover new gifts among us when small groups lead, and we are reminded that worship is not a spectator sport."

Examining the different Lord's Prayers

Worship services during Epiphany season focused on Jesus' words in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) at Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship.

The Lord's Prayer appeared in this teaching, and the congregation used a different version of the prayer each Sunday.

The congregation was encouraged to make the Matthew chapters part of their own devotional reading during Epiphany.

Joel Miller, pastor, was one of the co-leaders for a March 18-20 workshop at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, in Pennsylvania.

Wrestling with Angels: Bruises and Blessings in Congregational Life, was the weekend theme. The purpose of the weekend retreat was to gain access to a network of support and encouragement for serving people with mental illness and others who can absorb substantial congregational energy and resources.

Members assist at Open Door

Members of Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship and some children in the congregation made 225 sandwiches to donate to the Open Door Community in Atlanta.

David Rensburger said, "We were able to spend some good time fellowshiping with one another, and to make a small contribution to the work of the Open Door, whose soup kitchen serves about 400 sandwiches three days a week to homeless people."

In February, the congregation's reading group began reading "Habits of the Hearth: Individualism and Commitment in American Life." Discussion is underway this month.

Grace benefit meal helps Bluffton student

Grace raised \$1,408 in a benefit meal for Mosoka Hassan, a Bluffton University international student. The February event covered the student's current medical bills plus other expenses.

Eighth Street volunteers in Mississippi

Volunteers from Eighth Street Mennonite spent time in Meridian, Mississippi, in January in clean-up operations.

Here are four members digging a tree stump. From left, Jerry Stoltzfus, Jeremy Amstutz, Hans Thogersen and Ron Yoder. Additional photos from the VS trip are on the church website.



FROM PAGE ONE

Missional Church Committee offers grants

After the first set of interviews, our committee broke the information we had gathered into activity categories. This process made us aware of apparent gaps in the data and we decided to follow up with a second round of interviews, *after* congregations had had a chance to see all the data we had compiled.

Activity categories:

- Children and youth
- Creation awareness
- Food ministries
- Generosity (*Really the overarching theme of all the activities!*)
- Hospitality
- Interfaith/ecumenical participation
- Mennonite connections
- Outreach
- Parents/families
- Peace and justice
- Service opportunities
- Spiritual development

These categories are both arbitrary and overlapping. The content within all the categories, however, is a profound testimony to the level of caring and giving expressed by the people who make up our congregations.

The most frequent response to the question about potentially helpful resources came through as a need to hear each others stories and to be able to ask questions:

- How do other congregations manage when they have more positions

than people?

- Are others engaged in ministries like ours? Different from ours?
- How can small congregations learn from each other?
- What makes congregations tick, in CDC and across MC USA?

We have gathered the stories. The complete list of reported activities, identified by congregation, is available online at http://centralsdistrict.mennonite.net/Resources/Missional_Activities.^{*} Check it out – you may find congregations that:

- are dealing with the same issues facing your congregation
- have implemented a vision that's been trying to emerge in your community
- could use some of the knowledge and experience your congregation has gained the hard way
- are struggling with an issue better addressed by a number of congregations working together.

The next step is up to you.

TASK GROUPS: As a way to strengthen our work and witness, we are suggesting that you think about ways in which you might partner with others within a region or across the conference by creating a task group to address an issue you cannot manage alone. A task group provides a way to work with people from other congregations as well as professionals or people who may specialize in the particular issue you want to ad-

dress. Task groups may be funded by a Reign of God grant if the requirements for the grant are met. For more information and an application form, see the CDC website at www.centralsdistrict.mennonite.net under the Resources tab.

REIGN OF GOD GRANTS:

New missional initiatives in need of funding will have the opportunity to apply for a grant. The Missional Church Committee, with the support of the Board and Stewardship Committee, created a fund to encourage missional activity by congregations in partnerships. Application for a grant is separate from the task group application—again see www.centralsdistrict.mennonite.net under the Resources tab.

^{*}The collection of data will be ongoing as congregations continue to report where their energy is focused. It has been a temptation, in these initial information-gathering conversations, to catalog all of our missional efforts. While this has some validity, (it's good for us to recognize everybody's contribution) our goal in this process is to identify where we especially see God's energizing Spirit eliciting our passionate participation in God's work. So, while we've made a good beginning, we will want to continue the conversation as a way to zero in on what excites and energizes our congregations.

- Submitted by
Ruby Friesen Zehr
Missional Church Committee

Mark your calendar:

Annual meeting June 23-25

Central District Conference's 2011 annual meeting is June 23-25 at Silverwood. The theme is "Following Christ and Growing Together." The event is hosted by the Michiana area congregations.

Hively Avenue

Hively Avenue children's Sunday school offering since September supports Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection (DOOR), a program in Miami, Fla. The children's goal is \$100. DOOR works with inner-city children and youth through Mennonite Mission Network. The children recently passed the \$50 mark in their offerings.

Lima Mennonite

Lima Mennonite hosted a Rally Point Youth Center benefit concert on Feb. 20. EZ and Co. (Ed Zickafoose of the congregation with several of his friends) performed as a free-will offering was collected for the youth center.

March 6-12 the congregation as-

sisted Immanuel United Methodist Church, with its Family Promise ministry. Members of the Lima congregation assisted as fellowship hosts with homeless families in the Lima area who were housed at Immanuel during the week. Members ate dinner with the families, helped with cleanup, played games with youth and provided food during the week.

First, Sugarcreek

To chase away winter blue, members of First, Sugarcreek, held several events of interest to members. The congregation held a special breakfast, a book discussion and showed the movie "Despicable Me." The movie is an animated story of redemption.



Fastnacht night

Aimee Weishaupt's daughter, Riley, stands next to the doughnuts during Silverwood's Fastnacht night. Ron Guengerich brought the Fat Tuesday tradition to Silverwood from Zion Mennonite, Archbold, Ohio, where he previously served as pastor. This year several members of the Zion congregation joined in the celebration.

CDC financial facts: 8 months 2010-11 report

Income	\$115,306
Expenses	\$122,750
YTD difference	-\$7,444
Spending Plan	\$131,277
Difference from Spending Plan	\$15,971

As our current year deficit is significant, we very much appreciate your prayers and generous support to close the gap in these last few months of our program year.

-Chris Habegger, CDC Treasurer

CDC calendar

March 26 - Chicago regional meeting, Chicago Community, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

April 4-8 - Transitional Pastors Training, Amigo Centre, Sturgis, Mich.

April 15 - Board of Directors, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Ministerial Committee, 6:30-9:30 p.m.; Stewardship Committee, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Camp Freidenswald

April 16 - Leadership Council, 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; Missionary Church Committee, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Camp Freidenswald

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

July 4-9 - Mennonite Church USA convention, Pittsburgh, Pa.

CENTRAL DISTRICT REPORTER

Volume 55, Number 2, March, 2011

Editors: Fred and Mary P. Steiner

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The Reporter is published six times a year. It is the official organ of communication among the churches of Central District Conference of the Mennonite Church USA. It is distributed free to CDC congregations through the CDC spending plan. It is printed by Boehr Print, Bluffton, Ohio.

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