



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

Reporter

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

NOVEMBER 2011

Tamales at relief sale

Florence Church of the Brethren/Mennonite offered tamales for sale at the Michiana Mennonite Relief Sale this fall.

Members of the congregation who assisted, are from left, Kathia Nieto, Vanessa Nieto and Martha Miller.



Assembly's 2 Percent Fund

Over one-half million beyond tithe and offering

By Rachel Giovarelli

Over the past 25 years, Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, has given over one-half million dollars beyond tithes and regular offerings through its 2 Percent Fund. Soon after

Typically, the funds go to organizations where Assembly members have some involvement.

the church was established in 1974, Assembly members decided to give 1% of their income beyond the traditional 10% tithe to a fund that specifically helps with the needs of develop-

ing countries. A few years later, the fund was expanded to 2%, doubling the fund in order to

meet local needs as well. Assembly created a committee to receive fund requests and to keep the congregation informed. The committee is made up of five to seven members with one representative from the Finance Committee. Current committee members are Johanna Sutter (chair), Ben Nelson (Finance committee representative), Bertha Beachy, J.R. Burkholder, Jen Eberly, Jeanne Liechty and Dave Ostergren. Assembly has a congregation of 130 members and an average attendance of 200 contributing to the fund.

According to Edgar Metzler, a former committee member, the 2 Percent Fund began at the request of the congregation, many who have worked overseas, because they wanted to

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God's Story...our stories

One treasurer's thoughts on stewardship

One Sunday morning some 30 years ago, as I was beginning to walk home after church, another young couple stopped me to talk.

I remember they were smiling as they asked me if I was tithing regularly. While a bit surprised at the spontaneity of the question, I responded that I thought tithing was a good thing. They indicated that they had made that decision a while ago and felt blessed because of it. I don't recall other parts of that short conversation, but remember afterwards reflecting on the idea of the tithe. I knew that our family hadn't previously had specific goals related to giving. My wife, Trish, and I discussed the subject and agreed that we wanted to tithe.

We monitored our giving over the years (to be honest, probably more at tax time than otherwise). We worked to increase our giving and made progress for a number of years. We did notice that while we were able to increase the amount we gave (thanks to promotions, inflation, etc.), our percentage of giving did level off. We had set a goal but didn't have a plan to reach it. At times, it had been a struggle to meet all the different expenses and sometimes it seemed like there wasn't enough to go around. On the other hand, sometimes we did spend on extras.

About 10 years later, a Sunday School class on stewardship was announced. Hoping to find information that could help provide for better planning, I committed to attending.

Using materials written by Mark Vincent, we discussed many examples of stewardship. One of the concepts we discussed was "firstfruits" giving. The idea of setting aside for God first from our labor just made sense to me. I looked for a way to implement a system, which could do this in an automatic way, as planning had been a problem. Since we used direct deposit for payroll, I set aside a checking account specifically for "firstfruits." Within a short time Trish and I realized that we had created an exciting tool for showing

us how we were doing with our giving. By giving first to God, we also adjusted our spending levels for ourselves to what was left.

Stewardship is one of the priorities of MC-USA: "In his words and practices, Jesus modeled an understanding that God is the Lord of all life. Thus, we are called to be stewards of the resources that God has generously entrusted to us for the sake of God's purposes in the world.

As missional communities we will assist every participant in our congregations to cultivate a healthy whole-life stewardship, to care for creation, to practice mutual aid and to be generous in ways which reflect the generosity of God." One good way to expand your knowledge in this area is to attend the Everence program called Stewardship University.

The goal of this program is to provide ongoing holistic education in the areas of wellness, environment, finances, time, talents and family life based on a firstfruits understanding of stewardship.

I also invite you to consider individual giving to Central District Conference, as especially during these challenging financial times, there is need in both our general and missional funds. You can find a pledge form online at centraldistrict.mennonite.net.

In the meantime, I would like you to consider these questions:

- Do you tithe regularly?
- Does a firstfruits giving plan feel right for you?

While it's not my style to ask these questions directly to any one person, as your conference treasurer, I feel called to share my thoughts with you. And if you should stop me some day to ask a question about stewardship or tithing, you'll see a smile because I feel blessed for having made a commitment that feels right to me.

- Chris Habegger, CDC treasurer

Assembly at worship



Assembly's 2 Percent Fund

Over one-half million beyond tithe and offering

assist individuals and communities in developing countries for specific needs not usually covered by the organizations included in the Assembly budget. The original fund was created with the Assembly Understanding that "The United States has accumulated its wealth and power through

exploitation of others." Also according to the Assembly Understanding, the fund is "neither to ease our conscience nor to give the impression that in so doing we have done all."

Assembly created a 1 Percent Fund as a "part of practice of Christian fellowship" to assist the Two-

Thirds World said Metzler. The original 1 percent, according to the Assembly Understanding, was suggested "as a minimal figure which is based on an original recommendation made by the World Council of Churches and the United Nations. We would hope that the United States, which now gives less than one-quarter percent of its gross national income in financial aid to other countries, would adopt the suggest figure." Expanding the fund to 2 percent enabled the congregational to also respond to local needs in Goshen and Elkhart County.

Local and global needs each make up at least 40 percent of the 2 Percent Fund's giving for the year with the contributions split evenly between them. The remainder, Metzler said, must "fit the spirit of restititional giving" and allows for "flexibility."

The MCC meat-canning project in Goshen is one example that did not fit into either category last year, but was covered in the remainder.

Metzler said the fund is intended as an "innovative idea of how to alleviate poverty" and a way to take care of "emergency needs."

The guidelines specify that "funds are not to be used for Assembly members or other North American personnel working in the Two-Thirds World," but instead "go to agencies with expertise in pro-

viding opportunity for individuals and families to improve their life situation." Typically, the funds go to organizations where Assembly members have some involvement and they send a request to the committee.

Local Qualifications:

- Material needs
- Housing
- Health care
- Legal help
- Employment help
- Work with disabled

Developing Countries Qualifications:

- Material needs
- Education
- Peace education
- Pastoral training
- Orphans and street children, etc.
- Health

Assembly tries not to give to organizations from the 2 Percent Fund that already receive money from the regular budget. Last year Assembly's budget was \$205,000 with an additional almost \$34,000 given the 2% fund.

2% Fund Giving:

- Average donation to organizations, \$500 to \$1000
- Last year (2010), \$33,787
- Last 10 years, \$268,757
- Last 25 years, \$592,158

The committee chair Johanna Sutter said in the 2010 2 Percent Fund Report: "We plan to distribute funds similarly in 2011. We are always open to suggestions for needs and projects." The Assembly Understanding states, "We hope that our response is heard by others as a call to similar actions. We believe that all who have benefitted from the exploitation of others must be confronted with their repayment responsibility."

Rachel Giovarelli is a senior at Bluffton University majoring in English and Writing. She is working this year as an intern for the CDC Reporter and focus.

We hope that our response is heard by others as a call to similar actions.

How six CDC congregations celebrate Advent

Advent, beginning Sunday, Nov. 27, launches the new church year. CDC congregations observe the season in many ways. Here are how six churches will celebrate this year.



Oak Grove

Using the suggested theme for Advent from *Leader*, the congregation will also continue some long-held traditions, which include Search for the Christ Child. That event draws over 500 persons during one Sunday evening in December, as the congregation portrays the Christmas story.

Oak Grove's annual presentation of Handel's "Messiah," includes vocalists and instrumentalists from the congregation and community.

A candlelight Christmas Eve service and a new tradition started last year of marking the Longest Night will also take place.

Eighth Street

Advent planning began when the congregation's Worship Commission attended the Advent Planner at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart.

According to Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau, pastor, "That group then created a worship series using

adapted materials from the *Leader* and extra materials given out at the Planner, as well as writing pieces as needed.

For example, for Advent 1, a purple cloth will drape diagonally over the entrance to the sanctuary. Another purple cloth will drape diagonally over the front of the sanctuary. That cloth will pool behind a lamp stand, which will receive the new Advent candle each week. The cloth will be changed to white and gold for Christmas Eve to Epiphany.



Thanksgiving auction - a Salem tradition

Salem

As a precursor to Advent, Salem, will hold its annual Thanksgiving day auction on Nov. 24.

During Advent, Kevin Himes, pastor, will lead the congregation in pondering God's awesome deeds, which he says are often not the ones people expect.

"We will celebrate and anticipate unexpected ways God still surprises our world," he said.

The adult choir will perform Viv-

aldi's "Gloria in D," accompanied by strings.

During Advent, the congregation will be encouraged to do unexpected deeds of kindness to family, friends and strangers.

"We will collect and hang unexpected items on the Christmas tree, for People to People, a local ministry.

Silverwood

To emphasize Advent as a time of surprises, during Sunday worship time for children, Ron Guengerich, pastor, will look into the Surprise Box for things unexpected. Worship visuals will encourage the congregation to be alert for God and God's work in the world.



Maplewood

Barry Schmill, pastor, says that the congregation will use Advent resources provided by the Mennonite Church, "Awesome Deeds We Do Not Expect."

"We will use an Advent candle that a couple from Germany created for us," he said. "The sanctuary will be decorated very modestly with boughs of evergreens and candles."

A manger scene will be displayed outside, near the church entrance. A Christmas Eve candlelight service will also take place.

Trenton

The congregation began Advent activities on Oct. 8, according to Lin Sylvester, pastor.

"This is because our church has long supported the Ministerial Association's Food Pantry and Emergency Assistance Fund," said Sylvester.

"The fund was severely depleted this summer, so the assistance fund was empty and food supplies were low."

Sylvester continues: "I resolved to do a benefit concert to raise \$1,000 for the fund.

"Some were skeptical, thinking we couldn't get half that much, but we did. We raised the \$1,000, which

will now help needy families in November and December, going into the cold months."

Sylvester said that he sang at the concert as did a few of his friends. One of the singers was an associate pastor from another Trenton area church.

"We had people attend from our church, Presbyterian, Church of God, Lutheran and a Baptist Church.

"So, instead of telling about our Advent candles, Christmas tree, carry-in meal, and candle service planned for December, we, instead, want to tell you about a need that has been met," he said.

First series of Reign of God grants

By Ruby Friesen Zehr

Where is the Spirit bubbling up in your midst?

This is the question Missional Church Committee asked congregations in an attempt to identify those activities that capture and honor God's continuing creative energy in establishing God's reign in the world.

As a followup, earlier this year the committee was pleased to announce the creation of Reign of God grants as a way of encouraging and resourcing congregations partnering with other congregations in new, joint missional initiatives.

And, at its Oct. 15 session at Camp Friedenswald, the committee awarded grants to four new CDC missional initiatives.

It is the goal of Missional Church Committee to match (1-1) and distribute \$5,000 annually to facilitate

our work together as missional congregations. These funds will be drawn from the CDC Missional Fund.

Reign of God grant applications are due by Sept. 15 of each year so they can be reviewed by the committee at its October meeting.

Grants must be used for:

- missional initiatives base within CDC, by partnering CDC congregations;
- initiatives related to worship, nurture, evangelism, education, peace and justice or creation care;
- new initiatives or significantly new additions to existing programs.

Reign of God grants for 2011-2012 have been approved for the following new CDC-based missional initiatives by cooperating member congregations:

Mennofolk Central District:

a celebration of contemporary Mennonite faith and culture through acoustic music and song

• Sponsoring congregations:

The planning committee represents a network of congregations and includes members of Columbus Mennonite, Toledo Mennonite (OC), Ann Arbor Mennonite, First Mennonite Sugar creek, First Mennonite Bluffton and Grace Mennonite

• **Contact:** Wendy Chappell-Dick (419-303-9769 or wendy@mennofolk.org)

Amy Stauffer-McNutt (330-897-1286 or amily32@hotmail.com)

• **Grant amount:** \$1,500

• **Mennofolk Central District** is planning a music festival at Bluffton University, July 6-8, 2012. It is an attempt to reincarnate an earlier Mennofolk concept of outreach to young adults by inviting them into a familiar music festival context.

Once an annual event, with local musicians in different communities, there has been no Mennofolk activity in CDC for almost 10 years. This current initiative will be a tapestry of songs to be offered to the wider world, songs which come out of our collective experience of faith, music, and Anabaptist values.

Congo Cloth Connection Delegation to Congo 2012

• **Sponsoring congregations:** Florence Church of the Brethren-Mennonite, Silverwood Mennonite, Chicago Community Mennonite and Kern Road Mennonite (IN-MI), with participation by members of Eighth Street Mennonite and College Mennonite (IN-MI)

• **Contact:** Nancy Myers (269-695-2101 or njmyers@mindspring.com) Nina B. Lanctot (574-848-0218 or ninablancot@msn.com)

• **Grant amount:** \$1,500

• **The Congo Cloth Connection** connects church women and men in North America and the Democratic Republic of Congo through the beauty of cloth, prayer and personal relationships. Several Congolese Mennonites have traveled to the U.S. as part of this program and are asking that North American women reciprocate with a visit to Kinshasa. Congo Cloth Connection plans to send a delegation of two or three CDC women to Congo in 2012, the first in what may become on-going, occasional exchange visits.

Peacebuilders Family Camp

• **Sponsoring congregations:** Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship, Paoli Mennonite Church, Mennonite Fellowship of Asheville, Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, and possibly others

• **Contact:** James Rissler (404-335-8061 or amf@atlantamennonite.org) Marilyn McGinnis (404-624-3205 or marilun.mcginnis@earthlink.net)

• **Grant amount:** \$1,500

• The vision for the Peacebuilders Camp is to redefine the popular conception of world peace to include equality, justice, health, safe housing and personal freedom.

The camp will take place at Koinonia Partners in Americus, Ga. Participants will be introduced to peacebuilders in south Georgia who are actively working to end racism, provide fair wages to all, provide healthcare for migrant workers, house people living in poverty, provide comfort and support for detained immigrants, and who stand up for their commitment to pacifism and religious freedom.

This proposal is based on the belief that international peace can be created by individuals and communities working for justice in their local areas.

Reign of God grants continue on page 6

Reign of God grants continued

Summerfest

- **Sponsoring congregations:** Mennonite Church of Normal and Living Love Ministries
- **Contact:** Matt Hickman (309-452-6622 or fax: 309-452-0478) Maria Hatfield (3089-452-8780)
- **Grant amount:** \$500 (for Summerfest 2012)
- Summerfest 2011 was the second annual neighborhood block party and the first one sponsored jointly by Mennonite Church of Normal and Living Love Ministries. Their goal is to build meaningful intercultural relationships between their racially, socially and economically diverse congregations and neighborhoods while also promoting and nurturing an Hispanic Mennonite church plant. It is their hope that relationships initiated at Summerfest will provide opportunity for future conversation and interaction around the Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective on Christian faith.

Missional Church Committee is delighted to have received all of these inspired, and inspiring proposals, and to be able to provide some grant funding for each of them. We are not, however, able to provide full support for all of them. So we invite the rest of you, if you are excited about these new missional stirrings within our conference, to contribute and to help give these proposals life.

For example, if families from other congregations would like to participate in the Peacebuilders Family Camp initiative, they might contact that group directly to sort out what that might mean.

For more information about new missional stirrings for more information about the new missional stirrings within Central District or about Reign of God grants, please contact office@mcusacdc.org.

Living Love Ministries chooses continued affiliation with IC

The CDC Board and staff recently received word from Living Love Ministries saying the congregation has made a decision to end its dual-conference affiliation with CDC.

"We are so grateful to the Lord for the way in which He used the Central District Conference in the planting of our church so many years ago. We pray that the Lord will richly reward you. As a congregation we have come to the decision that we must withdraw from the Central District Conference. The reason for this decision is because we already belong to the Illinois Mennonite Conference and Living Love Church USA and simply aren't able to actively participate in three conferences. Thank you once again for your love in Christ and support throughout the years."

As a conference we extend our blessing to Living Love and pray that God will continue to use them to minister to the Hispanic people in the area. We are grateful to have walked alongside them for the years they were part of CDC.

Living Love Ministries will continue as a member of Mennonite Church USA through Illinois Mennonite Conference and continue their relationship with Living Love Church USA.

Atlanta rents worship spaces from Friends Meeting

In August the Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship began renting worship space for its services on Sunday evenings from the Atlanta Friends Meeting, Decatur, Georgia. There are several former Mennonites in the Atlanta Friends Meeting, and some AMF members have worshipped or worked alongside Quakers. David Rensberger said that the Atlanta congregation looks forward to the development of a relationship between the two congregations.

CDC Financial Facts: Four months, 2011-12 report

Income	\$46,595
Expenses	\$67,181
YTD difference	-\$20,586
Spending Plan	\$67,976
Difference from Spending Plan	-\$21,381

We especially need your prayers and generous support as the calendar year comes to a close. Together we fulfill our conference missional activities.

-Chris Habegger, CDC Treasurer

CENTRAL DISTRICT REPORTER Volume 55, Number 6, November, 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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