



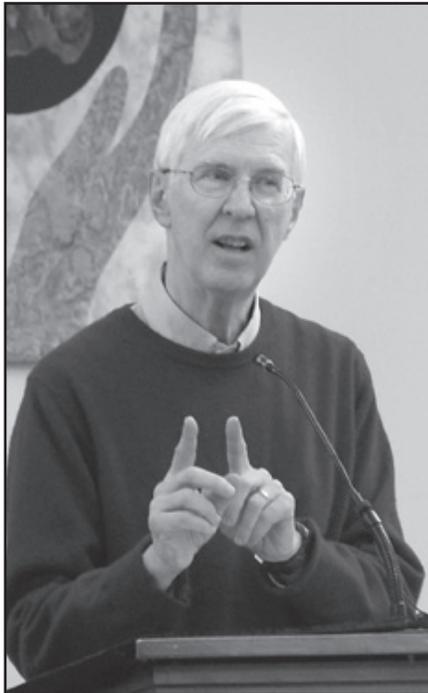
Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

KNOWING
CHRIST'S LOVE
– ANSWERING
GOD'S CALL

MARCH 2012



Alan Kreider

said. The early church also can give us clues; we might see something they are doing that gives us an idea of something to do or that we want to change.

Hively Avenue hosted Kreider, retired Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary professor of church history and mission, for the annual January series. Two Wednesday evenings, Jan. 11 and 18, were devoted to Kreider's presentations, each following a chili supper.

Kreider answered the questions of why and how people joined Christianity in its first two or three centuries, when it was not an advantage to belong. By looking at photos of artifacts and reading documents from that time, participants explored how early Christians viewed themselves and how they were viewed by people outside the church.

It was the witness of the church – how the

Alan Kreider speaker at annual series **Hively Avenue explores witness of early church**

By **Mary E. Klassen**

“Early Christianity cannot tell Hively what to do or how to do it,” Alan Kreider said in the second of two Spiritual Emphasis sessions. But there are things we can learn that will be valuable, he insisted.

The early Christian church can “provide for us a conversation partner, just as we talk now with Christians in other parts of the global church,” Kreider

people lived and behaved – that had the most significant impact on church growth, Kreider emphasized. If they did not live what they said they believed, then the Christian message would be unconvincing.

For example, Christians responded to severe illness in a way no one else did. Kreider explained: “They could go into the household of somebody who had the plague and provide elementary nursing, recognizing this was dangerous for them. But recognizing further that the worst that could happen was that they could die. They knew if they died, they were safe. Jesus would take them into eternal life. Their response to the plague caused the church to grow.”

In addition, Kreider said, “If the witness of the church relates to its behavior, we must then be able to say why we do what we do. We must be able to talk about our faith as well.”

While Hively's adults were learning about the early church, children in the congregation were learning from two families in the congregation who shared about life in their home countries: Chaiya and Aranya Hadtasunern from Thailand, and Agnes Odhiambo and Susan Oponga from Tanzania.

Regional gatherings

An important event in the life of CDC

This is the third year that the CDC Leadership Council determined that regional gatherings are important to the life and health of CDC.

The purpose of the gatherings is to build connections and to put a face on conference. This year stories and storytelling are used throughout the gathering to correspond with the CDC two-year focus, God's Story...Our Stories.

The gatherings are planned to have an agenda that is upbeat and fun, filled with laughter, singing, sharing and prayer.

Here's an overview: Introductions (participants gather around tables with no more than one other person from their congregation), Bible Study/Dwelling in the Word; Singing the salvation story (*Heilsgeschichte*) (German word for salvation

story); a historical vignette about Anne Neufeld Rupp, the first woman ordained in CDC; sharing about a local Reign of God grant project; the acknowledgment of the need for individual giving to CDC; the introduction of St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship who was presented for membership at the 2011 CDC

annual gathering; congregational Bible story activity where each congregational group chooses a Bible story that overlays the work/passion of their congregation and then acts it out (without using words) for others to guess; and finally, a discussion on homosexuality guided by Lois Kaufmann.

In small groups, people are invited to reflect on their experience with an understanding of homosexuality and then to share, listen and repeat what was heard within their group. Lois brings the gathering to an end with prayer. At each gathering the host congregation provides a delicious lunch.

Evaluations from the first two gathering

reflect appreciation. Here are a few comments:

• **What part of the day was most beneficial to you and/or your congregation?**

• I really enjoyed singing the salvation story – an idea I am hoping we can pass on to our music leaders.

• I enjoyed the interactive parts. The musical hymn sing was fabulous! A good mix of listening, singing and prayer and discussions – I was glad for a little of each.

• The theme of parables and stories. Enjoyed the study, application to song and dramatic presentation. You made me think a lot, today, about my church, what I believe and how I fit in. I liked the conversation using the “talking stick” – I’m going to try to do that in my book club! I also enjoyed the book display and bought some books for our developing church library. I enjoyed meeting other people – the discussion, humor and fellowship.

• Glad to have an open and comfortable conversation about sexuality.

• Good format for discussing the homosexual issue – good honest discussion. – The conversation about homosexuality was well structured and very important. Also appreciated singing *Heilsgeschichte* – perhaps an idea for Sunday worship

• **What would you have liked that was not included in the day's schedule?**

• More information on what is taking place at some of the churches.

• I wish more persons could be involved.

• **What other suggestions might you offer for future regional meeting?**

• Could take an offering for CDC.

• Continue talks about issues like homosexuality. Continue praying together.

• See if we could get several high school students to come.

- **By Joyce Schumacher**
CDC president

The purpose of the gatherings is to build connections and to put a face on conference.

To help people facing financial needs

14 CDC congregations receive Everence grants

In 2011, the Everence Sharing Fund program provided more than \$28,360 in matching grants to 14 churches in the Central District Conference. Congregations receiving grants included:

- Carlock
- Chicago Community
- North Danvers
- Hively Avenue
- Maplewood
- Silverwood
- Southside Fellowship
- Shalom, Ann Arbor, Mich.
- Columbus
- First, Bluffton
- First, Sugarcreek
- Grace
- St John
- Shalom Harrisonburg, Va.

The grant program from Everence Financial helps members facing financial distress because of lost employment or medical bills and also supports church needs like community aid or service projects.

Phyllis Mishler, Member Benefits Manager for Everence, said the grants are part of how Everence and Everence Federal Credit Union fulfill their joint mission – and work together to support the financial needs of local congregation members.

Like the unexpected needs a family experienced

when their 16-year-old son was stuck by a car. Left with a severe brain injury, broken bones, a punctured lung and hemorrhaging from his carotid artery, he was in the hospital for six months. When the once active and lively teen returned home, he was dependent on others for round-the-clock care. A Sharing Fund grant allowed his family to get much-needed support as they adapted to their new life.

“To our members seeking to express their faith in their financial lives, the Sharing Fund is one of the most important ways we work with their congregations,” Mishler said.

The Everence grants are funded primarily by members who own Everence products or use Everence Federal Credit Union banking services. Because of the organization’s tax status, money that would be paid in federal taxes instead is distributed through mutual aid – including the Sharing Fund.

“As a company, Everence tithes on its income by donating to the Sharing Fund, plus many staff contribute, and we also receive contributions from others who support the Sharing Fund,” Mishler said. “These grants are part of our commitment to help our communities thrive.”

In 2011, the Everence Sharing Fund gave more than \$924,000 in matching grants to 2,049 families across the country.

Assembly’s InterPlayers present “Mystery in the Moment” drama

Assembly’s InterPlayers presented “Mystery in the Moment,” on March 2.

Described this way in the congregation’s weekly newsletter: “InterPlay offers a way to reach the wisdom of each body through play (it is described as a ‘sneaky deep’ practice).

John Glick, Linda Schlabach Miller and Michael Miller joined other InterPlayers from Michiana and Chicago in the performance.

Members receive candles for Lent

“During Lent members received candles to light each evening during a meal,” said Emily North, Shalom, Harrisonburg, pastor. The candles are part of the congregation’s Lent theme “Keeping the covenant, tending the Light.”

Some suggestions for using the candles include:

- Reading a Psalm or scripture passage from the lectionary.
- Everyone at the table say one thing that the person is thankful for from that day.
- Say one place in the world or a person who needs extra love or healing or peace and then pray for that person.
- Do a version of the examen: One thing from the day that you were thankful for (or how you experienced God’s presence) and one thing from the day that you were sad about or was difficult (it was hard to remember God’s presence). Then pray for those things.
- Pray for the prayers of the people from the previous Sunday.
- Have a moment of silence.

Herald Press release by Gerald Mast

“Go to Church, Change the World”



Gerald Mast

“The church should not be taken for granted ... just reading the Bible, baptizing and singing together help prepare us for life in the world,” said Gerald Mast, Bluffton University communication professor, member of First, Bluffton, and author of “Go to Church, Change the World: Christian Community as Calling.”

Published in January by Herald Press, the book explores traditional church practices such as singing, baptism and communion, and how participation in them determines how churchgoers see the rest of their world, including their careers.

The idea for the book goes back to 2002, when Bluffton received a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment for the Pathways to Mission and Vocation project, to study theological assumptions about vocation that shape curriculum. “There are other reasons for pursuing a major, or advancing a career, than success, status or salary. So what are these other motivations?” Mast asked.

He attempted to answer that question during his 2005 sabbatical. “I proposed to the university to study an Anabaptist theology of vocation and answer what gives meaning to our work, what gets us up in the morning,” said Mast, who grew up in the Mennonite tradition and describes the church as “a central part of calling” in Anabaptist theology. During his leave, he read what other Anabaptists wrote and interviewed others in their workplaces.

The book, he said, is for those who wish to reenergize their beliefs and their relationship with church. The book is the fifth either written or edited by Mast.

Faith Stories: Seeds, Storms and Surprises

Just as Jesus used stories to help people get a glimpse of God’s Kingdom in their lives, this winter, members of the Faith congregation are getting their own glimpse through the telling of their own stories.

Faith members are invited to share their own life’s stories with other members.

Titled “Faith Stories: Seeds, Storms and Surprises,” stories center around such questions as, How has God surprised you in your life? Who are the people who have planted ‘seeds of faith’ in your life? Have there been ‘storms’ or times of celebration, confidence and calm that have changed you or caused you to grow or affected your faith?

Salem youth fundraiser for service trip

Salem Senior High Youth Fellowship held a soup luncheon fundraiser on Feb. 26 following the worship service. The fundraiser was for a service trip to Honduras. On March 25 and 26 the congregation will hold pre-Easter services. Matt Hamsher, regional Ohio Conference pastor, is the guest speaker.

Wadsworth assists Salvation Army

The February outreach project for First, Wadsworth, involved collecting paper products and soaps for the Wadsworth Salvation Army. The congregation’s MYF held a Feb. 19 fundraising lunch following the service.

Urbana, Evanston worship together

First, Champaign-Urbana, and Evanston along with First, Morton (Illinois Conference), held a hymn-sing on Feb. 26 in the Champaign-Urbana sanctuary. On March 11 the three congregations worship at Morton where a potluck followed the service.

Joel Miller: Topic is close to our hearts

Forum focus: Christianity and Islam

By Rachel Giovarelli

Cincinnati Fellowship completed an Adult Forum on the topic of Christianity and Islam during the month of January.

Participants met during their regular Sunday School hour for four weeks to learn about the history Christians and Muslims share, the differences between the two religions, and the possible ways to develop relationships with Muslims in the Cincinnati area.

Christine Schumacher, the chair of the Peace, Justice, Outreach, and Service Committee (PJOS) at CMF, noticed the “Christians and Islam: A Discussion Guide” listed in *Sojourners* magazine and decided it would be, as she said, “a good discussion opportunity for our Fellowship.”

Because Schumacher suggested the series, the Christian Education Committee at Cincinnati asked PJOS if they would lead the sessions. Jerry Sears and Steve Herbold, in addition to Schumacher, volunteered to lead.

Ultimate hope for the series

The ultimate hope for the series, Schumacher said, was “to have a better understanding of Islam, build awareness and able to speak positively about Islam, attend one of the Mosques in the city for an opportunity to learn directly from them, [and] create future contacts with Muslims.”

None of the three leaders had any special training or experience with the Islamic community, but saw the importance of developing their congregation’s ability to work for truth and reconciliation.

The sessions were “very well attended,” said Schumacher, “and there are plans for follow up with the Muslim community.” The age of participants ranged from college age to mid-60s,

and according to Christian Education Committee chair Violet Sears, some Sundays there was “standing room only.” Attendees were strongly encouraged to read ahead to be prepared for discussion.

The discussion guide provided material for four sessions, which CMF ran from Jan. 8 to 29. Sears led the first session called “A History Together,” Schumacher led the second on “Understanding Islam,” and Herbold led the last two sessions “Islam’s American Face” and “Real Success Stories.” The introduction of the guide states that the “series is designed to spark discussion and thought about how to live out God’s call for justice in our world.”

To put their new knowledge to practice, CMF is planning to visit a mosque to meet and talk with some people there.

Overall outcome positive

The overall outcome of the series, Joel Miller, pastor at CMF, said, was positive: “From the attendance and level of participation in the discussion, it is clear that this is a topic close to our hearts.

“Perhaps this is because learning about and relating with our Muslim neighbors feels like one of the more practical and urgent ways of being a peacemaker in our time. We were pleased with the study guide put together by *Sojourners* and would recommend it to any group wishing to do a study on Christian-Muslim relations.”

More information available

If your congregation is interested in leading a discussion on Christianity and Islam, see <http://www.sojournal.net/resources/christians-and-islam-pdf-discussion-guide> for more details and to purchase the discussion guide.

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.

The ultimate hope was to have a better understanding of Islam, build awareness...create future contacts.

Sister Care May 4-5 at College Mennonite

Carolyn Heggen and Rhoda Keener lead the May 4-5 Sister Care "Equipping Women for Caring Ministry" seminar cosponsored by Central District Conference and Indiana-Mennonite Conference. Held at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, sessions are Friday, May 4, from 7-9 p.m., and Saturday, May 5, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For additional information visit www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net.

Janeen Bertsche Johnson speaker at Grace in April

Janeen Bertsche Johnson will be the guest speaker during the April 1 and 2 Holy Week services at Grace. She will speak Sunday morning and evening and Monday evening. She is campus pastor at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

CDC calendar

April

At Camp Friedenswald

20 - Board of Directors,
8:30 am-5:30 pm

20 - Ministerial Committee, 6:30 pm

20 - Stewardship Committee, 6:30 pm

21 - Leadership Council,
7:30 am-12:30 pm

21 - Missional Church Committee,
1:30-4:30 pm

May

4-5 - Mennonite Women USA Sister Care, College Mennonite Church, Goshen

June

21-23 - Annual meeting, Mennonite Church of Normal; hosted by the Central Illinois region congregations



Winter family retreat

Guests enjoying the Peaceful Grounds coffee shop at Camp Friedenswald during Winter Family Retreat, which took place Feb. 17-19.

Atlanta members hear Martin peacemaking lecture

Members of Atlanta Fellowship had an opportunity to participate in a Feb. 27 lecture about Iran and peacemaking led by Ed Martin, Director of the Center for Interfaith Engagement, at Eastern Mennonite University. Martin's lecture was hosted by the Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition.

Sunday adult options this spring at Silverwood

Several adult Christian education options are available for Silverwood members Sunday mornings this spring. They include:

- *God's creative world*: a study of John's Gospel through the theological lens of creation.
- *Living the Gospel*: draws from the second half of Matthew, the upside down kingdom of God.
- *Women's class*: a study of Terri J. Plank Brennehan's book "Wonderfully Made: Women, Faith and Self-Care."
- *Men's class*: reading scriptures focusing on Colossians and Philemon, letters Paul wrote in prison.

CDC Financial Facts: 8 months, 2011-12 report

Income	\$124,545
Expenses	\$127,361
YTD difference	-\$2,816
Spending Plan	\$128,916
Difference from Spending Plan	-\$4,371

Thank you for your prayers and generous support as together we fulfill our conference missional activities.

-Chris Habegger, CDC Treasurer

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