



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

Reporter

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

JANUARY 2013



Members of Chicago Community and Heritage Woods residents

Chicago Community observes Longest Night; sings carols with seniors

Members of Chicago Community held a Longest Night Service followed by Christmas caroling in a retirement community on Dec. 20, according to Megan M. Ramer, pastor.

“In our annual Longest Night service of worship we mark the winter solstice. This service provides a space for acknowledging the grief and sorrow in our own lives - even, and sometimes especially, during the holiday season - and our longing for the Light of God’s presence,” she said.

Following the service, members carpoled to Heritage Woods assisted living facility for Christmas caroling with some of the elderly residents.

Eighth Street exploring Open Space for 2nd Hour

Eighth Street’s Christian Education Commission recently launched an experimental Sunday program for its adults, according to Brenda Swatzky Paetkau, co-pastor.

Titled “Open Space for 2nd Hour,” the model is set up “for organizing conferences and meetings, which rely on participation by people who have a passion for the topics to be discussed,” and seeks “to explore the emergent ideas and agendas of their members.”

Explaining the program in the January “Messenger,” Eighth Street’s newsletter, the Christian Education Commission said that the model provides “open space” to gather around topics of common interest. A group may gather for just one Sunday or multiple Sundays.

The format for how the group meets is at

The group could meet for one week or multiple weeks. Topics will be identified in the church bulletin each week.

See page 3

By Joyce Schumacher, CDC president

“You are invited...”

As a child, I looked forward to family reunions. These were fun times with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. They happened often and I knew everyone. However, sometimes there were extended family reunions with great aunts and uncles and second and third cousins and many unfamiliar faces. Family members traveled from out of state and Canada. We were bound together by blood lines, traditions and memories. We prayed and ate together, laughed, played games and listened to stories. It was a great time.



I also enjoy reunions of my church family. The family of Central District Conference is made up of 46 sister congregations. The family is bound together by love of Jesus and a commitment to keep Jesus at the center of all we do.

This winter will be the fourth year that the CDC family will gathered for regional gatherings – gatherings planned by CDC leadership and hosted by local congregations. The first of four regional gatherings will take place on Jan. 26 and will be hosted by First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana. Three others are planned for February and March. Each gathering will include dwelling in the Word, singing and praying together, learning about CDC history via an historical vignette, sharing a lunch and learning more about the Reign of God grant projects and Peace Pledge projects. This year each congregation is asked to bring a loaf of bread that represents a story from its congregation. We will share the bread as we celebrate communion together.

We will be addressing two MC USA Purposeful Plan priorities. One is Christian formation and the role of the Bible. MC USA calls 2013 the Year of the Bible. Ron Guengerich, CDC president-elect, will lead an activity to identify and consider the sig-

nificance of foundational stories in the Bible. The activity will be interactive, lively and fun. The second priority is undoing racism. Lois Kaufmann, conference minister, will lead a cultural sensitivity exercise.

In preparation for the 2008 CDC annual meeting, held at Wheaton College near Chicago, Bonnie Neufeld and the children of Community Mennonite Church made a beautiful quilt to be auctioned at the gathering. On each block of the quilt is an image of a child of different ethnic groups and dressed in brightly colored clothes. The hair of the children was made from human hair and styled accordingly. The quilt was purchased by Susan and Steve Goering, then pastors of Columbus Mennonite. Recently Steve and Susan retired; and they donated the quilt back to CDC. At each of the regional gatherings the quilt will be displayed as a story about children breaking down barriers of racism is told. The quilt will be auctioned again at the 2013 annual gathering.

So, I invite your congregation to bring a car load or two of people to the family reunion (also known as a regional gathering) in your area. And begin planning now for the larger family reunion (also known as the CDC annual meeting) that will take place at Bluffton University, June 20-22. As your congregations consider who to send as delegates to the annual meeting, be sure to include families with children, as activities are being planned for them. I look forward to meeting you.

Joyce Schumacher
CDC President

2013 Regional Gathering Schedule:

- Jan. 26** – Central Illinois Regional Gathering at First Mennonite Urbana
- Feb. 9** – Chicago/Wisconsin Regional Gathering at Madison Mennonite
- Feb. 23** – East Ohio Regional Gathering at First Mennonite Sugarcreek
- March 16** – West Ohio Regional Gathering at Trenton Mennonite



Christmas Eve at Emmaus Road

Several out-of-town visitors attended Emmaus Road's Christmas Eve service, as persons came home for the holiday. Bernie and Marie Wiebe's daughter, Heidi Sosa Padilla, visiting from Seattle, were among those visitors, according to Anita Rediger, Emmaus Road pastor.

CDC co-sponsor of April 13 workshop for small congregations

If you are a pastor or lay leader of a small congregation, mark your calendar for April 13 and plan to spend a day with leaders who know what it's like to do church in a congregation of 25, 50, or 75, and who believe that small churches are key to what God is doing in the world.

- Benefit from the experience of congregational consultant and former American Baptist pastor Margaret Marcuson on *Leaders that Last: Sustaining Yourself in Small Church Ministry*.

- Choose from breakout sessions on discerning the future of your congregation, worship and music, Sunday school and Christian formation, leadership structures, community outreach, and sustainable finances, all geared to the strengths and challenges of the small congregation.

- Network with small congregations in your geographical area for resource sharing and support.

This event is co-sponsored by Congregational Life Ministries (Church of the Brethren), Central District Conference, Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Two or three registrants from the same congregation will get a registration discount. The event will be held from 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Camp Mack (Church of the Brethren camp in Milford, Ind.).

For more information and to register online, visit www.brethren.org/training/small-churches.html. If you have questions, contact Lois Kaufmann at confmin@mcusacdc.org.

From page 1

Eighth Street exploring Open Space

the discretion of the group or the person who initiated the topic.

Three classrooms in Eighth Street's building are available for the Open Space experiment.

Here are Open Space for 2nd Hour procedures as explained in "The Messenger":

- Anyone interested in a particular topic and who seeks conversation with others is invited to call the church office to identify the topics to be discussed and to reserve a space to meet during the 2nd Hour.

- Topics and meeting rooms will be identified in the bulletin each week.

"The Messenger" continues: "Whoever

shows up is the right group to be having the conversation. If you find yourself in a group that is not right for you, you are not obligated to keep attending for the duration of that particular series but are welcome to participate in another gathering."

CEC is aware of four initiatives/ideas for classes including: Prayer Walking, Worship Response, "Living the Questions" DVD series and, Issues Related to Aging Parents.

The experiment will run through 2013 and Eighth Street's Christian Education Commission will review the program at the end of the year.

Growth of families at Champaign-Urbana leads to creation of “Children’s Circle”

One of the developments of the past 18 months at First, Champaign-Urbana, is the arrival of several new children (and their families).

That growth means several things for the congregation:

- more children participating in the children’s story during worship,
- enough K-5 children to offer K-2 and 3-5 grades Sunday School classes,
- enough children that it is difficult not to notice them enriching every service.

The congregation’s Christian Education began looking at options to support the additional needs of children and their parents on Sundays.

One option CE initiated is a new activity during its fellowship hour. The group of children is now playing cooperative games and other games during the fellowship hour.

Children’s Circle, as this time has come to be called, is led by volunteers.

These volunteers are a combination of parents, MYFers, young-at-heart empty nesters and younger adults.

“If you come by while we are playing (in the yard by the peace garden), you will see a rope boundary on all four sides of the play area so that children

know exactly what the boundaries are,” writes Sheryl Nisly-Nagele in “The Vine,” the church newsletter.

“You will most likely also see Tom Ander-



Children’s Circle activities this fall at First, Champaign-Urbana

“This is a most enjoyable way to get to know our children.”

son standing by Springfield Avenue making sure that no child darts onto the street while we are playing,” she adds.

Helpers and children alike are getting some good exercise. As the weather turns colder, the group will continue to be outside as much as possible, but is exploring indoor options as well.

Church member David Wright has agreed to offer a drumming circle in January.

Others in the congregation are invited to lead similar activities.

As CE explores indoor and outdoor options for the colder months Nisly-Nagele says, “This is a most enjoyable way to get to know our children, and it can also be a great way to get some exercise and fresh air.”

Planning underway for 2013 annual meeting in Bluffton

Planning is already underway for the June 20-22 Central District Conference Annual Meeting in Bluffton.

CDC churches in the Western Ohio cluster are responsible for planning the gathering.

The congregations include Ann Arbor, Cincinnati, Emmaus Road, First (Bluffton), Grace, Lima, Paoli, Shalom Community and Trenton.

Silverwood youth have haystack fundraiser Jan. 20

Silverwood's annual congregational meeting on Jan. 20 takes place after a haystack fundraiser meal put on by the congregation's youth.

Donations to the meal will help the youth make the trip to Phoenix, Ariz., this summer.

Oak Grove celebrates 2013 as "The Year of the Story"

The Oak Grove congregation will celebrate 2013 as "The Year of the Story," which centers on a theme that the Bible is one continuing story of God and his people.

Each household in the congregation has received a gift of "The Story" from its Spiritual Life Commission. "The Story" is the Bible as one continuing story of God and God's people. It is condensed into 31 chapters covering Genesis to Revelation.

In partnership with the Worship Commission, the congregation will use it as a map for worship in 2013.

In addition, all who worshiped on Christmas Eve received a copy of "The Voice," translation of the Bible. "This is the latest attempt to capture the passion, grit, humor and beauty that has often been lost in the translation process," according to the committee.

Paoli observes Shalom Sunday

Paoli's congregation observed Shalom Sunday on Dec. 30. The congregation met for worship at 11 a.m. and then shared in a potluck dinner at noon.

The worship service focused on the past year and anticipation of the new year.

Ted Larrison, worship leader, asked the congregation to think about how God has been present and a help in the past year and a hope for the new year ahead. A Shalom Committee planned the worship service.

Themed groups forming at Grace; recommitment service held

The Shepherding Team of Grace is creating "themed" group opportunities for members beginning in January and lasting at least three months.

Previous groups chose themes including Food, Marriage, Singing Together and Bible Study.

In other congregational activities, the Jan. 6 worship service included a new year's service of recommitment and communion. The service included communion, parent-child blessing and dedication and commissioning of Grace church leaders for 2013.

Cotton Patch Gospel given at First, Bluffton

The Cotton Patch Gospel, a two-hour musical will be presented by Phil Kaufmann, Tiskilwa, Ill., at 3 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 20, at First, Bluffton. Donations will be received to aid the Bluffton Food Pantry, Mennonite Central Committee and WHYHunger.

The Cotton Patch Gospel is a translation by Clarence Jordan, a modern version from an African American context.

CDC calendar

February

- 4 - Stewardship Committee meets
- 5 - Missional Church Committee meets
- 9 - Chicago/Wisconsin Regional Gathering, Madison
- 12 - Board of Directors meets
- 23 - East Ohio Regional Gathering, Sugarcreek

March

- 4 - Ohio Ministry Resource Day, Columbus Mennonite
- 6 - Illinois/Wisconsin Ministry Resource Day
Mennohaven
- 8 - Indiana Ministry Resource Day
Camp Friedenswald

April

- 9 - Michiana Pastor Peer

Camp Friedenswald

- 12 - Board of Directors 9 am - 5:30 pm
- 12 - Ministerial Committee, 6:30-9:30 pm
- 12 - Stewardship Committee, 6:30-9:30 pm
- 13 - Leadership Council, 7:45 am - 12:30 pm
- 13 - Missional Church Committee, 1:30 - 4:30 pm

June

- 20-22 2013 Annual Meeting at Bluffton University

First six months CDC giving report

We are so grateful that congregations sent \$29,402 and other donors gave \$9,848 in the month of December to Central district Conference. The fiscal year-to-date revenue stands at \$107,675 against a goal of \$95,000.

Expenses year-to-date were about \$6,125 under planned expenses so as of Dec. 31, we were about \$18,600 to the positive on net income/expenses (+\$12,675 of income +\$6,125 of less expense).

We know December is often a good month for giving, but we are still very encouraged by this strong support.

Roger A. Nafziger, CDC Treasurer

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Atlanta launches prayer group for spring

Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship is organizing a prayer group for the spring. A prayer group met in the fall during the week to pray for each other and for the Atlanta community, according to James Rissler, pastor.

Karl Shelly on winter sabbatical

Karl Shelly, pastor of Assembly, is on a sabbatical through mid-February. Interim members of the pastoral team during the sabbatical are Jennifer Gingerich and Bethany Swope.

Sunday adult education options at Shalom

Shalom, Harrisonburg, is in the planning stage for several adult Christian Education winter-spring Sunday classes.

Topics suggested include:

- More life stories from members of the congregation
- Immigration
- Sexual ethics
- Religious and personal experiences of angels (what different religions believe about angels)
- Learning about other world religions from people in our community.

“Gospel of Rudba” now in Hively library

“The Gospel of Rudba: War, Peace and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq,” a book by Greg Barrett, was recently donated to the Hively church library by Bob and Ellene Miller.

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