



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

# Reporter

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

**MARCH 2013**



## Winter retreat

Members of Milwaukee Mennonite Church's gather for singing during the congregation's sixth annual winter retreat. The event took place at a farm northwest of Milwaukee on Feb. 3.

## Suter tells about clean water project

Fred Suter, member of Columbus and formerly Grace, Pandora, shared an evening program at Grace in February.

The former Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and PAX volunteer to the Democratic Republic of Congo, shared about his work getting fresh, clean water to a hospital at a former Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission station in the DRC.

Camped one night in a box

## Champaign-Urbana pastor goes homeless

Janet Rasmussen, pastor of First, Champaign-Urbana, went homeless this winter. And it was one cold winter night.

Her experience was part of a one-night event to raise awareness around homelessness in Champaign-Urbana. It was also used to collect funds to underwrite the housing provided by C-U at Home, an organization working to house and support homeless people in Champaign-Urbana.

Rasmussen was among 75 community members who camped outside in boxes from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. on Feb. 1. The awareness event took place at the University of Illinois Quad and downtown Champaign.

There were more than 200 volunteers involved in helping out at the two locations. This event shows what can happen when a community comes together behind a meaningful cause as it topped its goal of \$50,000 raised, according to Rasmussen.

By James Rissler, pastor of Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship

# MC USA's Purposeful Plan

Greetings from Atlanta.

I hope that many of you have some familiarity with Mennonite Church USA's Purposeful Plan, approved by delegates at Pittsburgh 2011. This plan is based on reflecting on six questions:

- Who is God calling us to become as a people?
- Where is God calling us to go?
- What are the signposts to show we are on God's chosen path for us?
  - Where are we now on this journey?
  - What circumstances might cause us to make adjustments to our goals along the way?
  - What are the next steps on the path?

And the answers to these questions are centered on seven priorities intended to guide our missional work. The first three articulate foundations of what it means to be an Anabaptist congregation, and the latter four identify areas that we want to focus on over a 10-year period. The priorities are:

- Christian Formation
- Christian Community
- Holistic Christian Witness
- Stewardship
- Leadership Development
- Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation
- Church-to-Church Relationships

A summary of the Purposeful Plan, including references to Scriptures that ground these priorities, and how they interact with our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, are available at: <http://mennoniteusa.org/about/purposeful-plan/>. There are also study guides for each of these priorities and for the questions above that small groups or Sunday School classes could use to reflect on them in their context.

This year, MC USA and CDC are especially focusing on the priorities of Christian Formation and Undoing Racism and Advancing Intercultural Transformation. The latter will get a lot of attention at Phoenix 2013, and I'm looking forward to going on one of the day-long border learning tours that are being offered to learn more about the impacts

of U.S. immigration policies. In CDC, leadership has engaged this priority over the past months by sending members of the Board and Ministerial Committee to a Damascus Road anti-racism training at Bluffton, sending Lynda Nyce to Chicago for a training on assisting immigrants in adjusting to life in the U.S. called *Bienvenido*, and both she and Lois to Communities of Hope, a training on intercultural transformation. On a congregational level, Hively Avenue and Community Mennonite, Markham, have a Reign of God grant to "Walk a mile in my shoes," a May 4 event where members of both congregations will gather in Markham to walk and pray in that community while sharing stories and reflecting on what it means to be the body of Christ across racial, gender and class differences.

CDC's two year theme – God's Story, Our Stories – has nicely dovetailed with the priority of Christian Formation, and we have done more as a conference related to this. Those who have attended regional gatherings have appreciated Ron Guengerich's leading us in reflecting on Scripture, especially on the overwhelming sense of God's provision and grace in the Old Testament. And at each of those gatherings, we have used a communion liturgy developed by Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship as part of the "12 Scriptures Project" (<http://mennoniteusa.org/2012/03/22/the-twelve-scriptures-project/>) being encouraged by MC USA during this "Year of the Bible." Other congregations (including Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship) have also engaged that process and found it richly rewarding in the ways that we have found ourselves working with biblical texts in new ways.

The direction that our denominational leadership and delegates have given in adopting the Purposeful Plan and encouraging us to focus on these seven priorities seems very good to me. It is good for us to focus on these priorities rather than our disagreements, and we should work at these while we also do the hard and holy work of discerning together God's will on controversial topics. I hope that we will all take the time to learn more about the Purposeful Plan and experiment with the denominational initiatives around it as we continually seek to be conduits of God's healing and hope for all people.

**James Rissler, Pastor**  
**Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship**



**James Rissler**

## Wadsworth members ponder scriptural texts

This winter the First, Wadsworth, congregation, set out on a scripture text journey.

In February members were invited to join the project by adding their top scriptures to a display in the church hallway.

The church bulletin request reads: "Think about the scripture passages that have shaped you personally, then write each one on a sticky note and add it to the display."

## Children and the kingdom of God

Florence members held a mid-week family night with a free chili meal cooked by members of the congregation. On the first Sunday of March members visited children's classrooms following worship to see classes in action. The visit fit well with the Sunday text "Children and the kingdom of God (Luke 18:15-17).



## CDC co-sponsor of April 13 small congregation workshop

CDC is co-sponsor of a small congregation workshop April 13 at Camp Mack, Milford, Ind.

Congregational consultant and former American Baptist pastor Margaret Marcuson will lead the workshop.

Those attending may 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 sessions focus on strengths and challenges of small congregations.

For more information and to register online, visit CDC website: [www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net](http://www.centraldistrict.mennonite.net).

## Informal discussion on "aging" at Assembly

The Assembly congregation launched an informal group to discuss the challenges and joys of aging and ill family members. The group meets on the fourth Sunday of each month for lunch and conversation after the second hour.

## Eighth Street offers safe place for homeless

Eighth Street has joined with St. John's Catholic Church, Goshen, to offer a safe place for homeless families to stay while they are temporarily without a home. In March Eighth Street hosted families from March 10 to 17.

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## Silverwood's spring Christian education offerings

# Let justice roll down...Walking with Jesus

Silverwood offers five Christian education options for adults this spring.

- Beyond the Present Time - traces the theological theme of hope in Hebrew and Christian scripture. Scriptures are taken from Daniel, Luke, Acts, Thessalonians and Peter.

- Adam's Return: The Five Promises of Male Initiation - a book by Richard Rohr is the focus of a men's class.

- Book of Romans - offered to young adults in

the congregation.

- Let Justice Roll Down - examines the Book of Amos. A class for women offers an opportunity to support each other through the events of life.

- Walking with Jesus - focuses on the second parts of Mark and Acts. Participants will learn about the journey of discipleship that Jesus and his followers embarked upon.

# Traveling the U.S. and Canada with the MCC mobile canning crew

Andrew Keeler probably cans turkeys in his sleep. That's because when he's awake and on the job, he helps process up to 5,000 2-pound cans of turkey meat per day.

Keeler, a member of St. John, Pandora, and 2012 Bluffton University grad, is part of the four-person Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) mobile canning crew.

For seven months each year the crew travels the United States and Canada pulling a 42-foot trailer equipped with all the canning equipment necessary for the job. During the other five months, the crew stays in Akron, Pa., the home base of the canning project.

The mobile meat canner operates in 33 different locations across the United States and Canada, from October through May. Over 10,000 volunteers a year fill, weigh, stack, wash and label every can.

Over the 2011-2012 season, the collective efforts of all involved produced 556,586 cans (over a million pounds of meat).

The finished product is shipped around the world, feeding hungry people, and investing in the future of those in need.

"I graduated from Bluffton University in 2012 and wanted to get involved in a volunteer assignment," said Keeler. He applied and was accepted by MCC for a two-year volunteer term with its portable canning operation.



**Andrew Keeler, a member of the MCC mobile canning crew**

So far, Keeler has visited 13 states and two Canadian provinces.

"The food we can goes overseas to the Ukraine and North Korea. We've also shipped some turkey to Haiti," said Keeler.

At Bluffton University, where he majored in history, he participated in "Shining Through." Keeler is the son of Randy and Karen Keeler of Bluffton.



## Chicago Community retreat

Members of Chicago Community held its annual retreat at Menno Haven in late February. Bluffton University Camerata Singers led the worship service. Here, a group from the congregation sing together.

## “Empowered by God” theme of Bible Institute

Timothy Gukunja is this year’s Winter Bible Institute guest speaker at Oak Grove.

The Institute takes place March 16-17 and is titled “Empowered by God.” The event starts with a Saturday benefit supper in support of the Gakunju family’s planned mission trip to Kenya.

## Cincinnati part of Celebration for Citizenship

Cincinnati members are partners in hosting “A Celebration for Citizenship.” The event was Feb. 25 at Woodward High School. It included music, dancing and food from various parts of the world.

Also included was participation of DREAM Act Students and undocumented immigrants telling their stories.

## Paoli’s Covenant Service Jan. 27

Paoli’s Covenant Service took place Jan. 27. The yearly service invites participants to publicly reflect on their relationship with God, others and PMF.

## CDC Lent observances take several shapes and forms

Here is a sampling of how several CDC congregations observe the season:

### Assembly

Prior to Ash Wednesday, Carnival with Jam and Gravel Road playfully prepared the congregation for Lent. Participants explored “Don’t blame me!” with blame stories from three storytellers.

### Faith

The congregation is taking a special offering for food baskets to Syria’s Mennonite Central Committee. The baskets assist people affected by violence there. One basket is sent for each \$22 donation. Faith and Assembly held a joint worship on Ash Wednesday.

### Shalom, Harrisonburg

Members of the congregation were given a feather for their home altar on Feb. 25. The feather symbolizes God’s loving protection.

### Lima

This year’s Lenten giving project is collecting items for AIDS caregiver kits. The kits includes personal hygiene items.

### Chicago Community

The annual church retreat took place Feb. 16-17 held at Menno Haven Camp. The retreat included a talent show, games, crafts and a Holden evening prayer service.

### Grace

Lent booklets are available for families to use at home with their children, ages preschool through elementary.

### Atlanta

Communion was served on the first Sunday of Lent. Following the service members held the first of several Lenten discussions focusing on Lectionary texts.

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## Women’s Council “Staying Strong” event at Bluffton on April 6

This year’s Bluffton University Women’s Council invites women to attend the 2013 R&R for Women. The event is April 6 from 9:15 a.m. to 3 p.m. and the theme is “Staying Strong: What’s in your toolbox.” Registration, which covers lunch, is \$45 for one for \$40 each for a group of three. For more information and to register contact Joyce Schumacher 419-358-3456.



## Family night

Jane Bowers and Nora Harris, Journey Program graduates, started a Family Night ministry at Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite. On Feb. 28, 40 persons from the community attended. From left, Shane Nichols, Nora Harris, Georgie Harris, Sarah Nichols, Dallie Nichols and Kloiee Tucker.

## CDC calendar

### 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

## First nine months CDC giving report

We are two-thirds of the way through our fiscal year and the numbers continue to look good. Revenue (giving) is slightly ahead of our plan and expenses are under the budgeted expenses for year-to-date. Giving from congregations is \$5,685 ahead, other giving is \$650 more than planned and earned revenues are \$1,336 ahead for a total above-plan amount of \$7,661 year-to-date. Expenses through Feb. 28 were \$6,179 below the planned amount, so the net amount that we are ahead totals \$13,840. That feels very good and we hope the strong support continues so we are able to close the year on June 30 with a gain.

**Roger A. Nafziger, CDC Treasurer**

## Sister Care workshop joins women from CDC and Ohio Conference

Central District Conference and Ohio Conference will host a Sister Care workshop Friday and Saturday, April 26-27, at First, Bluffton.

The workshop theme is "Equipping Women for Caring Ministry."

Carolyn Heggen and Rhoda Keener lead the weekend. The seminar is under the auspices of Mennonite Women USA. Sister Care seminars led women interested in gathering with other women to learn ways to integrate scripture, prayer, self-care and individual gifts in caring ministry.

The weekend opens Friday, April 26 with a 7-9 p.m. session. The Saturday, April 27, session continues from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Women of all ages are encouraged to attend. The cost is \$35 and in-home housing is provided upon request. Friday refreshments and Saturday lunch and snacks are included.

To register contact: [FMC@bluffton.edu](mailto:FMC@bluffton.edu).

## Difficult biblical texts Spiritual Emphasis topics at Hively Avenue

Hively Avenue's Deacons' Council sponsored the congregation's annual Spiritual Emphasis evenings on Feb. 20 and Feb. 27.

Following a supper, Dr. Safwat Marzouk, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary professor, spoke on difficult texts found in the Old and New Testaments. His talks focused on how to understand these texts.

**CENTRAL DISTRICT REPORTER**  
Volume 57, Number 2, March, 2013

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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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