



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE
ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

June 2014

Get to know the **Missional Church Committee**

Planting, watering, growing in our congregations

A question-and-answer session with Gerald Mast, 2011-2014 member of the missional church committee.



What is the purpose of the missional church committee?

The purpose of the Missional Church Committee is to encourage congregations to use denominational and conference resources, and to nurture congregations in developing and mobilizing their missional potential. The committee is to be alert to congregational needs and special interests, linking congregations to appropriate resources and to other congregations with similar interests. The committee encourages missional partnerships. In short, the Missional Church Committee plants and waters seeds in our congregations and hopefully watches them grow.

Tell me about the Reign of God grants? What are its purpose, origins, etc.? How do people/churches apply?

The Reign of God Grant is designed to encourage missional activity among congregations. This Missional Church Committee program will match (1-1) money raised at the grassroots level to give the extra financial boost necessary for new, cooperative missional initiatives between two or more congregations. A missional initiative is any activity capturing and honoring God's continuing creative energy in establishing God's reign in the world.

Grant proposals will be submitted by September 30 of each year. Proposals should be no more than three pages in length and may be submitted online, by fax, or by postal mail. Individual grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 will be given.

The goal is to distribute \$5,000 annually.

Grants must be used for:

- missional initiatives based in the Central District region of the United States by Central District Conference congregations,
- missional initiatives related to worship, nurture, evangelism, education, peace and justice, and creation care,
- new initiatives, or significantly new additions to current programs. Operation funds for existing programs will not qualify.

An application can be found at http://centralsdistrict.mennonite.net/Resources/Reign_of_God_Grant
Why have you wanted to be a part of the missional church committee?

I have appreciated being part of the missional church committee because of the inspiring visions for the church's mission that we share in our meetings. The missional church has also become a kind of hub for knowledge about the exciting and transformative ways that God is working in and through CDC congregations to change the world. Being involved on this committee has strengthened my conviction that CDC has extraordinary gifts to contribute to the mission of the church in general and to Mennonite Church USA in particular.

How often do you meet and how do you decide what projects to pursue?

We meet together in person twice a year to do our

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The Missional Church Committee

is currently made up of Janeen Bertsche Johnson of Eighth Street Mennonite, chair, and members Terri Geiser of Hively Avenue Mennonite, Phil Hart of Columbus Mennonite, Lois Kaufmann-Hunsberger of Maplewood Mennonite, J P Masih of Asian Mennonite Community, Gerald Mast of First Mennonite-Bluffton, Matt Morin of Milwaukee Mennonite, and John Powell of Shalom Community, along with Emma Hartman, conference administrator.

“Spirit Quilts” processes difficult U.S. history

Two CDC churches have partnered together to use quilting to explore an unfortunate part of U.S. history - the slave trade and the injustice to African Americans during that era.

Community Mennonite of Markham, Ill., and Hively Avenue Mennonite in Elkhart, Ind., have worked together to plan and piece a quilt that has panels showing families in Africa, the U.S. slave trade, the civil rights movement and a look at the current era and the churches' dreams for the future.

The idea for “Spirit Quilts: Mennonite Women Quilting Bee” began after the two churches received a Reign of God grant from the CDC missional church commission for an event exploring racial reconciliation and peace. The event included workshops, peace walks and more.

Through that time, Terri Geiser from Hively Avenue Mennonite and member of the CDC missional church committee, and Cyneatha Millsaps, lead pastor of Community Mennonite, got to know each other and realized they shared a love of quilting, Geiser said.



They began to discuss the idea of creating story quilts for historical expression, healing, and worship. The women applied for and received a Reign of God grant from the missional church committee to cover the expense of materials and also some educational trips, including a visit to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the two church groups were hosted by Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship. Geiser said she and others were especially moved and inspired by the “And Still We Rise: Race, Culture, and Visual Conversations” exhibit, a collection of quilts created by the Women of Color Quilters Network, showing the history of the African American experience.

While women from Community Mennonite and Hively Avenue have primarily been the ones involved with the project, a few women from other congregations, including a woman from Columbia, have also been involved, Geiser said.

“It’s been intensely meaningful,” Geiser said. “But it’s also been very upsetting.” Some blocks, like one that includes the image of a woman being lynched, was very hard to do, she said.

Geiser has enjoyed discussing the emotions that have come from the project with others in the diverse group, along with discussing related issues, telling stories, sharing meals and staying over in one another’s homes.

“It’s been a range of emotions really,” she said

The top is pieced, but not yet quilted. Geiser said that once finished, it will be available to schools and CDC churches to display, but that the group doesn’t have any definite plans.

“I don’t know yet all the ways God will use this quilt,” she said.

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work, and we also typically have a more informal lunch meeting during the annual meeting to become acquainted with new members. We also meet routinely through video or phone conferencing technology throughout the year: at least two additional times, but sometimes more.

What would you like congregations and their members to know about the missional church committee?

We are eager to know about all of the different ways that CDC congregations are advancing the mission of the church, and for ways that we can be supportive of that work. The committee is excited

to be part of a paradigm shift in conference leadership assumptions, in which church leaders see their task primarily as supporting communities of faith in carrying out the specific mission activities that God is calling them to do, rather than planning conference wide initiatives that congregations are then invited to support. This shift is both exciting and challenging, because we continue to search for new and creative ways to be supportive of congregational mission activity. One central way we have been doing this is to encourage congregations to work together, to communicate their dreams and hopes for mission to one another, and to identify congregational resources that they are willing to share with the broader conference.