



**Central
District
Conference**

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

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

NOVEMBER 2013

Reign of God grant – Spirit of Quilts

Mennonite Women Quilting Bee project

Hively Avenue, Elkhart, and Community, Markham, have joined together in a “Spirit Quilts: Mennonite Women Quilting Bee” project. They received a \$934 Reign of God matching grant from CDC Missional Church

Committee to help fund the project. The Hively Avenue and Community congregations plan to invite women from their churches and up to four other congregations to form a group of approximately 20 women to research, design and

make quilts on various themes.

The theme related to the grant is the Underground Railroad and the role of quilts to help guide slaves to freedom.

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To begin their research, participants will visit Bristol Historical Museum, a former site of the Underground Railroad. Another trip, to Mequon, Wisc., enables participants to visit the Ujamaa Quilting Bee, a quilt store specializing in African-American quilts.

Following the trip, quilters will design and produce a quilt, working locally as a larger group, to compete the blocks, put the quilt together and eventually quilt it.

At the project’s conclusion a celebration is planned.

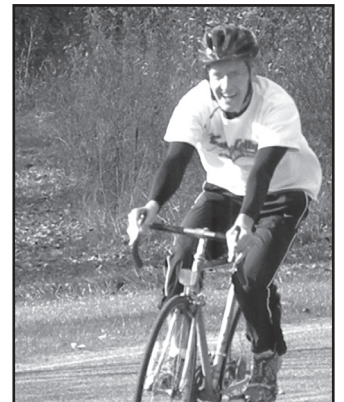
Friedenswald men’s retreat

With the theme “Under Construction: Men, Spirit and Wholeness,” nearly 30 CDC men gathered at Camp Friedenswald for the annual men’s retreat in October.

Among activities was the first-ever Friedenswald Mennathon. The weekend encouraged men to experience the “Peaceful Woods” and to think in new ways with retreat speaker Gareth Brandt.

Men were invited to participate in worship, choose a seminar tied to the theme, learn about and hike to the Prairie Fen Bridge Restoration Project and help with the current Friedenswald archery shelter project.

Terry Shue, Director of Leadership Development for MC USA, led the morning worship.



Gareth Brandt, retreat leader (top)
Brian Wiebe, biking (right)

Transformed through text and table

By Ron Guengerich
CDC board president

Living with a focal point in life is both necessary and difficult.

Life in focus means two things: first, we see clearly, and second, we are not distracted by inconsequential intrusions. These two things are necessary, but they are also difficult. It is difficult to choose a worthy focus and to keep the ubiquitous distractions from diverting us. The focus that we have chosen within Central District Conference

for the next two years is on three connected words: transformed, table and text.

This focal point of CDC's life together is the result of prayer and discernment. The prayer happened in preparation for several meetings – first by the Visioning Group (Board of Directors, chair of Ministerial Committee, and chair of Missional Church Committee) who met to find what God would have

us center on for the next two years, then the CDC Board and Leadership Council met to consider the proposal of the Visioning Group.

At the end of each of these meetings there was consensus that we could say, "It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit to choose 'Transformed through Text and Table' as our theme." This was not a quick or easy decision. After a day of wrestling and brainstorming about a two-year focus, the Visioning Group chose this theme in the last 15 minutes of our meeting – and the choice was made with delight and eager anticipation. The CDC Board and Leadership Council then affirmed this theme with a hearty "Amen."

"Transformed" is a core idea in the early church and this word has been a central value for the church and for Anabaptists across the centuries. It is stated most clearly in Romans 12:2 – "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God is – what is good and accept-

able and perfect." We are called from "being conformed" to the standards and values of our culture to "becoming transformed, being reborn, becoming new persons in Jesus Christ."

But how are we transformed? At what place are we transformed? What is the context of "being transformed?" How do we live a life of continually being transformed? What does this new life look like, and where is the place where this transformation is nurtured? What is the catalyst of this on-going transformation?

Table

"Table" is the place where transformation happens. At the table we are nourished and strengthened. At the table we meet to pray, to discern, to learn, to remember, to bear each others burdens. At the table we are "waiters" who serve each other and are served by each other. At the table we "taste and see that God is good." At the table we remember Jesus who provided food, who washed feet, who blessed the food, and who desires to eat with us. The table and "breaking of bread" becomes the focal point of God's koinonia, God's community and fellowship.

Text

"Text" is the visible, concrete expression of what God desires for us and for our world. Text has a richness of meanings that cannot be captured by one definition. We think of text, first of all, as the printed text, the given story. This text is a written document that points to a contract, a covenant, a testament that God makes with us and offers us. We think of text, secondly, as the living Word/text as we see that "text" in the life and soul of Jesus. We see this living text as becoming real and embodied in all the aspects of the Jesus story. We think of text, thirdly, as the "text" that we are "writing" as we encounter our God who is free to do "new things" in our world, within our fellowship(s) and at our tables.

I eagerly anticipate these next two years in which we will explore and discern the meaning and ramifications of how we, together as CDC, in our congregations and in our lives, will address the theme of "Transformed through Text and Table."



Ron Guengerich



First, Champaign-Urbana's Jubilee worship choir

Champaign plans an Advent of "joyful noise"

This summer's Jubilee celebration weekend at First, Champaign-Urbana, included a Jubilee worship choir (photo above).

Advent plans involve several additional musical contributions where the congregation is invited to make a "joyful noise," according to Janet Rasmussen, pastor.

"We invite members to present Advent and Christmas solos, duos, small ensembles or dance during preludes, offertories and special music times," she said.

Music continues during Advent in several forms. On the first Sunday in Advent is a Chrismon service, which includes singing the story of the Savior.

During the Dec. 15 service a women's ensemble will sing.

St. Paul retreat provides planning, sharing for 2014

St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship held its annual retreat Sept. 6-8 at AARC Retreat Center. According to David Edminster of the congregation, it was a time of personal reflection, sharing and planning for the coming year.

"As a small congregation, we were able to attend and participate, including two new members who have expanded our number to nine!" he said.

Ron and Marilou Adams of Madison Mennonite were guests. Ron helped the group reflect on the theme of expanding the congregation's tent.

Worship themes that emerged from the weekend included "Prophetic Voices/New Disciples" for Advent, "Confronting Power and Privilege," for March and "Mystery, Miracles, Magic," for June.

The retreat served as a time when members volunteer for all the tasks that keep the church running, and commit together to follow its Common Ground statement, a list of principles, which defines the congregation.

Cincinnati Mennonite hosts Mennonite Arts Weekend

The biennial Mennonite Arts Weekend, hosted by Cincinnati Mennonite is Feb. 7-9, 2014. The weekend celebrates the contributions of Mennonite artists by bringing together artists and members of the wider church for a weekend of worship, workshops, presentations and performances.

Persons may register in advance for \$65 before Jan. 17. The registration fee is \$75 after Jan. 17.

A list of the weekend's artist-presenters and registration forms are online at [www. http://mennoniteartsweekend.org/home.html](http://mennoniteartsweekend.org/home.html)



House church experience

“Each year we forego worship in our building in order to meet in homes across the city for a more intimate house church experience,” says Megan Ramer, pastor of Chicago Community.

Here members meet in a northside gathering at the home of two members of the congregation.

First, Wadsworth, members focus on Psalms in October

During October, members of First, Wadsworth, focused on the Psalms. During the series, members were encouraged to do one of the following things:

- Read all 150 Psalms.
- Psalm memorization.
- Write your own Psalm and either share it, or have someone read it for you during the Nov. 3 worship service.
- Sing a Psalm or put a Psalm to music.
- Or, create a piece of visual art based on one of the Psalms.

Memorizations, creations and reflections on the series were part of the Nov. 3 worship service.

Six CDC members accept voluntary service assignments

Six Central District Conference members accepted voluntary service position in Mennonite and Church of the Brethren agencies this summer. Five are in one-year service terms with Mission Network assignments.

They include:

- **Nicholas Handrich**, Silverwood, serving in St. Louis as an assistant site coordinator for Habitat for Humanity St. Louis.
- **Hannah Schumacher**, First, Bluffton, serving in Seattle, Wash., as a development and communications assistant with Washington Trails Association.
- **Miriam Weaverdyck**, Shalom Community, Ann Arbor, serving in Washington, D.C., as an administrative and legal intern with Catholic Charities CD.
- **Nathan Vader**, Assembly, serving in Chicago, as a church coordinator with Chicago Community Mennonite Church.
- **Ben Wiebe**, Eighth Street, serving in Paraguay with the Radical Journey program. This program, for young adults, emphasizes faith formation, service and cross-cultural learning.
- **Julia Schmidt**, Grace, is involved in a two-and-a-half year service term with Brethren Volunteer Service in Croatia. Her main placement will be working for a small non-government organization called RAND, Regional Address for Nonviolence.”

Bluffton's "First Night"

First, Bluffton, continues a tradition this fall offering a Wednesday evening program. Called "First Night," the series from Oct. 9 to Nov. 13 has several elements.

"First Night" begins in the sanctuary where a member of the congregation provides a story of faith, focusing on a variety of life issues.

A family-style meal follows the presentation. After the meal is a brief inter-generational program. Church choirs rehearse following the program.



Guatemalan guests visit Faith

Willi Hugo Perez, rector of SEMILLA, Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala City, and Vicky Montenegro, director of Casa Emaus, a guesthouse for participants in seminary and language school, were guests at Faith on Nov. 10.

In other news from Faith, the Junior High Youth Fellowship's longnecked pumpkin fundraiser realized \$90.

A congregational retreat is planned Dec. 7-8 at Camp Mack.

"Fish out of Water" film viewed

Members of the Florence Church of the Brethren Menno-nite watched the film "Fish out of Water," in October.

"The film deals with how we read scripture, especially those scriptures cited when discerning the church's understanding of sexual ethics," said Nina Lanctot, pastor.

Heisey speaks at Emmaus Road

Dean Heisey, church relations associate with Mennonite Mission Network, brought the morning message to the Emmaus Road congregation on Nov. 17. He is among several guest preachers this fall and winter to visit the congregation.

Future guests include John Eicher on Dec. 1, Don Blosser on Dec. 8, and Perry Bush on Jan. 26.

Oak Grove donates Syrian relief kits

Members of the Oak Grove congregation provided 14 complete relief kits plus several additional items for Mennonite Central Committee's program for refugees in the Syrian conflict. In addition, \$530 was donated to purchase supplies for relief kits.

Around CDC

Doug Reichenbach preached eight sermons at **Grace** during Dennis Schmidt's leave this fall. The themes of his October sermons were "Lord of the Dance."

"Take our Moments and our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book," is being read and discussed by members of the **Atlanta Fellowship** prayer group this fall.

The **Covenant** congregation held its Service of Meditation and Prayer on Nov. 8. The church newsletter described the service as "a time when we share together in a time of silence - in prayer, meditation, or simply quiet reflection as we look out over our beautiful creek."

Paoli members explored the meaning of "chesed" and its implication for them today during the Nov. 10 worship service, which focused on the Book of Ruth.

North Danvers members collected meat through Nov. 10. The collection involved donations of canned meat or cash toward the purchase of a variety of meats, to be presented to the community food pantry.

Carlock provides \$500 to Resource Center

This fall the Carlock congregation provided \$500 to the World Bank collection for Tazewell County Resource Center.

In September, members participated in the Race for the Cure and collected clothing for the Compassion Closet.

The congregation observes Mission Emphasis Sunday on Nov. 24. Dean Heisey of Mennonite Mission Network is the speaker.

Coin collection outreach at Silverwood

During Silverwood's fall outreach series, children in the congregation collect a coin offering during the worship service offering.

The children's collection will be used to fund projects through KIVA, which works at global economic development through micro-finance.

The Outreach Committee sees this as a way to teach Silverwood's children about different people around the world and how others can make a difference even with small amounts of money.

Assembly retreat focus: "Finding Center"

Assembly's fall retreat at Camp Friedenswald took place Oct. 11-13. The focus of the retreat was working together to "find our Center" in our busy world.

In other Assembly news, individuals in the congregation's prayer group, using "Take our Moments and our Days," meet weekly to discuss about how each one has experienced the readings.

Four month CDC giving report

Congregational giving was strong in October and we are now only about \$3,700 short on the revenue side of the plan.

Conference staff continues to do a great job of controlling expenses, which are about \$3,900 under the plan year-to-date. The conference is showing a gain of about a \$200 for the fiscal year through October.

Thanks to all for their strong support and please keep CDC in mind as you plan your calendar year-end giving. Our 2013-14 plan calls for \$30,000 contributed to CDC from individuals and businesses and so far this fiscal year, about \$6,000 has come in. Thanks to all who support the work of CDC.

Roger Nafziger, CDC Treasurer



Fred and Mary Pannabecker Steiner

CDC editors leave *Reporter and focus*; after serving 11 years

Due to increasing demands from their Bluffton and Ada Icon news website business, Fred and Mary Pannabecker Steiner have tendered their resignation as editors of the Central District Conference *Reporter* and *focus*.

Conference leadership and staff thank them for their 11 years as conference editors. Their excellent work and willingness to adjust to the publication needs of the conference has been much appreciated.

Fred and Mary have served in this role since the fall of 2002 and will continue through Dec. 31. Conference leadership will review the publications process and needs of the conference.

An interim editor will be appointed to serve during the review process.

After Jan. 1, congregations may send information, i.e. bulletins, newsletter and articles, for the *Reporter* or *focus* to office@mcusacdc.org.

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