



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

Reporter

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

SEPTEMBER 2013



Fingerprinting on Milwaukee's painting by Matthew Bailey

Milwaukee Covenant celebration

Milwaukee Mennonite celebrated its fourth annual Covenant Celebration Sunday on Pentecost. Participants remembered their baptisms, renewed their commitment to the congregation and shared communion. They also shared stories of how they were drawn to Milwaukee Mennonite and their hopes for the church.

The visual centerpiece of the service was a painting by Matthew Bailey, which featured earth and a barren tree made of finite brown rectangles set against a blue sky with three unending circles representing the Trinity. All were invited to fill the tree with budding leaves by inking their fingerprints on the branches.

Chicago Community celebrates 35th year

Chicago Community celebrates its 35th anniversary as a congregation during a Nov. 2-3 weekend celebration.

According to Megan Ramer, Perry Bush, CDC historian and member of the Bluffton University faculty, will offer a keynote address on Saturday evening. Other Saturday events include an all-day "quilting and history writing on butcher paper."

Members will reflect on the first 35 years of the congregation through a history and storytelling session, which includes memories of Mennonite Voluntary Service Chicago. Following that, the congregation will look toward the next 35 years in a second session of the afternoon.

Saturday evening's program includes a keynote talk by Bush, hymn singing and the presentation of a commissioned choral work by the congregation's choir.

Sunday's events includes a morning worship followed by fellowship and a potluck lunch.

Members will reflect on the first 35 years of the congregation through a history and storytelling session.

Variations on a theme of listening

By Jim Bortell
Pastor Emeritus, Carlock Mennonite

I am an ordained United Methodist minister and a credentialed Mennonite USA minister. After retiring once (serving Methodist churches), I served the Carlock Mennonite Church as pastor for eight and one-half wonderful years – retiring for the second time in January of 2013.

Paul Walles, a dear friend of many years, is now the church's pastor.

We had plans to co-pastor the church but something unplanned intervened. Life, of course, is that way.

In one of his autobiographical books Presbyterian minister and author Fredrick Beuchner counseled: “listen to your life.” The last year has been a time when life has given me much for which to listen. In 2012, I was diagnosed with leukemia and underwent six months of chemotherapy. I am now in remission.

As always, there has been so much in my life for which simple gratitude has been the only right response. Life is a precious gift. Medicine and those who administer it are a gift. Faith is a gift. Family and friends are gifts. My church family is a gift. As always, but even more in this chapter of my life, I find myself listening to the music and wonder of God's world, of “all creatures great and small,” of green and growing things, and “the beauty of the earth, the glory of the sky...” I'm listening in thankfulness; more it would seem than ever before.

As always, there have been dear friends who have finished their earthly journey. I cherish their memory and even in silence they still speak in the lives they lived and the love they gave.

As always, the disorder in the world has

sometimes been deafening. However, when you find yourself carrying a little extra baggage this disorder is noisier.

Religiously, I am hearing fewer “answers,” but experiencing more faith in God. Faith in God is more about assurances than certainties. Certainties divide, but assurances unite.

The people I have met at our Cancer Center are about as diverse as one can imagine, but cancer patients feel instant connections with one another even when you don't know the other's name. And differences don't seem very important.

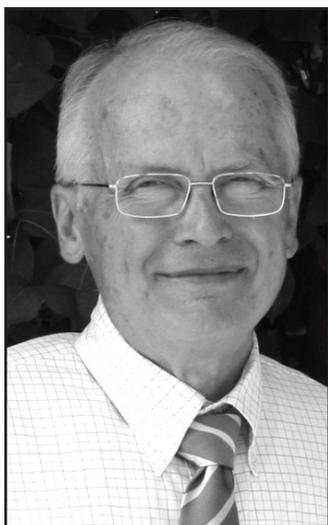
I am what might be called a theological being. I love trying to understand and interpret our faith. However, at this time in my life I am more interested in listening to others. I am more interested in joining hands with others and doing the Lord's work.

John Wesley had a good line that applies: (found somewhere in the Psalms) “if thy heart is right give me your hand.” The old saying “doctrines divide, but duties unite” also applies. I find great satisfaction in listening to people who are outside of my faith and some who fall under the heading of “other” or “none.” Many of my faith friends have told me they remember me in their prayers. A rather agnostic Jewish friend wrote me in an e-mail “God bless you.” A Buddhist friend told me she was praying for me.

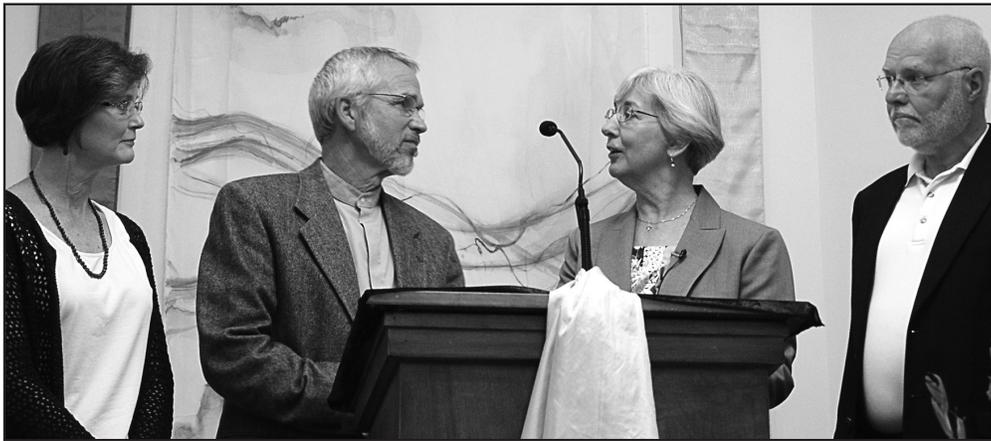
And, of course, I have been listening to many biblical texts. In closing I share just a few: “in quietness and confidence is your strength,” “I can do all things through him who strengthens me,” “the kingdom of God is within you,” “may the God of all comfort give you joy and peace in believing,” “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,” “study to be quiet,” and “the Lord was not in the earthquake, wind, or storm but the still small voice.”

I share these “listenings” with you to understand them better myself, and perhaps to stimulate your own listening to your life.

God bless all my dear Mennonite friends. And together, while apart, let us listen to our lives.



Jim Bortell



Charles Geiser (second from left) was ordained at Hively Avenue on May 26. Lois Kaufmann, conference minister for Central District Conference, led the ordination segment of the service, and they were joined by Terri Geiser, Charles's wife, and Walter Sawatsky, congregational moderator. (Photo by Mary E. Klassen.)

Charles Geiser ordained at Hively Avenue

Charles Geiser was ordained for ministry on May 26, at Hively Avenue. Family members, friends, pastors from several local churches and Hively members joined in the afternoon celebration.

"This is a service of recognition for Charlie, but that doesn't absolve us of responsibility," said Ron Guengerich, in the ordination service message.

He added, "Ordination is a recognition that we want Charlie to be one that we listen to. We expect God to give him words and God to give him a life that is a lamp that guides and directs. And we will be supporting and encouraging and companions on that journey together."

Guengerich who has served as a mentor to Geiser, is pastor of Silverwood and is CDC board president.

Three gifts were presented to Geiser in the service. Lois Kaufmann, conference minister for Central District Conference, presented him with the viol of oil used for anointing him. Annie Mohr presented two pieces of pottery, a platter and covered casserole dish, signaling the gift of hospitality that Geiser and his wife, Terri, freely share. Participants at the service were invited to add their contributions to a book of blessings for Geiser, which will be completed and presented at a later date.

First, Sugarcreek, holds worship workshops

The second of several worship fall workshops took place Sept. 15 at First, Sugarcreek. Following a soup and salad lunch participants signed up to join one of these four workshop groups for an afternoon discussion:

- Praise the Lord, O my soul! • And will not God grant justice?
- Good Hope • The son of righteousness shall rise

Shalom offers lifestyle choice series

On Sept. 22 a panel of Shalom, Harrisonburg, members lead the first of a series of adult education discussions on lifestyle choices. According to Emily North, pastor, they will share their personal stories of struggle, conflict, compromise and discernment in making decisions about what to buy, how to plan a vacation, ways to live communally and more.

First, Urbana-Champaign

First, Urbana-Champaign is holding a used book sale in September to benefit the church library.

Atlanta

In August, the congregation collected money for its donation to Penny Power at the Georgia Mennonite Central Committee relief sale held Sept. 14-15. Also in August the congregation affirmed its desire to continue to relate to Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition.

Paoli

Paoli members are participating in a Habitat for Humanity Apostle Build project. Members will work at the site in West Baden on Sept. 28.

Cincinnati

Four Journey Groups are forming this fall at Cincinnati. The groups are: "Art and Spirituality," "Women's Spiritual Journey," "Mom's Discussion Group," and "Men's Discussion Group."



Silverwood and Emmaus Road youth together attended MC USA convention in Phoenix.

Silverwood, Emmaus Road youth travel together to Phoenix convention

By Eric Martin, Pastor of Youth and Young Adults
Silverwood Mennonite Church

Going to the MC USA convention in Phoenix was a big deal to the youth from Silverwood. Many had attended the convention when it was in Pittsburgh and had an amazing time.

The ones who did not attend had heard from the upper classmen or older siblings how great it had been and the stories of the worship services, the late night talks in small groups and the fun times that they had.

They were looking forward to growing closer to God and also to each other. So when in January, I was contacted by Anita Rediger from Emmaus Road about possibly taking some kids from Berne, Ind., I was of course on board, but I wanted to check with the youth group first.

They said that “of course they could come with us,” they would not deny someone else the chance to go to Phoenix. However, there was some worry that the newcomers would change the dynamic of the group and cause

some to not be as open during the small group time after worship.

Not only did it turn out that they did not have anything to worry about on that subject, but many from Silverwood already knew the kids from Emmaus Road from their times at Camp Friedenswald. At convention, relationships between the two groups only grew.

I was extremely proud of the youth from Silverwood with how they included the kids from Emmaus Road (as they outnumbered them greatly), and also very impressed with how the kids from Emmaus Road integrated themselves into the group so well.

It turned out that not only did the “newcomers” not interfere with the Silverwood youth groups experience, but rather they added to the experience and made it even more positive. As I reflect on this, the experience in many ways fit the theme of immigration that was talked about so much at convention. Our group was able to experience that when you welcome the “outsider,” it only adds to wholeness of your community.

Covenant celebrates Peace Sunday

Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Sarasota, Fla., celebrated Peace Sunday at Arlington Park. The congregation reflected on peace for worship and afterward took a peace walk. The walk was a celebration and affirmation of the congregation's peace witness.

Oak Grove hears about Kenya

John Zook, Mark Steiner and Doug Zehr shared their April 2013 experiences in Kenya with several adult Sunday school classes on Aug. 11.

Guest preachers at Lima Mennonite

During the fall sabbatical of David Elkins, pastor of Lima Mennonite, several guest preachers will assist in Sunday worship services.

Those preachers include Louise Wideman, Randy Keeler, Brice Brennehan, Carl Liechty, Sandra Liechty and a presentation by EZ and Company with Jon Zickafoose.

Assembly processing "Where We Are"

Two documents have been created this fall at Assembly. One describes "Where We Are," in processing various options. The second reports on the congregation's discussion of Two Worship Service proposals from the August congregational meeting.

Sowing and Reaping program offered at First, Bluffton

First, Bluffton, presents "Sowing and Reaping: Celebrating Good Food from the Earth?" The program is part of the Bluffton Community Fall Festival Sept. 28.

The program includes a free community brunch in Fellowship Hall. The meal will include locally grown food. The musical play "The Pasture: A Tale of Just Food," will be performed in the sanctuary by Mad River Theater Works.

Several food demonstrations and food sampling prepared by members of the congregation will also take place during the morning at Bluffton's downtown farmers' market.

Two month CDC giving report

August is a month that typically sees less revenue than many others, and this year's giving continues that pattern.

Revenue fell short of the plan we adopted in June for 2013-14 by almost \$12,000 with giving from congregations being over \$10,000 behind the plan for July and August.

Expenses were under the plan for the first two months of our fiscal year so as of Aug. 31, we were about \$9,500 behind where we hoped to be according to our plan.

Roger Nafziger, CDC Treasurer

October CDC calendar

At Camp Friedenswald

4th - 9 a.m. Board of Directors

4th - 6:30 p.m. Ministerial Committee

4th - 6:30 p.m. Stewardship/Board of Directors,

5th - 7:45 a.m. Leadership Council

5th - 1:30 p.m. Missional Church Committee

At Amigo Centre

14-16th MC USA Constituency Leaders Council

Not our first choice, but what our children wanted to do

Sleeping at church

Steve and Rachel Nolt and their two daughters participate as overnight host volunteers in a program sponsored by Goshen Interfaith Hospitality Network. From 40 to 45 volunteers each week host families who stay the night in Goshen churches.

The Nolts wrote about why their family participates in this program in a recent issue of GIHN publication "A Place At The Table." Four CDC congregations are GIHN host churches. They are Assembly, Faith, Silverwood and Eighth Street.

Note: This article was written when the Nolts were members at Eighth Street Mennonite. Rachel is now one of the pastors at Silverwood.



The Nolt family

For the last number of years our family, which includes daughters Lydia and Esther, now 12 and 10, frequently served as GIHN overnight hosts at our previous church, Eighth Street Mennonite.

Why did we do it? Frankly, because when our children were young they thought sleeping over at the church was great fun!

As parents, we wanted our family to participate in GIHN and the overnight opportunity appealed to our children. Sleeping at church, rather than in our own beds at home, was not always our first choice, but it was what our children wanted to do, and we chose to build on their interests when volunteering as a family. We often took Friday night because our Saturday mornings are more flexible.

Generally, overnight host volunteers don't get as much interaction with guests (although on Friday evenings guests often stay up a bit later), but we had the opportunity to hear guests' stories over a more leisurely Saturday morning breakfast. It is important to us that our children become aware of the needs in our community.

Serving with GIHN is a simple and concrete way for our family to broaden our interaction with the community.

During 2013, due to changes in our family's schedule, we are not regularly volunteering [as overnight hosts], but expect that we will again in the future. We may again take our cues from our children. Maybe in another year they would prefer to be evening hosts instead of spending the night.

We'll see.

— Steve and Rachel Nolt

It is important to us that our children become aware of the needs in our community.

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