

Congregation deepens commitment to providing transitional housing

by Annette Brill Bergstresser

"Is God calling us to expand our ministry of hospitality?"

On Dec. 7, 2016, this question drew a number of people from Faith Mennonite Church to meet at the Faith House, the congregation's hospitality house on South 7th Street near downtown Goshen, Indiana. The house next door had come up for sale.

It didn't take long for representatives from Oaklawn, a local mental health organization, and the Elkhart County Clubhouse, a network of support for people with mental illness, to convince them of the need in Goshen for more short-term

transitional housing options like what the Faith House had been offering through its guest room for 11 years. A new question emerged—how to raise the \$139,000 purchase price quickly in a tight housing market?

The next morning, they had an answer, when a local businessperson who was aware of the need came forward with a significant offer of logistical and financial support.

"We felt that God was responding to

that question," said Deron Brill Bergstresser, who co-pastors Faith with Kay Bontrager-Singer. "At each step, someone kept appearing who felt called to support the ministry."

Bergstresser said that after 11 days of prayerful discernment and discussion of the practical implications, the congregation affirmed taking the next steps to expand the ministry and offered pledges that eventually went toward the down payment for the house.

"When Kay and I talked to our local Mennonite pastor peers, we heard a lot of

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Kay Bontrager-Singer

With the financial support of sister congregations and individuals, Faith Mennonite Church provides short-term transitional housing at the Faith House (on left) and Hope House near downtown Goshen, Indiana.

Congregation deepens commitment (continued)

interest in our mission, which also gave us confidence in proceeding,” he added, noting that the financial support of a number of sister congregations and individuals ultimately helped make the house purchase possible for Faith. In March 2017, the congregation closed on the property—now known as the Hope House—and continues to pay down the mortgage with outside support. They’ve already hosted five guests.

Hospitality has been a central focus for Faith since it was founded in 1990 by a small group from Assembly Mennonite in Goshen to connect with people from the neighborhood who had no church home, Bergstresser said. Since then, Assembly has continued to offer Faith the use of its building for the congregation’s weekly Sunday evening worship service and meal. The congregation now consists of 80 to 90 people from a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Assembly’s provision of worship space helped make it possible for Faith to purchase the Faith House in 2005 to have space for meetings and church activities and to host short-term guests. As those coordinating the ministry built connections in the community—particularly to the Elkhart County Clubhouse—the guest room came to be in steady demand, Bontrager-Singer said. The Faith House has provided transitional housing for more than 30 people over 12 years.

“Some people need a welcoming and safe setting while waiting for a Section 8 housing voucher or a disability check,” she said. “Many of our guests are working at least part time and need a few weeks or months to save up for a deposit on an apartment after some tough luck experience,

often related to challenges of coping with a mental illness.”

Between the two houses, there is now space for three guests. Two live-in long-term hosts, Matt Pflederer (Faith) and Nick Bouwman (Hope), help provide continuity and support. Bontrager-Singer noted that most guests stay six to 12 weeks; they need to have a plan and outside support for moving toward permanent housing. One benefit of staying at either house is that guests can qualify as homeless, which can shorten the wait for government assistance from two years to two months. The congregation is currently receiving more requests than it can accommodate.

Both pastors see it as a strength that the Faith House is a hub of activity for both formal and informal gatherings. People bring their laundry. Faith’s youth and some small groups gather there regularly. Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, a CDC congregation that grew out of both Assembly and Faith, meets at the house on Sunday mornings for worship and a meal. CDC leadership groups have met there on occasion.

“We have discovered that the combination of uses creates a vibrant atmosphere in the Faith House that is conducive to physical, spiritual and mental wellbeing,” Bontrager-Singer said.

(continued on page 3)



The CDC Leadership Council held its fall meetings in Faith House. Gathered in the living room are Matt Morin, Kay Bontrager-Singer, Emma Hartman, Marlene Suter, Carrie Mast (back to camera), Ron Adams and John Powell.

Mary E. Klassen

Congregation deepens commitment (continued)

Parker Kennedy, the Hope House's second guest and a former Faith House guest, agreed.

"One night, Nick [Hope House host] invited me and his girlfriend and Matt [Faith House host] to play cards together," he said. "It was just so great being together and being normal. When you're homeless, the ability to have fun doesn't really follow you around anymore."

Bontrager-Singer concluded, "We've learned that having transitional housing is crucial for people moving out of homelessness, and that it's not easy to find. This is one concrete way we as a congregation feel called to share the love of Christ in our City of Goshen, and to grow in relationship with our neighbors."

See also faithmennonitegoshen.org. 

Congregations embrace need for sanctuary for immigrants

Elkhart and Goshen area churches

by Julia Schmidt

The Elkhart Goshen Sanctuary Coalition began in early January 2017 when some local pastors and educators came together to think how churches can show hospitality to the immigrant community.

Two local churches—Universal Unitarian Fellowship of Elkhart and North Goshen Mennonite Church—have agreed to host a sanctuary case if there was one in Elkhart County.

However, sanctuary is more than just hosting a particular case; it also is being willing to respond to the needs in the community. Through many discussions, working groups were formed to address issues of housing public and private sanctuary cases, education in churches and the broader community, communicating with the Latinx community about sanctuary options, and forming a team to look at a rapid response system if there would be ICE raids in the county.

During these 11 months, we have worked hard at building relationships with local churches and the Latinx community and moving ahead with our different initiatives. In the last month, we have begun to change the structure and find opportunities for all interested churches to form their own organizing committees to find ways that each church could address a specific need in the community. These range from passing a local racial profiling policy to helping provide transportation. Our vision is to develop a wide network of people and

congregations working together to make our county a welcoming place to immigrants. We want to develop leadership and work harder at building intercultural relationships in the community in order to build trust and work in partnership with the Latinx community, instead of for them.

Julia Schmidt, a member of Southside Fellowship in Elkhart, helps to coordinate the Elkhart Goshen Sanctuary movement. Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, also is represented in the coalition with member Jamie Pitts serving in the coordinating group.

Columbus Mennonite Church

Columbus Mennonite in Ohio has hosted a woman whose stay in the community was in jeopardy. To understand more of the congregation's decision and the experience of providing sanctuary, follow these links:


Columbus Mennonite Church website:

www.columbusmennonite.org/who-we-are/sanctuary-edith

Podcast interview from The Mennonite:

soundcloud.com/themennonite/columbus-mennonite-church-and-the-journey-of-sanctuary

Columbus Alive website:

<http://www.columbusalive.com/entertainment/20171018/community-feature-inside-edith-espinal-life-in-sanctuary> 

Leadership Council wrestles with questions

Doug Luginbill brought observations from his first year as conference minister to the CDC Leadership Council at their semi-annual meeting in Goshen. These observations then shaped six questions for discussion:

How is God calling us, preparing us and encouraging us to live into current tensions and opportunities around race relations?

How is God’s Spirit moving through transitions as the conference loses some congregations and gains others?

As shifts occur in how the denomination regards issues of sexual identity and orientation, how does CDC move forward?

How does the conference continue to be good stewards of the generosity of constituents?

How is God calling us to live faithfully into radical biblical hospitality? What does being missional mean for CDC congregations?

The Council—board and committee members—then looked at what God might be calling the conference to do in these areas. The discussion was not intended to end with specific goals or tasks. Instead it gave opportunities for sharing counsel. It’s like a family of adult sisters and brothers might do, Doug reminded the Council members, referring to the way the conference documents describe our polity. ☺



Lois Kaufmann-Hunsberger, resource advocate; Jenna Liechty Martin, Camp Friedenswald executive director; and Leroy Saner, member of the stewardship committee, discuss questions during the September Leadership Council meeting.



Enjoying the Faith House sunroom during the Leadership Council meeting were Gladene Hershberger, missional church committee member; Ardean Friesen, ministerial committee member; and Anna Yoder Schlabach, president-elect.

Mary E. Klassen

Financial report

October 31, 2017

Congregational support and giving outside the congregations for Central District Conference were quite strong in October and while we did close the gap on actual revenue vs. the 2017-18 plan, we still are a bit behind. Expenses were also under the spending plan amounts approved for this fiscal year so all-in-all, the conference remains in good financial condition.

Year-to-date giving	
from congregations	\$53,275
Year-to-date plan	\$64,167
Difference between giving and plan	-\$10,892

Year-to-date giving	
from individuals and families	\$4,537
Year-to-date plan	\$7,667
Difference between giving and plan	-\$3,130

With some additional revenue, total revenue is about \$12,800 behind. Expenses were less than planned, so overall we are about \$9,500 below the planned amount for the end of October.

Report provided by Roger Nafziger, conference treasurer

A cup of safety

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

What does safety taste like? Is it hot or cold? Bitter or sweet? Fizzy or flat? Do we drink it alone or with others?



On Tuesday mornings at 7 am I can generally be found in the sanctuary of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, with a dozen other souls, listening to the lectionary scripture texts and being silent together. This tastes like safety to me. After all, it is a “sanctuary”

and these are spiritual friends, many that I’ve known for years.

I was leading Tuesday Morning Prayers on November 7. The scriptures were familiar. Joshua was asking the Israelites whom they were going to serve. The Psalmist was reminding people of how their ancestors “cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.” Jesus told a parable, reminding us to “keep awake” and Paul reflected on toil and suffering. During the spoken prayer, we prayed for a dying member, for others facing challenges and for the Sutherland Springs First Baptist church and their community. And then, after the Lord’s Prayer, I pronounced the benediction that I often use;

Go in love, for love alone endures.
Go in peace, for it is the gift of God.
Go in safety, for you cannot go where God is not.

I hadn’t given much intentional thought ahead of time to the benediction. It was automatic, familiar, and I believed it. But when I proclaimed, with arms open to God, the congregation and the world, “Go in safety,” I suddenly felt vulnerable, almost as if I didn’t believe what I was speaking. When another sanctuary becomes a killing field, where can we truly be safe?

What are the best questions to be asking as people of faith in response to such a tragedy? Very practical questions are appropriate. Are there things we can do to decrease the potential of something like Sutherland Springs happening in our church building? Do we train ushers or others to be vigilant? Do we lock our doors during worship? Do we post sentries at doors throughout worship? These are fair questions and each congregation may need to wrestle with a response. One resource that provides counsel for responding to emergencies, including active shooters, can be found at <http://bit.ly/2zNjw5G> (also see footnote).

Others may ask, “How can our community of faith attend to the underlying factors that contribute to such random acts of violence? How do we care for those with mental illness? What do we teach about gun ownership or gun safety? How do we engage with legislators and public policy debates? How do we watch for and respond to warning signs?

And then there are other questions of faith. How do we experience and respond to fear in our lives? How much time, how many resources and how much emotional energy do we give to safety concerns? In what ways do we “cry out to God”? What does it mean to “stay awake”? What do we learn from a crucified savior and martyr ancestors? Are we different when we “go in safety” rather than “going in fear”? What does it mean to live with the assurance that God is present constantly and everywhere?

What does safety taste like in our churches and in our lives? ©

*Note: The full URL of the document is:
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Developing_EOPs_for_Houses_of_Worship_FINAL.PDF
This file is provided by several government agencies.*

Ordinations

Marvin Bartel



Julia Gingrich was ordained at Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on September 17. She is one of two pastors in the congregation, serving together with Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau. Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister, anointed Julia as part of the ordination service.

J. Tyler Klassen



Deb Byler (center with stole) was ordained at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind., on October 8. She was surrounded in prayer by family, friends, congregation members and other supporters during the service. In January, Deb will begin a two-year term with Mennonite Mission Network in Guatemala, accompanying women leaders of women's groups in the Kekchi Mennonite Church.

Sabbaticals

Two CDC pastors and their congregations have received grants from Lilly Endowment, Inc., for sabbaticals in 2018.

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau, pastor of Eighth Street Mennonite, Goshen, says, "Joy and walking are already part of my life; through the extravagant gift of a sabbatical, I hope to merge the two into a new practice that I call Joy Walking."

She and her family will do two walking tours, one in Norway and one in Scotland, and spend time in Arizona learning from those who walk across the US-Mexico border. She also invites the Eighth Street congregation to use walking as a spiritual discipline and to notice "the joy that is God's constant energy in our world."

Joel Miller, pastor of Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church, has titled his sabbatical, "Called In: World, City, Congregation, Self." The focus is on exploring and listening to where the Spirit is at work in his life and in the congregation.

The sabbatical includes language study in Guatemala, visiting the congregation's sister church in Colombia, exploring the city of Columbus by bike and working with a personal coach who specializes in pastoral ministry.

Congregational funds that come with the grant will be used for an artist (or artists) in residence, spiritual direction for congregation members, an adult lecture series and more. ©

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