

## Introducing two congregations

*Three congregations have asked to join Central District Conference, and delegates will vote on their membership at the 2018 Annual Meeting, June 21–23 in Goshen, Ind.*

*One of these congregations, Raleigh, was introduced in the September issue of focus. The other two congregations are introduced in this issue of Reporter. **Chapel Hill Mennonite Church**, Chapel Hill, N.C., is a member of Virginia Mennonite Conference. **Berea Mennonite Church**, Atlanta, Ga., is a member of Southeast Mennonite Conference.*

### Chapel Hill Mennonite Church

**W**e are a congregation of around 70 worshipers who gather to sustain our lives through the love of Jesus Christ, poured out in and through one another. Our church is a place of fellowship with God and neighbors, where we learn how to serve our friends, strangers, and enemies just as Jesus laid down his life for the world. You are welcome in our midst!

Our congregation is part of Mennonite Church USA. This Christian tradition finds its roots in the 16th century movement called the Radical Reformation (also called Anabaptism). Our history plays out in our contemporary lives in various ways. Here are a few commitments that are important to us: nonviolence, simple living and worship, communal embodiment of the gospel, concern for God's merciful justice for our neighborhoods and across the globe. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we hope to follow in the way of Jesus, who gives us the grace to

love one another as God loves the world.

We are part of the Supportive Communities Network, a fellowship of Mennonite and Church of the Brethren congregations who affirm our LGBT members.

*From Pastor Isaac Villegas' introduction at the 2017 CDC Annual Meeting*

**I** think the best way to get to know people is to get to know their arguments, so let me tell you about one of our recurring disagreements at Chapel Hill Mennonite.

It's about chairs.

*(continued on p. 2)*



*The Chapel Hill Mennonite Church congregation at worship.*

## Chapel Hill Mennonite Church (continued)

We spend so much time talking about the chairs in our worship space: Who is going to move them on Sunday? Is it worth it to spend all that time to move chairs for about 70 people? It's a lot of work.

For all the 15 years of our congregation's existence—from the beginning—we have always rented space. We are nomadic people. We used to meet at a Quaker meeting house and in that space we learned to meet in the round, in a semi-circle where we could see one another's faces and worship face-to-face. We love that—to see the flicker of life in someone's eyes, the life of the Spirit.


Worshipping face-to-face became essential to who we are as a community, essential to who we are as a people.

We outgrew that space a few years ago, so now we rent from a Presbyterian church ... and we don't like their rows, all of them facing up to the front. We realized we couldn't see one another if we left the chairs the way they were; we couldn't see each other's eyes when we worship. So we have to move the chairs every Sunday. It's a lot of work and we argue about whose job that is.

We haven't figured out a coordinated system (and we love systems), but somehow every Sunday the chairs get moved. They are all set up so we can all see one another face-to-face. Then are returned to their locations so the Presbyterians can worship.

If I were to summarize this culture of worship at our church—our sense of community as a congregation—I would use the words from Genesis when Jacob reunites with his brother Esau and he looks at him, looks into his eyes, both of them face-to-face and he says this: "To see you is like seeing the face of God."

So we gather as a congregation for prayer, for potlucks, for singing, for service projects—and all of it is our worship, where we are face-to-face with each other, which means we are face-to-face with God. Just as Gregory of Nyssa said in the fourth century to his congregation, "In you is the beauty of Christ's body; to look at you is to behold the body of Christ."

Chapel Hill worships from 5–6:15 pm on Sunday evenings in the sanctuary of Church of Reconciliation, 110 N. Elliott Road. Their email address is [chmennonite@gmail.com](mailto:chmennonite@gmail.com). 

## Berea Mennonite Church

**B**erea Mennonite Church is a small congregation in Atlanta, Georgia. We meet regularly on Sunday mornings to fellowship, study and worship together. Our relationships with several community partners who share our property extends our influence throughout the week. In both the church's ministries and in the work of our community partners (an organic urban farm, a dual language preschool, the arts studios of a local ministry, and service-learning work groups), we seek the peace of God through which all things are made new.

Berea grew out of the calling several Mennonites experienced to come and see how God's Kingdom was emerging in Atlanta. In the late 1950s, the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions sent delegates to Atlanta to start a voluntary service unit. Berea was birthed out of the community worship of this service unit, and

*(continued on p. 3)*



*Children sing about the fruits of the Spirit at Peace and Carrots camp, a program of Berea Mennonite Church.*

## Berea Mennonite Church (continued)

by 1962 a property in Southeast Atlanta housed the church. Berea moved to its current location in East Atlanta in 1975. While it started with a sanctuary and an education building on six acres, the property now includes a barn, several farm buildings, fenced pastures, greenhouses, and a number of fields and growing spaces.

Since its inception, Berea's members were committed to racial justice. It became one of the first interracial churches in Georgia. This legacy continues to challenge members to remember and welcome the stranger and to be a people of love and peace to all. Now, the development of the farm and growing spaces on the church property is one of the primary ways strangers are drawn to seek out the peace of God that our community desires to bear witness to.

In addition to our gatherings as a church and our support of the work of our community partners, two major ministry commitments of the church have included the Peach Cobbler Mennonite Relief Auction and Peace and Carrots Camp. Organized by Mennonites from several communities in the southeast, the Peach Cobbler Mennonite Relief Auction is an annual quilt, craft and antique sale that benefits Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Aid Ministries. The auction has been going for

18 years, and it is now held annually in the fall at the Georgia National Fairgrounds. Members of Berea work diligently year-round with other Mennonites in the southeast region to make this joyous event possible.

For more than five years, the farm on Berea's property has helped provide the context for Peace and Carrots Camp, a summer day camp that combines lessons on creation care with learning about peacebuilding and how to deal with conflict. In addition, summers have also been a busy time because of our partnership with DOOR Atlanta, whose service-learning programs have brought hundreds of young people (approximately 800 last summer) to work on our property.

We continue to trust that God will bring people to our property and community, whether for a camp experience, a service-learning event or to join our church. We welcome all interested to join us for worship. We gather at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings. Our street address is 1088 Bouldercrest Dr SE in Atlanta. We invite email correspondence, too, directed to [bereamennonitechurch@gmail.com](mailto:bereamennonitechurch@gmail.com). In all our activities, we pray that the reign of God's peace may be known, and may we all continue to seek the newness of God's creation together. ☮

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### Regional gatherings

#### Come, walk with us. Tell us your story!

You are warmly invited to gather with your CDC brothers and sisters in any upcoming Regional Gathering that best fits your schedule. We'll sing and pray together as we get to know one another. There will be updates about what is happening in CDC and the talks taking place with Allegheny Mennonite Conference. The host congregation will serve lunch and share a bit of their congregation's story. Come share your perspectives and ideas and bring a friend. Please know that anyone is welcome to participate.

- Feb. 10 @ Grace Mennonite Church (502 E Main St, Pandora, Ohio)
- Mar. 17 @ Silverwood Mennonite Church (1745 W Lincoln Ave, Goshen, Indiana)

Regional Gatherings start with coffee and tea at 9:45 am, and conclude at 3:00 pm.

The Mennonite Church of Normal, Grace, and Silverwood congregations have graciously agreed to provide lunch for us. We ask that those eating lunch bring a donation to help cover the costs. To help them plan for the amount of food needed, please let Emma know if you are attending by Feb. 5 and Mar. 12 (depending on the regional gathering you choose to attend). Email: [office@mcusacdc.org](mailto:office@mcusacdc.org); Phone: 800.662.2264.

**Note:** The regional gathering scheduled on January 27 at Mennonite Church of Normal was cancelled. ☮



## Mystery tea

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

**H**ave you ever been served a drink and you couldn't quite figure out the taste? Maybe it was a pink punch that piqued your palate at a party. Or maybe it was a lovely latte that lingered long, yet with an unidentifiable taste. Or perhaps you had a mug of mellow mystery tea with a hint of mint, so subtle that its origin escaped you. These mystery drinks can be absolutely delicious but leave you pondering the true nature of the flavor.




Central District Conference (CDC) has been in conversations with Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) over the past 16 months or so. The conversations have been to discern whether there might be opportunity to create an affiliation that is mutually beneficial to both conferences. The idea was first shared at a CDC Leadership Council meeting in October of 2016. On March 11, three representatives from AMC attended a Regional Gathering in Wadsworth, Ohio, and the idea was shared there. At our CDC Annual Meeting in Bluffton in June 2017, four members of AMC were in attendance and we spent some time in table groups talking about opportunities and concerns of such an affiliation. In August, three of us from CDC attended the AMC Summer Celebration at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center. From June through November of 2017, three members from each conference created a "Network Team," spending time getting to know one another and each other's conferences. By the end of 2017, participants in these conversations decided that there was sufficient energy, common mission and mutual understanding to explore this affiliation relationship further. Perhaps you could say we are at a point of thoroughly enjoying this Mystery Tea and are now ready to more clearly identify the ingredients.

A six-member "Affiliation Task Force" is being created for the purpose of "preparing proposals and recommendations regarding the potential for these two Mennonite Church USA conferences to formally affiliate."

Allegheny Mennonite Conference is twelve congregations primarily from southwest Pennsylvania. They also have churches in West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. You can learn more about AMC at [www.alleghenymennoniteconference.org/](http://www.alleghenymennoniteconference.org/). You may also read a recent blog post by Dave Mishler here: <http://bit.ly/2mort01>

AMC remains on a two-path journey. They are exploring ways to remain an independent conference of Mennonite Church USA while also imagining what an affiliation with CDC would look like.

There will be time to further discuss opportunities and challenges at our CDC Regional Gatherings: Mennonite Church of Normal on January 27, Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora on February 10 and Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, on March 17. Please join the discussion and share your thoughts, ideas, wisdom and prayers as we consider this possibility.

There will be continued dialogue at our CDC Annual Meeting, June 21-23 at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. The goal is to have clarity by the end of 2018 on whether or not to affiliate and what this might look like. By then we hope to establish the essential essence of this exceptional Mystery Tea. 

*The full URL for Dave Mishler's blog post is [https://themennonite.org/forbearance-forever-reflections-allegheny-mennonite-conference/?utm\\_source=TMail&utm\\_campaign=b17806d444-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_01\\_08&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_710b2b7199-b17806d444-96751341](https://themennonite.org/forbearance-forever-reflections-allegheny-mennonite-conference/?utm_source=TMail&utm_campaign=b17806d444-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_01_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_710b2b7199-b17806d444-96751341)*

## Congregational themes for 2018

**R**eporter asked CDC congregations if they will focus on a theme or selected biblical text in 2018. Several responded:

**Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite**, Constantine, Mich., is in a big transition: Nina Lanctot retired after 13 years as pastor and during January and February Gwen Gustafson-Zook, from Goshen, Ind., and Naomi Wenger, member of the congregation, will plan and lead worship. Gwen's theme will be "Meeting God." Suzanne Hilty Lind, board chair, reports: "Our congregation is one in which everyone participates in both worship planning and leading and in pastoral care. We will be very glad to have more focused leadership, but for now we are pleased that we have been able to keep church life moving smoothly, and to care for each other, during this transition period."

### Financial report

#### July 1 to December 31, 2017

As of December 31, 2017, at the mid-point of our fiscal year, the finances of Central District Conference are in very good order.

Year-to-date giving	
from congregations . . . . .	\$93,939
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$96,250
Difference between giving and plan . .	-\$2,311

Year-to-date giving	
from individuals and families . . . . .	\$18,697
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$11,500
Difference between giving and plan . .	\$7,197

Revenue is about \$5,000 ahead of plan. Thank you, thank you! Expenses through the first half of the fiscal year are about \$2,000 below the plan approved last June so year-to-date, we're in the black by about \$7,000. We are so grateful for this strong support.

*Report provided by Roger Nafziger, conference treasurer*

**Joy Fellowship**, Peoria, Ill., will focus on Psalm 65:11 as our year-long theme: "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness" (KJV). This scripture text serves as an intimate reminder of how God duly provides for us in a generous manner. It's our desire to continuously show gratefulness in our time, talent and treasures to Jehovah-Jireh.

**Oak Grove Mennonite**, Smithville, Ohio, will celebrate its bicentennial this year with the theme "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Three major events are planned:

- April 14-15, 2018 - Historical Reflections
- July 15, 2018 - Hymn Sing and Hymnal Celebration
- October 13-14, 2018 - Homecoming and Concert

**Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite** does not have an overarching focus, but both pastors will have sabbaticals at different times for a total of five months of the year. The congregation will be invited into Sabbath time as well, even as they continue the work of providing sanctuary to a local mother resisting deportation to Mexico.

**Silverwood Mennonite**, Goshen, Ind., has the theme of "Outreach" for the 2017-18 year (corresponding to the school year). Many of the sermon series have had an outreach focus. Jeremy Shue, one of the pastors, says, "This theme comes out of our vision statement that we crafted through 2014 that was planned for 2020. First we focused on community and launched our Dinner Groups (our version of small groups). Last year we focused on Leadership Development. This year is Outreach."

**Hively Avenue Mennonite**, Elkhart, Ind., will use Romans 12:2 as the theme for 2018: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds ...." Brian McLaren's book ***We make the Road by Walking*** will be a resource through the year. ©

## Ordinations



Lora Nafziger (center) was ordained at Assembly Mennonite Church on Sunday, Nov. 26. She is pastor of Christian formation and congregational life. Pictured with her are Mitch Rhodes, her husband (left), and Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister. The pastoral team of Assembly also includes Karl Shelly and Tom Kauffman.



Debra Sutter (center) was ordained at First Mennonite Church, Champaign/Urbana, Ill., on November 19. Shown with her are (L-R) Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister; Michael Crosby, pastor of First Mennonite; Jane Roeschley, pastor of Mennonite Church of Normal and Debra's mentor; and Doug Roth, chair of the Church Life Team of Illinois Conference.

## Installation



Linford King and Mary Etta King were installed as pastors of Covenant Mennonite Church, Sarasota, Fla., on November 12. Doug Luginbill (right), CDC conference minister, led the installation.



Anita Rediger (above), pastor of Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, Berne, Ind., has retired. The congregation celebrated her ministry on January 7.

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