

Annual Meeting: Journeying ... Storytelling

The invitation was clear: “Come, walk with us. Tell us your story.”

Participants did this in many ways at the Annual Meeting in Goshen, Ind., June 21 to 23. The Acts 16:6-15 story of Paul, Timothy and Silas journeying and listening for God’s direction formed the foundation of three worship services. The theme song, “Come, walk with us; the journey is long,” called participants to gather at tables for the business meetings.

Listening committee member Tim Stair said, “We find our way as we tell our stories and find other companions on our journey. That seemed to be the message of the seminars and workshops this year, whether it was learning what our African American brothers and sisters need to teach each generation to get home safe, or discovering the power of presence on a train ride in a country at war; whether it was a congregation discovering a mission of

transitional housing or providing hospitality with people from around the world in our nation’s capital.”

Worship was enriched by music, led by Bradley Kauffman, and three preachers: Nina Lanctot, John Powell and Jonathan Larson. Each sermon and children’s time explored the Acts 16 story. The first focus was on hearing “No” from God, and the following messages encouraged us to be willing to be vulnerable as we do what God calls us to and—like Paul—to be willing to walk with “outliers” as we follow God’s “Yes.”

In summarizing the worship experiences, Jane Thorley Roeschley, listening committee member, said, “Through chant and song, text and sermon, confession and prayers, children’s stories and rituals, we encountered, again and again, this powerful articulation of the essence of faith: We don’t know where we are going, yet God is with us and God will never leave us.”



John Powell preached on Friday evening in front of images of roads, placed there by worshippers after they pondered what their chosen images meant to them and shared that story with another person.

Annual Meeting activities

Mennonite Boomerang Project modeled

Sarah Thompson, scholar-activist, and Jonathan Larson, mission worker-storyteller, modeled the Mennonite Boomerang Project as one of the Annual Meeting seminars.

This project is a proposed resource for CDC congregations to find fresh understandings of what it means to be sent by the Holy Spirit into our contexts today.


Sarah and Jonathan, both living currently in Atlanta, Ga., can be invited by congregations to help members explore opportunities for joining God's work in their locations and to identify the people and resources available for stepping into that work. The name *boomerang* emphasizes the ways being involved in God's mission brings not only external change in a place; it also brings internal change to the people and congregations who are involved.

Sarah brings to this project experiences with Mennonite World Conference and Christian Peacemaker Teams, and Jonathan builds on a lifetime of engagement with people in Africa, across the US and in many other parts of the world. Their work is enriched by stories of people who are living out many examples of making God's love real in their contexts.

The availability of Sarah and Jonathan this



Sarah Thompson and Jonathan Larson modeled the kind of work they are available to do with CDC congregations, a resource called the Mennonite Boomerang Project.

fall is limited to work with four congregations. Anyone who wishes more information or wants to schedule the Mennonite Boomerang Project for their congregation should contact Emma Hartman in the CDC office: 574-534-1485 or office@mcusacdc.org. 

Children's activities


Lois Johns Kaufmann, former CDC conference minister, invited children to gather around her as she told the Acts 16 story of Paul, Timothy and Silas during each worship service. The children's times on Thursday and Friday evenings concluded with a blessing from the children to the adults. On Saturday, the adults gave this same blessing to the children:

May you hear God.

May you trust God.

May you love God.

May you remember that God is always with you.

During the daytime sessions, the children participated in special activities, including exploring Goshen's walking trails and Shanklin Park and visiting Pathways Retreat Center. 



Lois Johns Kaufmann gathered the children around her at each of the worship services, using small figures to tell the biblical story from Acts 16.

Photos by J. Tyler Klassen

CDC welcomes congregations

Three congregations joined the conference as delegates voted overwhelmingly to welcome them.

- Berea Mennonite Church, Atlanta, Ga.
- Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship, Chapel Hill, N.C.
- Raleigh Mennonite Church, Raleigh, N.C.


Three congregations have requested membership in CDC and they were introduced as a year of discernment begins:

- Americus Mennonite Fellowship, Americus, Ga.
- Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Gainesville, Fla.
- Jubilee Mennonite Fellowship, Bellefontaine, Ohio

In addition, the conference ministers for CDC and Allegheny Conference, Doug Luginbill and David Mishler, reported on continuing conversations about what possible affiliation or closer relationship might emerge for the two conferences.

Allegheny is experiencing a kind of rebirth, David Mishler told the Annual Meeting participants. So conversations at the meeting focused on questions of how CDC might support Allegheny by sharing staff and some

administrative responsibilities. Allegheny could benefit from receiving some administrative services from CDC, and CDC might benefit from the strong emphasis and investment in youth ministry in the Allegheny Conference.

Counsel from the Annual Meeting participants on these possibilities was collected to help leaders of the two conferences continue their discernment. 



J. Tyler Klassen

Melissa Florer-Bixler, pastor of Raleigh Mennonite Church, accepts a cup filled with blessings from CDC congregations from conference minister Doug Luginbill. Each of the three congregations welcomed into the conference received these gifts.



Mary E. Klassen

Participants surrounded leaders in a commissioning prayer at the Friday business session of the CDC Annual Meeting. This group included Matthew Erdel, Michael Gehman, Jon Hilty (member of the Gifts Discernment Committee), Doris Poole (at back), and Winifred Saner.

Building bridges between cultures, languages and world views

In a recent visit to Indiana, Willi Hugo Perez, Director of SEMILLA, the Latin American Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala City, Guatemala, and Michael Garcia, chairperson of the SEMILLA board of directors, strengthened their connections with congregations and people in Central District Conference.

They joined in a morning worship service at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen and took time for a conversation with *Reporter*.

At the time of the visit, two CDC pastors and their families were at SEMILLA studying Spanish: Jake Hess, Hively Avenue (Elkhart, Ind.), and Joel Miller, Columbus (Ohio).


A strong connection between SEMILLA and CDC is through Bluffton (Ohio) University,

particularly in their annual fall semester study program in Guatemala. Bluffton and SEMILLA also work together on a peace school in which leaders are prepared for ministries related to peace, justice and care of creation.

SEMILLA trains pastors and church leaders all through Latin America in three levels of study offered in distance learning programs. Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Ind., is supporting another effort—making Spanish Anabaptist materials available online. CASAS (Central America Study and Service) invites people to Guatemala from anywhere in the world to learn Spanish, along with Central American history and culture.

“In the world in which we are living today, in which there are many barriers between people and countries,” Willi Hugo said, “what SEMILLA and CASAS do is to provide bridges of encounter, friendship, dialogue and mutual learning between people from different cultures, different places, different languages and different world views. This is very important.”

To help build these bridges, SEMILLA offers learning tours for leaders and members of North American churches. Participants visit churches and church leaders and learn about Anabaptist-Mennonite projects in the region. **One of these learning tours is scheduled for October 19 to 30**, sponsored by Hively Avenue and Columbus Mennonite Churches, with some funding from a CDC Reign of God grant.

SEMILLA gets some funding from CASAS and a guest house on the campus, while also relying on contributions from friends throughout the world. Tax deductible gifts to support SEMILLA can be sent to 1104 South Seventh Street, Goshen, IN 46526. 

Financial report

June 30, 2018

We finished the year on a positive note regarding the CDC finances, thanks to strong support from congregations and meeting the goal for funding beyond the congregational contributions. In the area of congregational giving, over \$32,000 came in to the conference in June so we ended with a total of \$188,550 for the fiscal year, only \$3,950 short of our goal of \$192,500. Wonderful!

Giving by individuals and families totaled \$23,172 against the annual goal of \$23,000. We're so grateful for this strong support—thank you, thank you! In addition, the annual meeting registration and offering brought in more than we budgeted and our earned revenue was a bit more than planned so, in total, we ended the year with about \$3,000 more income than the planned amount of \$235,880.

Total expenses were about \$4,000 less than planned for the year so the net gain for fiscal year 2018 was about \$7,000. That is in addition to the gift we received from the Russell and Lora Oyer Estate, announced at the annual meeting. Thanks so much for the strong financial support for your conference.

Report by Roger Nafziger, conference treasurer through June 30.



Doug's Mug: Beauty and horror

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

I have quite a mixture in my mug/mind/spirit; a blend of sweet beauty and toxic horror.

On the day after we concluded the wonderful 62nd Annual Session of the Central District Conference (that's part of the sweet beauty), Paula and I began our journey to the Baltic



States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia where we met our daughter, son and daughter-in-law for a ten-day vacation. Our daughter had just completed a seven-week stint as a sponsor of an Eastern Mennonite University cross-cultural trip. She

served as our tour guide as this was her third experience in the Baltics. It was a fantastic experience.

Oh, the beauty we experienced. We gazed at ornate depictions of biblical stories painted on ceilings and walls of Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals. We listened joyfully as an 89-year-old organist played classics in a Lutheran church—his gift to the world-community that flits in and out of his church. We strolled through markets with their displays of brilliantly-colored scarves; freshly picked gooseberries, currants, strawberries and wild blueberries; and cut flowers of every hue. We hiked a pine-birch forest, covered in a blanket of moss and fern. Even the cobblestones of the streets and sidewalks were beautiful. One day in Riga, Latvia, we stumbled upon an every-four-year song and dance festival parade with 40,000 participants in traditional dress. Dance clubs, orchestras, choirs and ensembles from every part of the country came together to celebrate the beauty of the arts. One evening we enjoyed a free instrumental concert in a 400-year-old cathedral. What a great way to unite a country!

And then there was the horror. Caught as a pawn between the empires of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia during and after World War II, citizens of the Baltics have experienced the worst of humanity. Deserted cement bastions

dotted the beaches. Prisons-turned-museums told stories that must not be forgotten but can hardly be heard. Execution rooms, confinement cells and torture chambers as numerous as the churches. Those beautiful, moss-covered forests were once covered by the blood of hundreds of thousands of Jews, foreigners and “undesirables,” marched off the nearby trains, gunned down and buried, thousands to a grave.

It seems that beauty and horror have but one thing in common: the silence created by those awe-ful images, the observer struck dumb by the raw emotion of it all.

And when we catch our breath and are once again able to speak, what shall we say? What message do we proclaim? What song do we sing?

*How can we be silent when our souls are filled with awe
at the beauty of creation and the mercy of our Lord?*

*How can we be silent as we turn our eyes away
and ignore the poor and broken who lie bleeding
in the street?*

*How can we be silent when we're called to heal
and serve
in the image of Lord Jesus, who has stooped to
wash our feet.*

*None can stop the spirit burning now inside us.
We will shape the future. We will not be silent!*

-Excerpts from Michael Mahler in “How can we be silent,” *Sing the Journey* #61 

Annual Meeting numbers

- 165: people registered
- 91: delegates present
- 31: CDC congregations represented, plus three who were taken into membership and three introduced for discernment for joining in a year
- 62: the number of Annual Meetings CDC has held

Ordination



Lydia Brenneman was ordained on May 13 at Lima Mennonite Church. She is serving as a chaplain at St. Rita's Medical Center in Lima, Ohio. Lima Mennonite pastor, Emily Hedrick, is on the right. Lydia's husband, Brice, and her sons are behind her.

Installed and licensed



Peter Martin, right, was installed and licensed toward ordination at Emmaus Road Mennonite Church in Berne, Ind., on Sunday, May 20. He began as half-time pastor for the congregation on May 15. Serving communion with Peter are Doug Luginbill (center), CDC conference minister, and Bernie Wiebe.

Licensed toward ordination



Devon Miller, standing with Margaret, his wife, was licensed toward ordination on May 27 at Florence Church of the Brethren Mennonite.



Sally Weaver Glick was licensed toward ordination on Sunday, June 10, at Open Table Mennonite Fellowship. The service was held at Pathways Retreat Center in Goshen, Ind. Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister, is at left, and John, Sally's husband is at right.

Photos by Paula Luginbill

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