

Learning to know three congregations

Three congregations have asked to join Central District Conference and a period of discernment about their membership in CDC has begun. The three congregations are:

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

These congregations were introduced at the Central District Conference Annual Meeting in June 2018 and delegates at next summer's Annual Meeting will vote on their membership. This issue of *Reporter* includes each congregation's answers to several questions and comments from the Annual Meeting.

Americus Mennonite Fellowship

What are your congregation's strengths?

We are a church that was birthed out of Mennonite Voluntary Service, Habitat for Humanity, Koinonia Farm and Fuller Center for Housing. Our church's strength is service and the desire for "Kingdom building" in all its forms.

How old is your congregation?

We are coming up to our 30-year anniversary next year!

How many members does your congregation have or how many people typically are present for a worship service?

We have about 50 members and attendance is usually 35.

How would you describe your congregation's worship?

Blessed Simplicity. We try to incorporate everyone's talents and gifts and also to have children help in music, holding offering plates and reading scripture. We read scripture in English and Spanish, because we often have congregants who speak only Spanish. Everyone is welcomed to share.

What are some of the ministries of your congregation—activities and programs that

serve your members, your neighbors, the broader church, or other places in the world?

We have advocated for undocumented immigrants in our community. Some we have been able to get released from detention or arrest.

We also have a tutoring program

which supports residents who are mostly first generation Americans or undocumented children and parents.

What characteristics make your congregation unique or different from others in your community?

We are a "Peace Church" in a sea of "God and



Members of the Americus Mennonite Fellowship decorate the cross for their Easter service.


Americus Mennonite Fellowship (cont.)

Country Churches.” We are often in contrast with the popular views in the Bible Belt. Anti-war ... anti-death penalty ... promoting diversity ... advocating for undocumented—these issues make us unique.

When Doris Poole and Jackie Campbell introduced the Americus congregation at the CDC Annual Meeting in June, Doris said, “Our small but mighty presence in southwest Georgia is incredibly important, especially in the times we find ourselves in.”

Service is a big part of our church, Jackie said. “In the last four to five years, we

have connected more with the local Latino community. We started a tutoring program and now there are 30 to 40 kids who come.” She added, “The kids are being guided and being loved and are being given a Bible story, and we are connecting with their families. It started small but has grown and blossomed in ways we didn’t expect.”

Americus Mennonite Fellowship is currently a member of Southeast Mennonite Conference. For more about the congregation, visit their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/AmericusMennoniteFellowship 

Emmanuel Mennonite Church

What are your congregation’s strengths?

We’re small, which is also our weakness, which is also our strength, because it motivates us to work and play well with others—that is, to seek partners with other churches and organizations in our city.

We have been able, with our partners, to host study and action groups for immigrant justice, aid to refugees, dismantling racism, interfaith engagement. These activities and the relationships we have formed through them have broadened and deepened our encounter with Scripture both in weekday and Sunday study groups.

How old is your congregation?

We held our first public worship service on the Day of Pentecost in 1983. We celebrated our 35th birthday on May 20.

How many members does your congregation have or how many people typically are present for a worship service?

We have more than 50 who are part of the congregation, but Sunday worship attendance is half that. Many of the people in the congregation live at a distance—up to 80 miles from Gainesville—and don’t come every week.

How would you describe your congregation’s worship?

We’re a blend of the traditions of our people, most of whom come to us from other-than-



Candy Ironworker, Caitlin Schroering and Eve MacMaster, pastor of Emmanuel, raise awareness of justice issues for farm workers in their area.

Mennonite traditions, other Christian denominations or no tradition, and occasionally from another faith entirely.

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Emmanuel Mennonite Church (cont.)

What are some of the primary ministries of your congregation—activities and programs that serve your members, your neighbors, the broader church, or other places in the world?


Currently we are focusing on creation care, immigrant justice, interfaith engagement, and advocating for the homeless and hungry in our city. We support Mennonite Central Committee and the agencies of the Mennonite Church.

What characteristics make your congregation unique or different from others in your community?

We base action for social justice on our faith in Jesus Christ, which sets us apart from most conservative and most liberal congregations.

When Eve MacMaster described the Emmanuel congregation at the CDC Annual Meeting, she explained, “For the first 25 years we were tabernacling, wandering from church to church and coffee shop to coffee shop.”

After receiving a legacy gift that allowed them to purchase a home and convert it to a meeting place, they had space to host others and collaborate with others in the community. They helped to get Gainesville designated as a welcoming city in the national network focused on helping refugees and immigrants. They also have become involved with the National Farmworker Ministries that assists migrant farm workers. Through contacts at the University of Florida, they have become the base for a student initiated movement to help migrant workers. And they are partners in ongoing dialogue with Muslims in the community and join in a fast-breaking Ramadan meal every year.

Emmanuel Mennonite Church is currently a member of Southeast Mennonite Conference. For more information about the congregation, visit www.gainesvillemennonites.org. 

Jubilee Mennonite Church

How old is your congregation?

Jubilee is the result of a 2001 merger between two area Mennonite churches—Bellefontaine Community Fellowship (BCF) and Jubilee Mennonite Church. We jointly agreed to the Jubilee name for the merged church. BCF began in the mid-1970s as a Sunday School class for persons with intellectual challenges at Oak Grove Mennonite in West Liberty. That group became a house church and eventually moved to a rented facility in 1983. It was supported by the area West Liberty churches and Ohio Conference as a church plant. The former Jubilee began in the mid-1990s as a small group from South Union Mennonite who met on Sunday evenings to provide support for two members who were dying of cancer. They eventually began meeting as Jubilee Church Sunday mornings in a rented space. We began joint services and talks of a merger as the two churches had similar vision and gifts that both

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Jubilee Mennonite Church congregation, like the other two that have requested CDC membership, enjoys potluck meals.

Jubilee Mennonite Church (cont.)

complemented and strengthened the other. So began the current Jubilee church! We worshiped in rented space until 2005 when our new building was completed.

What are your congregation’s strengths? Are there values, activities or experiences that grow out of these strengths?

Our congregation’s strengths seem to continue being what they were from the beginning: welcoming all persons with a heart for those especially on the edges of society and supporting those who are experiencing health issues. All persons are encouraged to contribute to community life. Children are welcome to read scripture, share concerns and musical interests. Persons with intellectual challenges who attend are a vital and much loved part

of our community. They freely speak during sharing time at our worship services and share their gifts of singing and helping in the nursery. Those who are experiencing illnesses are supported by prayers, meals, cards, emails, phone calls and rides to treatments. Persons express gratefulness for the support they receive.

How many members? How would you describe your congregation’s worship?


We are a small community of 35–40 members. Our worship services are usually centered on the lectionary scriptures and include singing from the Mennonite hymn books, a children’s story, a time of sharing and prayer and a meditation from a guest speaker or a Jubilee member. We have been experimenting with other ways to engage the texts through drama, three or four persons reflecting on the scriptures, outdoor services and the arts. Music Sunday is a favorite when music, scripture and personal stories are interwoven in the service.

What are some of the primary ministries of your congregation?

Monthly mission projects are featured for both local and world mission projects. Various kits for MCC have been assembled and money collected for My Coins Count and other MCC programs. We are currently using a matching Everence grant to provide funds to the Logan County Children’s Services to be used for emergency situations not covered by normal agency funding. Several members are involved with the community Celebrate Recovery program in response to the local drug problem.

Russ Miller, who introduced the congregation at the Annual Meeting, noted that Jubilee is all the churches it has ever been, taking different forms at different times.

It has the same number of members today as it had when it started, but in 2001, 18 of the 35 members were children; today nine members are children.

Jubilee Mennonite Church is currently a member of Ohio Mennonite Conference. For information about the congregation, visit jubileemennonite.com 

Financial report

August 31, 2018

Year-to-date giving	
from congregations	\$16,412
Year-to-date plan	\$32,083
Difference between giving and plan	-\$15,670
Year-to-date giving	
from individuals and families	\$2,834
Year-to-date plan	\$3,583
Difference between giving and plan . .	-\$749
Year-to-date expenses	\$33,952
Year-to-date plan	\$39,084
Difference between expenses	
and plan	-\$5,132

The new fiscal year for Central District Conference began on July 1, so the above report covers two months. Both expenses and especially income are significantly below our spending plan needs, but this is typical for July and August. In summary, our year to date activity has been normal, and we anticipate a better balance of income and expenses in the coming months.

Report provided by Tim Lind conference treasurer

Doug's Mug: Grape juice

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

In the spring of 2016 I planted three tiny grape plants in a narrow strip of dirt between our driveway and an alley. They came by mail from a berry farm supposedly just in time for planting in northwest Ohio. It was a long, cold spring and they waited patiently in my refrigerator



for about three weeks before I dug three holes, stretched out their long, cold roots and waited. One of them sprouted within a couple of weeks.

Another was chewed off down to the ground by what I presume was a squirrel. The third took so long to come

out of dormancy I nearly pulled it out, thinking it was dead.

Three seasons later I had my first harvest from three strong, healthy, sprawling grape vines. The bushel and a half of seedless Concordes were frozen and will make many delicious pies. The bushel of White Niagara grapes were steamed and pressed into 11 quarts of potently-sweet grape juice. Mmmm, God is good!

I am grapeful (oh, I mean grateful) for the 43 congregations of Central District Conference and for the three that are considering joining CDC at our next Annual Meeting, June 20-22, 2019, in Milwaukee, Wisc. Each congregation has its own birth story and its own share of adversities. And each congregation is producing fruit of various varieties and directing their gifts towards different ends. Sometimes it's tempting to think that all churches should be seedless Concordes or all should be juice-producers. Yet, the variety of worship styles, the diversity of gifts and the different directions of ministry found among our churches creates a beautiful garden of opportunity and faithfulness.

One of the values we hold as a conference of congregations is to "give and receive counsel." We recognize that we have something to offer and we are incomplete in and of ourselves. We desire to learn from one another and we


discover new ways of practicing our faith.

In my recent conversations with pastors and among congregations, I wonder how we might give and receive counsel with one another around the following areas.

1. What does faith formation look like among our children and youth in an age of tethered technology and endless extracurriculars? What can adults learn from children and youth? How does Christ's way of non-violence find its way into the hearts and souls of youth in a culture steeped in violence?
2. How are we discipling new believers? How do strangers become friends and leaders in our congregations?
3. How are a congregation's resources (vocational, environmental and financial) stewarded for the benefit of the local and global community? How do we preach, teach and live out the wholistic stewardship messages found in scripture? How do we not succumb to the fear of not having enough? Or, how do we find joy in living with enough and sharing the rest?

Are there tears in our social fabric that we, as Anabaptist Christians, are especially gifted to mend? If we were able to make a positive difference in how our nation responded to mental health two generations ago, what are we being called to help transform today? What can we do together that individuals or individual congregations are not able to do alone?

I welcome your ideas, thoughts and suggestions for how we can give and receive counsel on these or other areas. Feel free to contact me at confmin@mcusacdc.org.

The fruit of God's field is indeed very good. 

Thank you

On behalf of Faith Mennonite Church, and our guests at Hope House, we would like to say "Thank You" to CDC for sharing with us through the 'Giving back to the community' offering at the Annual Meeting. We so appreciate your donation of \$605 to help us provide transitional housing in Goshen. We continue to be grateful to CDC and our sister congregations for support and participation with us in this ministry of hospitality. *Deron Bergstresser and Kay Bontrager-Singer*

Recommendations for relationship with Allegheny Mennonite Conference

Over the last year and a half, Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) and Central District Conference (CDC) have been exploring options of forming a closer working relationship or an affiliation that might lead to becoming one conference.

An Affiliation Task Group, consisting of members from both conferences, has been working on several options. At the CDC Annual Meeting in June, the group reported that the emerging direction was for Allegheny to continue to be a conference of Mennonite Church USA. Annual Meeting participants were asked to discuss in table groups some possibilities of the two conferences sharing staff time and programming in ways that could benefit both conferences.

The Task Group reviewed notes from the table discussions along with what they have learned from their own discernment. They recently shared a summary of their work that includes these findings and recommendations:

- AMC desires to continue as an independent conference, and both AMC and CDC desire to continue to interact in ways that are mutually beneficial to their congregations, conferences and Mennonite Church USA.
- While there is openness to exploring staff sharing options, there is not a clear path to do so that significantly helps both CDC and AMC staff with their current responsibilities while also providing savings for AMC.
- Opportunities for further interaction include:
 - Encouraging CDC pastors and other interested people to attend AMC's Spring Seminar, an annual event at

Installation



Janice Troyer was installed as half-time pastor of community life and young adults at Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., on August 19.

Laurelville Retreat Center. For the 2019 Spring Seminar ((April 8-11), AMC has invited Rebecca Barrett-Fox, former Hesston College professor and current assistant professor of sociology at Arkansas State University, to examine American nationalistic conservatism and hate groups and how they can be addressed from an Anabaptist perspective in the neighborhoods of our congregations.

- Inviting members of AMC and CDC to visit a congregation of the other conference as they have opportunity, and then to share written reflections, likely through the regular publications of our conferences.

With this report, the Affiliation Task Group has concluded its work. ©

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