

Morning Star Mennonite Church Healing center for the wounded

The ministries of Morning Star Mennonite Church in Muncie, Ind., were featured in the Central District Conference regional gathering in Goshen on January 26. Gladys Maina, copastor of the church along with Simon Mungai, her husband, shared this report at that session. Their story fits this year's theme: "Come walk with us ... to God knows where," when sometimes the "where" is exactly where you already are.

Gladys Maina and Simon Mungai were graduate students at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., when they discovered Morning

Star Mennonite Church.

Their first visit wasn't very promising, however. It was raining and the building had cans setting out to catch the rainwater leaking in through the roof. Coming from Kenya, Gladys and Simon assumed they had already seen enough hardship, and that the small, struggling congregation wasn't for them.

However, the longer they stayed at a larger church with more programs and resources, the more uncomfortable they felt, Gladys said. So they returned to Morning Star, which by then had moved to a new location. "We sat and listened and watched these people worship God

(continued on page 2)



Gladys Maina and Simon Mungai explained that the Scripture foundation of their ministry at Morning Star in Muncie, Ind., is Isaiah 58 and 61. "How do you get away from feeding the hungry and setting the captive free and clothing the naked if those are your theme Scriptures and you are surrounded by people who don't have anything?" Gladys asked. (Photo by J. Tyler Klassen)

Morning Star Mennonite Church (continued)

with everything they had. The Lord spoke to us; we looked at each other at the end and said, "This is it,"

The Morning Star congregation began in 1988 when Bob and Sylvia Ewert felt called to start a congregation near Ball State University. They reached out to university students and to people they met on the streets in the community. Gladys and Simon initially felt God was calling them to be a support team for the Ewerts.

Gladys said, "Most of the people who were drawn in as the Ewerts reached out were disenfranchised, people who were on drugs, people who were abused with all kinds of trauma." Bob worked with these people and when he would meet women who had problems he could not address, he would call Gladys. "I was in a counseling program in graduate school and he was asking me to counsel the women."

Simon was ordained for ministry by Central District and Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conferences, but the couple still assumed they were at Morning Star temporarily while pursuing their studies. People in the community were facing many rough issues and Gladys and Simon thought, "God has called us to support Bob and Sylvia while they deal with these people and bring the love of Jesus to them—the hope and deliverance that comes from Christ. Then God will call us somewhere else," they thought, "either back to Kenya where we were ministering before, or China, Russia or Timbuktu—wherever he chooses to lead. When it was time for me to finish my studies, we will pack our suitcases and ask God, 'Where do you want us to go?' All these years we have been praying, 'God, please, please, send laborers to this field. Please send people to show these people the love of Jesus.'"

What they finally realized was that God was calling them to stay. CDC and IN-MI

Conferences recognized Gladys's gifts and wanted to ordain her. This was a challenge for Gladys at first, because she had never known a woman who is ordained. But they realized, "We are from Africa: we know poverty, we know pain, we know suffering, and yet we know what Jesus can do to bring hope to hopeless situations. We wanted to see that happening in our city."

Morning Star today

The congregation continues to reach out to the people of Muncie, who have faced more challenges than many other communities. The economic collapse of 2008 hit Muncie early, and the area has not recovered. For example, the city cannot support its public schools and the university had to take over their administration. Many grocery stores closed, leaving neighborhoods without sources of food.

One step in addressing the needs was to host a summer community picnic and that has now continued for about 25 years. This annual event brings together a diverse group—people of any nationality and color, Gladys says—when previously anyone with dark skin would not have been safe there. "We celebrate Jesus all day and we get to know one another. We get donations from different Mennonite churches and buy baskets so each family has the pride of taking some food home and preparing it together.

"This congregation didn't end up becoming a church the way we thought it would be," Gladys explained. "It ended up becoming a healing center for the wounded of the city, for those who feel like they don't belong anywhere, for those who feel like they are not wanted, for those who don't feel like I'm not good enough to go to such and such a church or I can't get a job. They come; we walk with them until they get their healing."

(continued on page 3)

Morning Star Mennonite Church (continued)

The congregation has a core membership of about 15 to 20 people, and they are supported by an advisory board made up of representatives of CDC, Indiana-Michigan, Mennonite Mission Network and the Evana network. They get contributions from other churches and individuals in the groups they are affiliated with. Canned goods, boxed foods and meat from the Mennonite Central Committee meat canner are shared with the people. “We have some farmers who will sometimes bring 100 ears of sweet corn,” Gladys said. “When you have sweet corn people will listen to anything you have to say.”

The “Bread Basket” is another ministry—a Saturday morning meal and worship time. People who come are invited to sit around tables to get to know each other. There is a time of sharing the good new of Jesus Christ, and there is also a lot of listening, Gladys explained. Then people get a sack of groceries to take home and they also can choose items from a clothes pantry. “We have seen transformation in people’s lives. This year in the first month, we had 19 people who gave their lives to the Lord. I tell you some of those people are people who you would not have wanted to meet on the street before; many of them have been on suicide watch. Some have said ‘I came to Morning Star this morning and this was going to be my

last day.’ We thank God for believers gathering around us to help us bring the love of Christ in a transformative way.”

Current needs of Morning Star

Donations: The food pantry is finding it difficult to get enough food when they cannot order from local stores.

Prayer support: “It is hard work when you’re working with people who are beaten down, people who have been abused and people who have generations and generations of pain.” Gladys said.

A larger building: The current building is too small for their current ministries and they would like to begin offering GED classes and tutoring for young people.

Volunteers: “Bring any skills you have and they are ready and waiting.”

When you visit

Saturday morning around 9 is when the largest group gathers for breakfast, devotions and

time to pray and talk. **Sunday services** are Sunday School at 9:30 am and the worship service at 10:30 am. **Wednesday evening** is a Bible study at 6 pm.

Address

2104 W Bryden Rd
Muncie Indiana 47304-1703
gladgem2@gmail.com



On Saturday mornings, people come for breakfast, devotions and caring conversations. Each family then can take a bag of food home.

Photo by Jake Hauser

Financial report
February 28, 2019

Year-to-date contributed support	\$138,529
Year-to-date plan	\$142,667
Difference between giving and plan . . .	-\$4,137
Year-to-date expenses	\$145,895
Year-to-date plan	\$156,338
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$10,443

As shown at left, with two-thirds of the year behind us, both needed contributions and actual expenses are slightly behind what is anticipated by the Central District Conference spending plan.


Report provided by Tim Lind, conference treasurer

First Mennonite (Bluffton) women honor their history in story and song

From “Great is thy faithfulness” and “Bye Bye Blackbird” to “Move in our midst” and “All the single ladies.” Hymns and popular songs covering 100 years helped to tell the history of women’s groups at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio.

The Sunday afternoon performance on January 13 involved the congregation in singing hymns selected to reflect each decade of the century. Paired with each hymn was the tune of a popular song from that decade with new lyrics that included details and themes showing what the women were doing at that time. Soloists, dressed to fit the decade of the song, performed these pieces.

Joanne Niswander did the research, combing through the archives of minutes from 100 years of meetings to summarize the changes and continuous threads of the women’s work. Wendy Chappell-Dick shaped the information into the narration (read by Joanne) and the new lyrics for the popular songs.

Wendy wrote in the production notes: “The founders of our women’s organizations dared to claim a role specific to women at First Mennonite, and honor its importance. Our Mennonite Women group has come through years when their work sometimes felt futile, exuberant decades of high turnout, and times of self-reflection and even doubt, to emerge victorious and vibrant 100 years later.” 



Wanda Stopher, pastor of spiritual formation, sang “Every time we pack a box, I pray a little” to the 1940s Cole Porter tune, “Every time we say goodbye.”



Wendy Chappell-Dick selected hymns and wrote lyrics for songs that were contemporary to the ten decades of the work of the women’s groups in the First Mennonite congregation.



Joanne Niswander browsed through 100 years of minutes of Mennonite women’s group meetings to glean themes, details and vignettes. She then narrated the presentation.



Wendy Chappell-Dick (left) is joined by cast members of Mennonite Women as she sings her solo during the presentation of “Mennonite Women: 100 Years in Story and Song.” Pictured are Wendy Chappell-Dick, Wanda Stopher, Jan Wiebe, Joanne Niswander, Ana Neufeld-Weaver, Beth Boehr, Laurel Neufeld-Weaver and Sara Benner, Not pictured: Soloist Kendra Johns and pianist Jackie Wyse-Rhodes.

Photos by J. Tyler Klassen

Doug's Mug: Surprise!

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

Have you ever taken a drink of something, believing it was one thing but quickly realizing it was something else? Maybe your Pepsi was really Dr. Pepper. Or perhaps your milk had turned sour.



Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker was one of the preachers/teachers at Pastors and Leaders Week at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary February 25-28. In his presentation entitled, "Hard Truths Towards Beloved Community," Rev. Hooker stated, "Surprise and disappointment happen

because you have a certain story in your mind and something interrupts the story." Drinking Dr. Pepper when you were thinking it was Pepsi is a pretty benign surprise, but it makes the point.


Rev. Hooker was talking about a much more important topic than fizzy drinks or sour milk. He was talking about the stories that have shaped us regarding our understandings of race, privilege and identity. When we begin to hear stories about race, privilege and identity that challenge the stories that formed us, we often respond with surprise and disappointment if not outright defensiveness and rejection. The invitation Rev. Hooker offered was to welcome an identity crisis and to be reshaped and reformed by the Gospel.

This reminded me of a scripture I was invited to preach on recently. Luke 18:15-30 includes two stories; Jesus Blessing the Children and the Rich Ruler. In both of these stories, Jesus surprises and disappoints his listeners. Jesus invites the children whom the disciples had rejected. Jesus then says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." In the story of the rich ruler, the ruler expects to have his virtuous and faithful life affirmed and blessed by Jesus. Instead, Jesus says, "Sell everything you own and distribute the money to the poor, and

you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

I had not previously noticed the connection between these two stories. In both stories Jesus is inviting his listeners to basically start over, begin a new journey, be shaped by a new story, be born anew! Jesus again and again reshaped the stories of value, success, joy, privilege and blessing. Jesus ministry was deeply transformational!

Rev. Hooker, while not denying the importance of working for social and legal reform, said ultimately "laws don't change narratives. It is up to the church to transform narratives." Later, in a sermon, Rev. Hooker talked about the biblical metaphor of yeast. He proclaimed, "You never need critical mass to change the world. You just need critical yeast."

So, perhaps we need to add a pinch of yeast to whatever we are drinking ... and await the transformation. Maybe water once again will be turned to wine! With God all things are possible. 

News notes

Valerie Showalter, pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., was part of a delegation of five Harrisonburg Mennonites who traveled to the U.S./Mexico border to meet, witness, and accompany those who are seeking asylum in the U.S. One aim was to deepen networks of solidarity, as they seek to address immigration justice issues in their area. The group blogged about their experiences at hburgtoborder.wordpress.com.

Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship hosted David Radcliff of the New Community Project in late February. David challenged the congregation to be more aware of their impact on the environment and to work toward both personal and systemic change. Listen to the podcast: <https://cincinnati mennonite.org/sermons/>

Columbus pastor tells story of sanctuary on Ted Talks

Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church has hosted Edith Espinal for more than a year as she challenges a deportation order. On February 14, they marked the 500th day that Edith has lived in sanctuary in the church.

Joel Miller, pastor of the Columbus congregation, shared the congregation's story and a helpful history of sanctuary in a Ted Talk.

Joel ends his talk with this affirmation: "We don't have to wait for big systems to change in order to be the kind of people, the kind of neighbors, the kind of community we want to be in this world. I believe we can all be sanctuary people. There is no law or policy powerful enough to prevent this."

Joel's Ted Talk can be watched at <https://bit.ly/2RMo2NG> 



Joel Miller, pastor of Columbus Mennonite Church, gives a Ted Talk about how the congregation is providing sanctuary for a woman who is in danger of being deported.

Madison members participate in summit on faith and gun violence

On Saturday, January 26, the Wisconsin Council of Churches hosted a day-long Youth Summit on Faith and Gun Violence. Four members of Madison Mennonite Church attended: youth delegates Ellie Kosek and Lydia Oakleaf, adult chaperone Laura Stoesz, and event volunteer Lisa Weaver.

The gathering took place at Pilgrim Center, a United Church of Christ camp near Ripon, Wisc. The day featured storytelling, advocacy and art workshops, as well as lunchtime conversations and fellowship across denominations.

Central District Conference is a member organization of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, on behalf of two CDC Wisconsin congregations: Madison Mennonite Church and Milwaukee Mennonite Church. Lisa Weaver and J. Denny Weaver both serve on the Peace and Justice Commission of the Wisconsin Council of Churches.



The Wisconsin Council of Churches plans to use input from this Youth Summit to formulate a study guide for churches.

Photo of Youth Summit participants provided by Kerri Parker, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches 

Central District Reporter
Volume 63, Number 2, March 2019
Editor: Mary E. Klassen
Email: cdceditor@gmail.com

Reporter is published six times a year. It is the official organ of communication among the churches of Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. It is distributed free to CDC congregations through the CDC spending plan.

Central District Office:
Doug Luginbill, conference minister
Emma Hartman, administrator
1015 Division St., Goshen, IN 46528

Toll-free: 800.662.2264
Phone: 574.534.1485
Email: office@mcusacdc.org
Web: www.mcusacdc.org