

Background for Table Discussion on Friday morning, June 21, 2019 (**Please read prior to Annual Meeting.**)

The mission of Central District Conference is to know Christ's abundant love in who we are and how we live, and to answer God's persistent call to share that love with one another and the world by:

- *Promoting a Christ-like community of hospitality where all are welcome and where grace-filled relationships flourish, and patience and generosity are practiced,*
- *Calling and nurturing wise, dynamic and compassionate Anabaptist leadership,*
- *Supporting missional partnerships that make God's reign visible and fostering ministries of evangelism, peace, healing and hope.*

Christian hospitality. Anabaptist leadership. Missional partnerships. These are three enduring values that the congregations of CDC have identified as central to our common mission. Finding resources and suggesting ways of living out these missional values individually and in our congregations is the ongoing task of the CDC board of directors, committees, and staff.

CDC leadership recognizes that, while these values endure, the ways these values are lived out and the relationships we develop need continued attention and realignment. Many of our congregations in CDC and MC USA are giving attention to relationships across race, culture and nationality. We confess that we have much to learn about holistically engaging in such relationships.

Over the past several years Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Church USA and CDC have invited engagement in such relationships.

In April 2019, leaders of Mennonite World Conference participated in an event entitled *Justice on the Journey: Migration and the Anabaptist story*, at Iglesia Vida Abundante in San Rafael de Heredia, Costa Rica. In an article entitled [Challenge and hope on the road](#) by Kristina Toews and Karla Braun, they recorded the following observations by participants.

"I learned that to belong is a two-way street," said Chief International Events Officer Liesa Unger, who moved to Germany from Siberia as a child. "Whether I belong or not does not only depend on the others who need to accept me, it also depends on me – whether or not I accept the invitation."

"The story of migration is one that we all share as brothers and sisters in an eternal kingdom," said YABs (Young AnaBaptists) North American representative Larissa Swartz. "Our spiritual identity is that of foreigners in a foreign land on a pilgrimage to reach our true home."

Zaida López of Costa Rica offered a challenge: "When we meet a migrant in our country do we think, how would I like to be treated if I were in their place? And rather than discriminate against them, we offer them a helping hand because they offer an opportunity to share the love of God."

In 2011 MC USA developed the *Purposeful Plan* which states, in part:

“Racism, antipathy and alienation among different cultural groups stand in the way of Christ’s kingdom of love, justice and peace. As missional communities we will seek to dismantle individual and systemic racism in our church. We will also seek to develop intercultural competence, which means that we intend to heal racial divisions, learn to live and work in a multicultural context, and value all the gifts of God’s diverse people. We envision people of many nations, tribes, people and languages as participants in the kingdom of God. We believe it is Jesus, pictured as the Lamb, who calls people together from all nations. (Acts 10, Galatians 3:25-29, Ephesians 2:15; Revelation 7:9, Article 9, 211 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective).”

In 2014 Mennonite Church USA affirmed a [Churchwide Statement on Immigration](#).

In 2017, congregations were encouraged to be part of a “Big Read” and study [Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism](#) by Dr. Drew Hart. Dr. Hart also preached and provided a plenary session at our 2017 Annual Meeting in Bluffton.

The CDC Missional Church Committee has formed a task group to enhance the missional capacity of congregations and provide essential and needed resources for them to effectively minister in their context. The task group is charged with developing strategies for addressing racial ethnic and religious reconciliation.

More recently Central District Conference was invited to consider how a relationship with [SEMILLA](#), an Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala, may be a valuable resource to our congregations as we engage in this important relationship-building across race, culture and nationality. Here is a link to a [brief history of SEMILLA](#).

On Friday morning of our Annual Meeting we will be learning more about SEMILLA and we will have some table discussion on three questions.

1. Are there activities and resources from your congregational experience (or other places) that have helped build relationships across race, culture and nationality? If so, please share an example.
2. Could seeking a relationship with SEMILLA be another step in our journey? From what you have learned about SEMILLA, identify a question, affirmation or concern you would have about SEMILLA as a resource for CDC congregations.