



Conference Minister's Report
2019 CDC Annual Meeting, Milwaukee, WI

Our theme for this year, "Come walk with us...to God knows where," came out of our board of directors visioning day last August. The theme has, appropriately, elicited both chuckles and contemplation. It is both a confession of faith (God does know where God is leading) and it is a prayer of relinquishment ("God, we don't always know where you are leading but we trust you.") The theme also has a sense of "throwing up one's hands," suggesting the path is out of our control.

We're just along for the ride. Depending on the day...or hour...I identify with any of these perspectives. I offer the following observations about our journey as CDC congregations.

- ❖ The past year saw fewer pastoral transitions than my first two years as conference minister. A question I'm often asked is, "Are there enough pastors for our churches?" If we look only at graduates from Mennonite colleges, universities, and seminaries, the answer is "no." When we consider graduates from schools such as Fuller, Duke, Harvard, various Methodist seminaries, Candler, Iliff, Wake Forest, Chicago School of Theology, Pittsburgh, Bethany, and others, there seems to be growing interest in Anabaptist/Mennonite ministry. Many students who knew little to nothing about Mennonites before entering college or seminary are discovering "their people" when they are introduced to Anabaptist theology and community. I wonder if God is paving a path of greater collaboration between Mennonite and non-Mennonite schools? I continue to believe that Anabaptist ways of understanding are vital to God's reign on earth.
- ❖ Related to this, a number of CDC congregations participated in the *Journey Forward, Pathways Curriculum* over the past year. Many expressed resonances with the three themes; Following Jesus, Witnessing to God's Peace, and Experiencing Transformation. As MC USA finds its way forward, I wonder how these themes might invite greater unity of mission and purpose. Can these broad theological claims carry us through and beyond the arguments that have divided us?
- ❖ At our four Regional Gatherings we tested three possible areas of emphasis for the future; youth ministry, planting and nurturing new communities of faith and developing a relationship with SEMILLA (an Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala.) I anticipate further discussion and discernment at our Annual Meeting in June. How might God be guiding us along paths less-traveled or even new paths of faith formation, discipleship and Christian hospitality?
- ❖ We continue to test new ways of living out our witness of peace and justice in a polarized society. I am grateful for the work of the Missional Church Committee as they have invited persons to serve on a task group to attend to racial, ethnic, and religious reconciliation. They are inviting pastors and others in CDC to also grow in intercultural competence. How might God be leading us to be healthy, diverse and interculturally competent communities of faith?
- ❖ I am grateful for the many staff, board and committee members, pastors, lay leaders and congregational members throughout CDC and MC USA who are committed to the journey wherever God may lead!

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