



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

April 2019

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Reign of God grant

Reading the Bible with Jesus

With the help of a Central District Conference Reign of God grant, four Ohio congregations brought Bryan Moyer Suderman and the "Reading the Bible with Jesus" effort to their area January 11–13, 2019. Following are excerpts from the report Matthew Yoder, pastor of Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, shared about the weekend.

Three of the participating congregations were CDC congregations—Grace Mennonite, Pandora; First Mennonite, Bluffton; and Lima Mennonite. The fourth congregation was Salem Mennonite in Ada, a member of Ohio Mennonite Conference.

Bryan Moyer Suderman, singer, songwriter and itinerant Bible scholar, is a teaching associate of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart and founder of SmallTall Ministries. Through AMBS, Bryan offers a weekend event called "Reading the Bible With Jesus." Using song and group Bible study, Bryan shows how Christ himself interpreted his own "Bible," the Jewish scriptures. Bryan leads groups in exploring how we might follow Jesus also in how we read, understand and use the scriptures in our lives today.

Bryan performed a concert of his music at First Mennonite Church on

Friday evening, January 11. Bryan warmly welcomed the intergenerational group into singing and motions as he shared the music he has written inspired by scripture.

The Saturday Bible study was hosted at Grace Mennonite Church. In those sessions, Bryan taught us how to approach passages of scripture where Jesus himself is engaging with the scriptures. We learned to look closely at the text and ask What is going on? Who is talking with whom? What is the Hebrew scripture that is in view? How is it being engaged?

On Sunday morning at Grace, Bryan engaged with the children of the congregation during the children's story time and offered biblical reflections, drama and music based on the Emmaus Road story from the Gospel of Luke.

Throughout the weekend Bryan was lively, energetic, knowledgeable, talented, warm and enthusiastic. Members of all four sponsoring congregations enjoyed singing, worshipping and learning together this new way of engaging the scriptures following Jesus' example.

We would like to thank CDC and the Missional Church Committee for your generosity in supporting this learning opportunity for our congregations and community with a Reign of God grant!



*Photo of Bryan Moyer Suderman from his website:
<http://www.smalltallministries.com/>*

Beyond Reign of God grants

A new initiative for the CDC Missional Church Committee

A major initiative of the CDC Missional Church Committee, reported by chairperson Matt Morin at the CDC Leadership Council meetings on April 6, is to work on resources for the conference related to anti-racism and white privilege.



Matt Morin (center), chair of the Missional Church Committee, reports on the task force working to address issues of anti-racism and white privilege. Carl Yoder and Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau listen.



Matthew Yoder (left) and Mark Rupp (right) are members of the Missional Church Committee. At the back is Arman Habegger, CDC president.

Members of the committee not pictured are Tim Stair, Kiva Nice-Webb and Lois Kauffmann-Hunsberger. Emma Hartman, conference administrator, is staff to the committee.

Matt reported that John Powell, former member of the committee, recommended this emphasis. John further suggested that this work should be done primarily by white people, but they should work under “the authority, guidance and suggestions of people who identify as people of color,” Matt noted. As the Missional Church Committee began this effort, they formed the Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation Task Force. Members are Annette Brill Bergstresser, Charles Bontrager, Sandra Miller, Kiva Nice-Webb (chair) and Brian Sauder. Accountability members are Isaac Villegas and Cyneatha Millsaps.

This group has met several times, Matt reported, but the task is not one that can be done quickly or easily. Task force members realized that first they must address their own attitudes and privileges; “You have to be chastened,” Matt said. “As you get farther into the questions you realize how hard the work is.”

The group has a one-year time span for their work, with the hope that the result will be helpful throughout the conference. More information will be shared as this effort progresses.



Photos by Mary E. Klassen

Missional Church Committee members Valerie Showalter (left) and Karla Minter (right).

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