

July 2019

Annual Meeting, June 20-22


Following where God leads

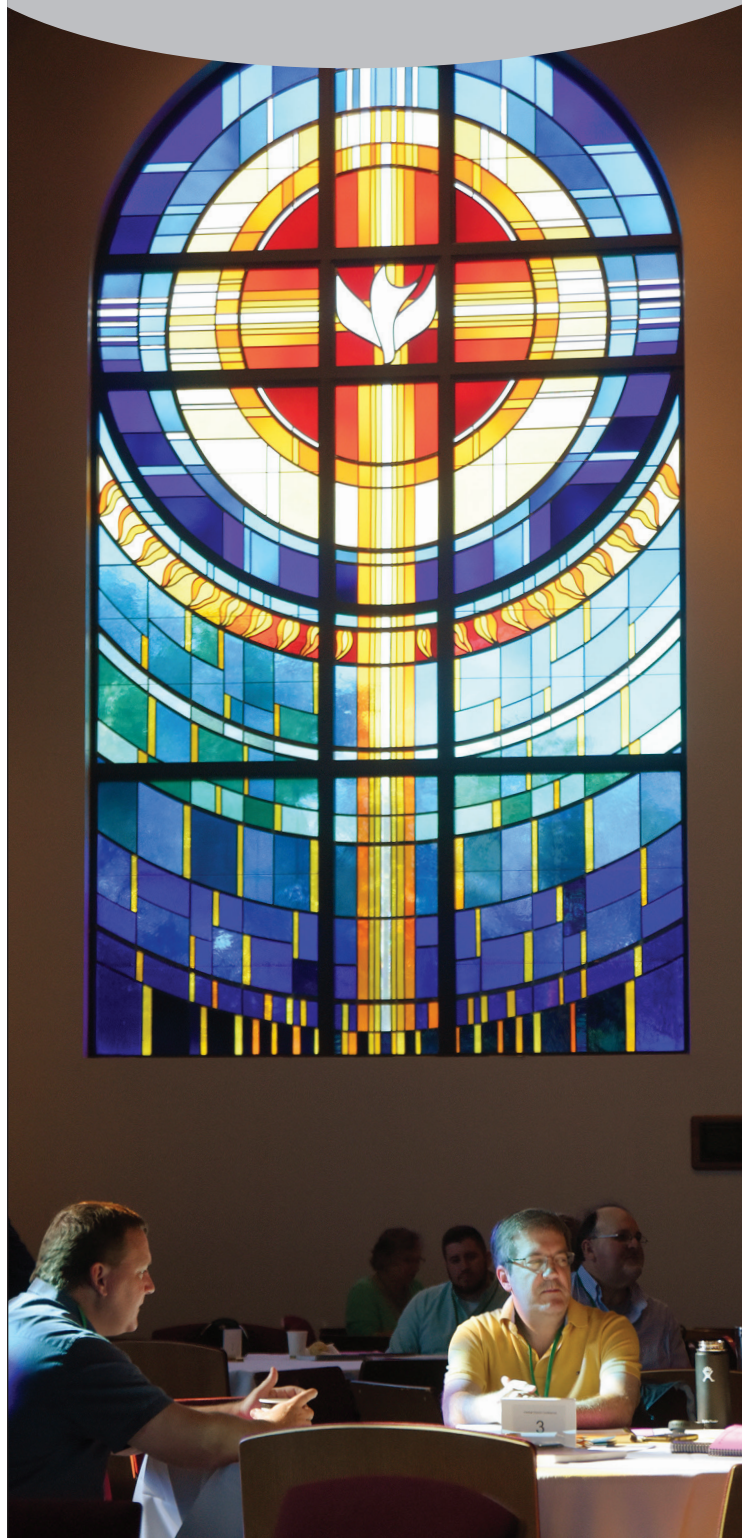
Sunlight streamed through stained glass windows as participants gathered at Milwaukee (Wisc.) Mennonite Church for the Annual Meeting of Central District Conference, June 20-22. The theme, "Come walk with us ... to God knows where," echoed through the days—in songs, stories and sermons.

Doug Luginbill, conference minister, noted that the theme can have different emphases. It can be a confession of faith: "to **God** knows where." It can express a mystery, asking where is God leading? Or it can be admitting that we don't know where God is leading, but we follow in trust.

For example, recent conversations with representatives of SEMILLA, the Anabaptist Latin American seminary in Guatemala City, have begun exploring how CDC and the SEMILLA might develop a relationship that is mutually helpful. We don't know what that might look like, Doug said, "but we want to walk this journey and discover together where it might be leading us."

Delegate sessions offered time for further discussion about this, while also including usual Annual Meeting agenda. Worship services provided challenges and inspiration, as well as opportunities to sing favorite and new hymns. Storytelling sessions and seminars gave glimpses into the work of congregations, Camp Friedenswald, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and more.

The Milwaukee congregation hosted the gathering, with support from Madison (Wisc.) Mennonite Church. The worship planning team also included members from St. Paul (Minn.) Mennonite Fellowship, Chicago Community Mennonite and First Mennonite in Urbana, Ill. 



J. Tyler Klassen

Kirby Keim from Covenant Mennonite, Sarasota, Fla., and Brian Kilheffer from Americus (Atlanta, Ga.) Mennonite.

Annual Meeting worship

From vulnerability to joy

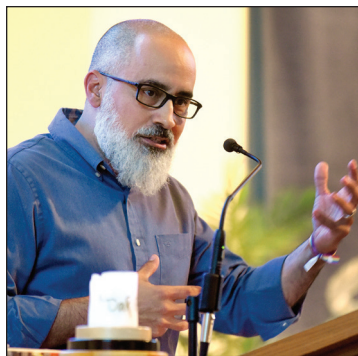
Worship at the Annual Meeting began with a story of deep grief and ended in discovering profound joy. A hymn sing bridged the two services as we sang songs that reminded us that God is with us as we journey ... to God knows where.

Anton Flores-Maisonet shared how his family and an immigrant family lived in community for 14 years. The death of his son by suicide came at the same time as the mother of the other family died from a long-term illness.

Anton reminded worshippers that Jesus, when he came to the well in Samaria, sat down to rest, and in vulnerability asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. Anton and his family, as they grieved, moved to a neighborhood of “people who live in constant fear. That’s where I have found life—by coming into this neighborhood where my deepest wound was exposed to the world. There, out of my vulnerability, I have found welcome. They wouldn’t bring me a drink of water, but of horchata, and tamales, and they welcomed me in ways they longed to be welcomed.”

He added, “Vulnerability is a gift of God. It can be sacramental. It can build a compassionate and empathic community. It can reconcile us to ourselves, to one another and to God.”

Alison Brookins focused on the story of Zacchaeus, who simply wanted to see Jesus but



J. Tyler Klassen

Anton Flores-Maisonet, cofounder of Casa Alterna and an associate member of Americus (Ga.) Mennonite Fellowship, and Alison Brookins, pastor of Chicago Community Mennonite Church, called us to be both vulnerable and joyful as we seek to follow Jesus.

ended up being transformed by joy.

“To believe in the gospel and turn your life toward the neighbor and stranger is to live in the deepest and most profound joy,” Alison emphasized. “Pursuing joy is an act of resistance against all that tells us we are not worth the breath that keeps us alive. The gospel is to be orientated toward joy at all times, oriented toward the knowledge deep in your stomach that you are loved.” The work of the gospel is serious work, she acknowledged, but that is why we need joy to sneak in and transform us.

To listen to these sermons, visit the Milwaukee Mennonite Church website:

www.milwaukee mennonite.org/meetings/ 

Children's activities

Children have their own conference activities and a special time during the daily worship services. Lisa Weaver (at right from Madison Mennonite) gave the children assignments, such as shaping pipe cleaners into something that is part of a Bible story.



Mary E. Klassen


The business of CDC

As Arman Habegger, conference president, called the business sessions of the Annual Meeting to order, he retold the story of the CDC gavel: The wood comes from the West Point, Iowa, Methodist Church, the building where the General Conference of Mennonites of North America organized in May 1860. It is a symbol—an icon—of CDC and conference history, Arman explained.



Items of business included welcoming three congregations to the conference (see p. 4) and approving:

- a call to Doug Luginbill to a new three-year term as CDC's conference minister,
- the slate of officers for the conference,
- the spending plan for 2019-20.

Participants also joined in conversations around tables about how the conference can address racial, ethnic and religious divides in our culture, resources for building relationships across these divides and how a relationship with SEMILLA (The Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala) might benefit both the conference and SEMILLA. 

Annual Meeting storytelling and seminars Discovering where God is leading

“We are surprised to be up here talking about prisons,” Christine Nofsinger said, during a Friday storytelling session at the Annual Meeting. Timothy Lind added, “The ‘God knows where’ theme is particularly relevant.”

Christine and Timothy, both from Florence (Mich.) Church of the Brethren Mennonite, shared about their congregation’s ministry to people who are now and have been in prison.

The ministry, they emphasized, grew out of the church’s vision statement, which was adopted 15 years ago. This statement declared that all are welcome in the congregation, and, as Timothy noted, that has led them to welcome people into the congregation in ways they had not expected. In turn, that has led them to become involved in the justice system in other ways, including lobbying for legislative initiatives and considering transitional housing.

Three other storytelling sessions gave different views of God’s leading: stories of calls to ministry, shared by Janeen Bertsche Johnson of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary; biblical storytelling, modeled by Karla Minter and Deron Bergstresser; and stories of the impact of Camp Friedenswald on people’s lives, led by Jenna Liechty Martin, camp director.

Continued on page 4



Commissioning new and continuing CDC officers and committee members came after delegates voted to approve the slate of nominees. This cluster of participants praying for conference leaders includes Sherry Miller, Jon Hilty (Gift Discernment Committee), Charles Bontrager, Winifred Saner, James Risser (new president-elect), Peter Eash-Scott (Gift Discernment Committee) and Justin Weaver.

P. 3 photos by Mary E. Klassen

Annual Meeting seminars and storytelling

Discovering where God is leading (continued)

Stories of following God's unexpected call resounded in Friday evening seminars, also. Isaac Villegas and Joel Miller shared the process and challenges of providing sanctuary in the congregations they pastor—Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship and Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church. Concluding this seminar, Joel invited participants to join in a prayer created by the Columbus congregation:

God, our sanctuary,
grant us and our neighbors,
near and far,
courage in our hearts,
peace in our homes,
and justice in our streets. Amen

Dios, nuestro Santuario,
concédenos y nuestros vecinos,
cercana y lejana,
coraje en nuestros corazones,
paz en nuestros hogares,
y justicia en nuestras calles. Amen

Other seminars:

Mary Etta King, copastor of Covenant Mennonite Church, Sarasota, Fla., led a

seminar on spiritual disciplines.

Jane Wood, president of Bluffton University, shared about her life through the books that influenced her and invited participants to share about books that were important to them.

Lora Nafziger, member of the pastoral team of Assembly Mennonite (Goshen), shared how the congregation works at faith formation.

Mark Rupp, member of the pastoral team at Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite, led a discussion of resources for youth ministry.

Michael Danner, staff member of MC USA, previewed the upcoming convention. 

Annual Meeting numbers

- 140: people registered
- 90: delegates present
- 17: children registered
- 36: CDC congregations represented, including three who were taken into membership
- 63: the number of Annual Meetings CDC has held



J. Tyler Klassen

Delegates voted unanimously to welcome three congregations to the conference. Each congregation received a cup of blessings from other CDC congregations and a CDC ceramic lamp. Above, Anna Yoder Schlabach, incoming CDC president, hands blessings to representatives of Americus (Ga.) Mennonite Fellowship: Jackie Campbell, Doris Poole and Crystal Kilheffer; Brian Kilheffer, Crystal's husband, is the lay pastor of the church. In the background to the left are Russ and Beth Miller of Jubilee Mennonite Church, Bellefontaine, Ohio. Not pictured are representatives from Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Gainesville, Fla.: Eve McMaster and Mark Moser.

Doug's Mug: Gratitude

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

Gratitude is like sipping a rich mug of hot chocolate on a cool fall evening, sitting around a campfire with friends and strangers, singing songs and swapping stories as stars gaze down. As I reflect on the past weeks ...

I am grateful for all who planned, prepared, volunteered, presented, prayed and made possible our CDC Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisc., on June 20-22. Relationships were built and wisdom was shared around tables, in the hallways, and along sidewalks. We were challenged to remain open to God's Spirit, wherever Spirit would lead. We were made aware of SEMILLA, an Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala, and were invited to imagine how we might experience transformation through a mutual friendship with our faith family in Guatemala. A visit to SEMILLA by some CDC representatives is being considered for early 2020. We said "thank you" to servants who were ending terms of ministry and welcomed new members who said "yes" to serving. We sang heartily and heard stories of faithfulness. I am also grateful for the opportunity to continue serving as your conference minister.


I am grateful for the spirit of MennoCon19 as Mennonite Church USA continues to find its heart and soul. The experience I was most looking forward to was the daily teaching on Ephesians by Tom Yoder Neufeld. He did not disappoint. When we are tempted to build walls, fortify boundaries and retreat into tribalism, the letter to the Ephesians describes a different orientation. Walls come tumbling down, former boundaries are breached and all tribes find hospitality in the presence of Christ. I am also grateful that we are a church that engages the complex and oft-broken world around us. We were challenged to bring back to each of our congregations the resolution entitled Churchwide Statement on the Abuse



of Child Migrants.* This resolution passed overwhelmingly and reminds us that we are a diverse denomination with many immigrant stories, and the migration story unfolding at the border and around the U.S. is our story, too.

I am grateful for green gooseberries and black raspberries, red currants and white currants, blueberries and strawberries. As a lover of the tart and the sweet, summer is berry-enthusiast season. I find delight in the various colors, textures and flavors of summer berries. I am also grateful for hikes in the Colorado mountains, snowbanks in July, wildflowers and butterflies adorning the paths, moose and elk grazing peacefully. I believe God also delights in the endless variety of God's good creation.

Indeed, my mug is full of gratitude and hope. While the fullness of God's Shalom remains incomplete and the little institutions we build to shelter and inspire us often fail to fulfill our aspirational goals, I give thanks for Christ's church and God's vision of healing and hope that guides us ever onward ... to God knows where.

* <http://mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/July-6-Churchwide-Statement-on-the-Abuse-of-Child-Migrants.pdf> 

Financial report

June 30, 2019

As the CDC financial year ends on June 30, the figures below represent our year-end report. Once again we have ended the year with a positive balance, due primarily to strong congregational giving, which exceeded the spending plan by \$7671. Expenses were under budget by a similar amount, \$7434.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 2018-19 contributed support | \$237,966 |
| 2018-19 plan | \$228,000 |
| Difference between giving and plan | \$9,966 |
| 2018-19 expenses | \$226,823 |
| 2018-19 spending plan | \$234,257 |
| Difference between expenses and plan | -\$7,434 |

We give thanks for the strong support of CDC congregations, and for the careful stewardship of conference staff.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

Ordination



Mark Rupp (center) was ordained at Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church on June 9. He is Pastor of Christian Formation, working with Christian education and small group ministries. Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister, is on Mark's right.

Licensing



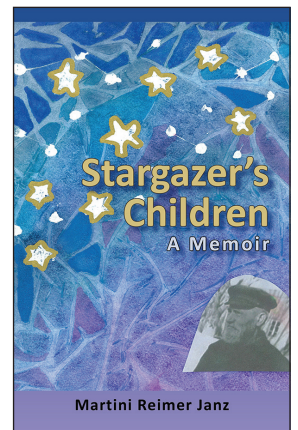
Kiva Nice-Webb was licensed toward ordination on June 23 at Chicago Community Mennonite Church. She is a chaplain at Westminster College, Fulton, Mo. Doug Luginbill, conference minister, presents her with a certificate. Kiva also serves on the CDC Missional Church Committee.



Dennis Miller (left), member of Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., has completed Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program. Dennis was recognized at the CDC Annual Meeting by Doug Luginbill, conference minister (right), and Jewel Gingerich Longenecker of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Journey, coordinated by AMBS, is offered in partnership with CDC and Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference.

New book

Martini Reimer Janz, member of Silverwood, recently published *Stargazer's Children*, a memoir of her life. She has focused mostly on the experiences of being a missionary with her husband, Art, in the Congo. However, the story begins with her great-great grandfather, nicknamed "Stargazer," because he stole time from farming to read and gaze at the stars. She also includes stories of the families that shaped her calling and Art's calling to mission work.



Rod Hollinger-Janzen of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, writes: "Martini Janz's honest self-assessment amid many struggles and learnings give *Stargazer's Children* the quality and depth of a spiritual autobiography."

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