

September 2019

Renting worship space: Shaping identity, saving money

Nineteen congregations—more than one-third of Central District Conference congregations—do not own the space where they worship. They use the buildings of other congregations or space in schools and senior centers.

For this *Reporter*, we asked several of these congregations three questions:

- What are the benefits, or how does renting help your congregation carry out its mission?
- What challenges have you experienced and how do you work at them?
- What is your congregation's average attendance for worship?

Benefits

Most of the congregations who responded named financial savings as an important benefit of renting.

Milwaukee (Wisc.) Mennonite Church, a congregation of about 40, said, "We're small enough to not need a full-time church building so money we don't spend on building ownership is available to help various local, national and global mission organizations like Mennonite



Chicago Community Mennonite Church meets at First Church of the Brethren in Chicago, Ill.

Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference that we choose to support."

Chicago (Ill.) Community Mennonite Church shared another kind of benefit for their group of 30–50 worshippers: "Renting our space from another church means that we have two congregational partners in ministry, the one that owns the building and another Mennonite congregation who are renters. We are able to cooperate with these two congregations for special events."

Shalom Mennonite Congregation in Harrisonburg, Va., said, "Renting saves us time and money associated with a building. It allows us to focus our resources toward people—both within our congregation and outwardly into the community. Since we rent from the local

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Renting worship space (continued)

Mennonite school, it allows us to support their budget and mission. The school is happy to know that their space is being used for good work on Sundays, and we are happy the space is being fully utilized during the week.”

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, a congregation of 40 in Berne, Ind., gave the term “freedom” to their benefits. “Not only does it free financial resources for us to share with the broader community and church, but it also frees us from the responsibilities tied to owning a building. Additionally, it frees us from the weight of a costly facility that has the potential to dictate decisions for us.” They noted that paying rent to the Senior Center where they meet provides income for that organization to offer important services to the community.

Saint Paul (Minn.) Mennonite Fellowship, as a congregation of about 35, has always rented and does not see any disadvantages. They said, “We have a good relationship with the church and its staff and members where we are now located, on the West Side of St. Paul. (The church where we rent space is within walking distance of a number of our members.)” In addition to sharing space and some office equipment, they and the host congregation jointly sponsor a Little Free Library at the location.

Challenges

In reflecting on challenges and how they have overcome them, the congregations shared varied responses.

Chicago Community, sharing space with two other congregations, said: “One of the challenges of renting space is the ‘whose stuff is whose?’ problem. It’s not always clear which items belong to our church, which items belong to one of the other churches who meet in the building, and which items need to be trashed, taken home, or put in a Lost & Found box.” It is hard, they said, for anyone to take responsibility for keeping the rooms clean and organized. “We have recently begun holding quarterly meetings with the other two churches to try to think through who uses which rooms and how we can all optimize the spaces we use regularly.

“Another, deeper problem with renting our space from another church is that we are not

always sure whether our ‘landlord’ church sees us mainly as **partners in ministry** or as **tenants in the building**. There are definite advantages to being seen as partners and working together. But there are advantages, too, to being tenants: namely, that we can expect them to take action when something needs to be fixed or when we have complaints. We occupy an in-between relationship with the church we rent from, and that sometimes leads to frustration.”

Worshiping in a school presents different challenges for **Shalom**, with an average attendance of 126 and a recent high of 169: “We have crews of volunteers set up the space each week according to our needs. As we have grown in attendance and our setup needs become more complicated, it’s been a challenge to have consistency in how things are arranged—especially chairs, sound system, altar elements, and classrooms. And even when we try our best, either we or the school will occasionally leave a mess that the other has to clean up. Open communication with the school and a sense of humility are important in maintaining a healthy relationship. Direct apologies to affected staff/teachers have been well-received when needed.

Emmaus Road, renting from a Senior Center, wrote, “A challenge of shared space is having limited options for children’s programming. There is one room aside from the main gathering area where children meet for Sunday School, but space isn’t ideal, as it contains billiards and pool tables, and needs to be set up each week for the kids. It’s challenging to think of expanding what we offer when space seems to limit us.”

Another challenge for Emmaus Road is the weekly work of setting up the space “to make church happen! Every week the church sign is pushed into the ground outside, banners and special artwork are placed in the space, and the flags are set aside; chairs are rearranged, and tables removed. While this requires extra effort, it has also provided opportunities for everyone in the fellowship to ‘pitch-in’ to make a Sunday service happen. The weekly ritual feels like part of our liturgy.”

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Renting worship space (continued)



Raleigh Mennonite shares a building with the former Hope Charter Elementary School.


Shaping identity

For some, the decision to not own a building or the experiences of renting have helped to shape the congregation's identity.

Milwaukee wrote, "We did not start as a church plant so we had to start from scratch. We were small enough to meet in homes and this allowed us to focus more on how we wanted to 'be' church than on where or what we wanted the church building to be. We then chose a location that best fit our mission."

Raleigh Mennonite Church shared: "At the founding of the church we made an intentional decision to rent space rather than own. We knew this would allow us to commit our financial resources towards mission and ministry instead of brick and mortar. We have found that freedom from the pressures of a building, or needing to emphasize 'growth' has formed our identity over time."

They admit to some frustrations in negotiating with building partners and working with limitations in how and when they can use the space. "We also know that the arrangement isn't guaranteed forever. So there's a sense of

insecurity. Or, another way to frame that, is that we have to see our identity as a people not a building. And that's a good thing." 

CDC churches that rent meeting space:


Ames (Iowa) Mennonite Church
Ann Arbor (Mich.) Mennonite Church
Atlanta (Ga.) Mennonite Church
Chapel Hill (N.C.) Mennonite Church
Chicago (Ill.) Community Mennonite Church
Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Sarasota, Fl.
Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, Berne, Ind.
Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church
Faith Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.
Joy Fellowship Mennonite Church, Peoria, Ill.
Madison (Wisc.) Mennonite Church
Milwaukee (Wisc.) Mennonite Church
Open Table Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Ind.
Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church
Shalom Community Church, Ann Arbor, Mich.
Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va.
Southside Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind.
St. Paul (Minn.) Mennonite Fellowship
Asian Mennonite Community Church, Lombard, Ill.

New residence at Hermitage Community

The Hermitage Community, a contemplative retreat center near Three Rivers, Mich., held a groundbreaking service for a new staff residence on Saturday, Aug. 3.

The home will be constructed as a “green home” using straw and clay for 12-inch walls, clay flooring with radiant heat, and, ultimately, solar energy. After the Enbridge (a multinational energy transportation company) added a pipeline crossing the Hermitage land, the board and the staff committed themselves to reducing dependence on oil and oil derivatives in the daily operation of The Hermitage.

According to Naomi Wenger, a member of The Hermitage residential community, “The vision for the new house is to continue to move toward eco-harmony on The Hermitage land and build with a preference for ecological performance and biological compatibility. We expect that the house will stand approximately 300 years and when its usefulness is ended, it can simply be returned to the earth without creating a toxic waste area.”

Construction is expected to take several months with occupancy in late summer 2020. 

Financial report
August 31, 2019

Year-to-date contributed support	\$23,028
Year-to-date plan	\$38,104
Difference between giving and plan	-\$15,076
Year-to-date expenses	\$32,817
Year-to-date plan	\$39,154
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$5,132


This early in our fiscal year—after two months of activity—contributions and expenses are typically well under budget, and this year is no exception. Overall the Central District Conference is in a sound financial position compared to previous years’ experience.

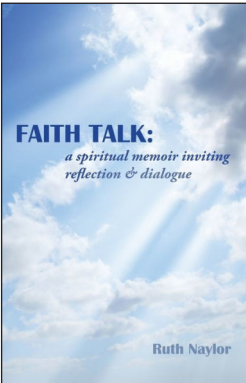
Report provided by Tim Lind conference treasurer

Faith Talk: a spiritual memoir inviting reflection and dialogue

Ruth Naylor, retired CDC pastor in Bluffton, Ohio, writes: My new book, *FAITH TALK: a spiritual memoir inviting reflection and dialogue*, is personal stories of my spiritual formation and lifetime of growth in prayer, experience of God’s presence, provision, and guidance beginning with my being raised in a Quaker home and contemplative community. The stories are not didactic; they simply illustrate how faith has influenced my life. Questions at the end of each chapter are intended to help the reader (or a small group) to think about their own important spiritual experiences or thoughts about faith—or no faith. The stories end with my husband’s illness and subsequent death after 61 years of marriage.


FAITH TALK is honest sharing of things we don’t often risk talking about—or even take the time to think about. It is my hope that the book will help others reflect upon their own life experiences.

It is published by WestBow Press, a division of Zondervan and Thomas Nelson, and is available at Amazon.com: Books. 



Brian Sauder honored

Brian Sauder, member of First Mennonite Church, Chicago, was selected for the 2019 *Midwest Energy News*’40 Under 40 awards program. This program highlights emerging leaders throughout the region and their work in the transition to a clean energy economy.

Brian, ordained by Central District Conference, is CEO of Faith in Place, an organization based in Chicago that works with houses of worship in Illinois to take steps to protect land, water and air. 



Doug's Mug: A strong gulp of yearning

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

For what do you yearn? Is your heart longing for something? How about your soul; what is its greatest desire? What do you imagine “yearning” tastes like? Is it salty like tears or sweetened with honey? Does it linger on your tongue or dissolve quickly away?



Over the next couple of years, Central District Conference is inviting us to consider our yearnings. Specifically, our two-year theme is:

Spirit, fill our souls with yearning!

I will confess that getting in touch with my deepest yearning is not an easy task. In fact, I likely resist such a discipline because truly yearning for something is a confession that certain hopes and dreams remain beyond my grasp and likely out of my control. Perhaps I also fear that if I feed the fire of desire too generously, my comfortable world may slip away. I don't want to be considered a fanatic, after all! Another fear is that my deepest yearning may never be satisfied.

So, my first challenge in response to the theme, *Spirit, fill our souls with yearning*, is to be willing to pray for the Spirit's gift of yearning. Only then might I be able to get in touch with exactly what that yearning is. Do I dare seek the gift of “yearning”?

Ronald Rolheiser, in his book *The Holy Longing; The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (Doubleday, 1999), says that “Desire can show itself as aching pain or delicious hope.” Similarly, Richard Rohr says that true transformation has its origin in experiencing either tremendous suffering (or chaos) or incredible love (or grace). Perhaps one of the ways we can begin to embolden the gift of yearning in our own lives is to reflect on the “aching pains” and “delicious hopes” that form us.

In my own life I have experienced few aching pains. Part of this is a result of my privilege.

Part of it is luck. Part of it is a reluctance to take big risks. And perhaps part of it is a result of faith. (Although Jesus does say that God sends rain on both the just and the unjust. Matt. 5:45) So, without a lot of aching pains that have formed my life, I must rely mostly on “delicious hope” and “incredible love” to discern my deepest yearnings.

Having been shown incredible love from family, mentors and friends, I yearn for individuals and communities to experience unconditional love, hospitality, the freedom to develop and use their gifts, the safety of respectful relationships and the opportunity to recognize the love of God in all creation. I am indeed grateful to have experienced and continue to experience such love; unearned and freely given.

I also recognize that I must hear and take seriously the yearning that comes from the experiences of the oppressed, the prisoner, those for whom the political and religious systems cause pain rather than love, those whose losses leave deep wounds that are still in the process of healing.

How do we hear and honor one another's stories that are at the root of our yearnings? What opportunities do we take to hear the yearnings of our neighbors, community members, or the strangers who walk into our lives? What does “yearning” taste like for you?

Spirit, fill our souls with yearning!



Upcoming events

Camp Friedenswald

Fall retreats: friedenswald.org/retreats/

Winter youth retreats: friedenswald.org/winter-retreats/

Mennonite Arts Weekend, Feb. 7-9, 2020.

organized by Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship.
mennoniteartsweekend.org/

Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary:

Shaping Faith in a Digital Culture: A joint conference of Deep Faith and Pastors and Leaders, March 2-5, 2020

Former CDC administrator dies

Eileen Kehler, former office manager for Central District Conference, died July 31, 2019, at the age of 86.

Eileen graduated from Quakertown High School in Quakertown, Pa., and received her bachelor's degree in business administration from Bluffton College. She worked as a secretary/bookkeeper for First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, where she was



an active member. Eileen later worked as office manager for 21 years for CDC and also was office administrator for E & N Coin Laundry in Findlay, her husband Neil's business.

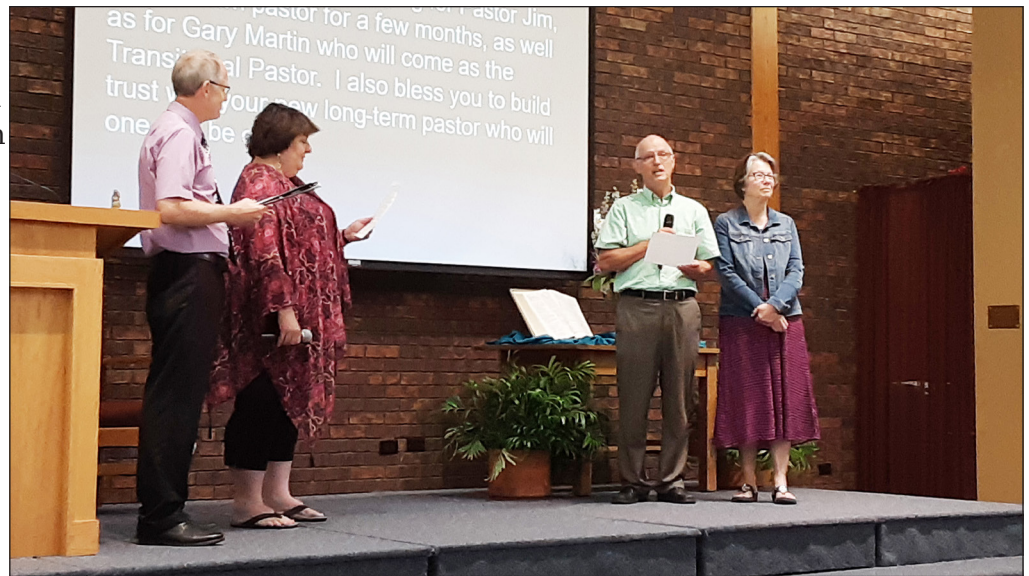
Survivors include her husband, Cornelius "Neil" Kehler; a daughter, Cheryl (Carl) Myers of Avilla, Ind.; two sons, Jeff (Eileen) Kehler of Dunkirk, Ohio, and Eric (Diane) Kehler of Worthington, Ohio; 10 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren. She and her husband were foster parents of 29 children.

Services were held Saturday, Aug. 10, at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, with private burial in Maple Grove Cemetery. ☪

Retirement

Tim Schrag, member of the pastoral team of Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.) has retired. He had been pastor in the congregation for 23 years.

Participating in the celebration of his ministry on September 1 were Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister (left), and Cindy Ropp, congregational moderator (next to Doug). Tim and Susan, his wife (at right), have moved to Goessel, Kan. ☪



Paula Luginbill

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