

## Sharing space encourages connections

The September *Reporter* explored the experiences of Central District Conference congregations who rent or borrow space. This issue explores the reverse—congregations who make their spaces available to others.

Congregations can share or rent space in myriad ways—to another congregation, to an organization or ministry, to a school, preschool or daycare center. Because of this variety, the conference office does not have a count of how many congregations in the conference share their space.

This issue represents a few of the possibilities. If your congregation is one who shares your building, or if your congregation might consider doing this, these responses are only a start on what we might learn.

### Four congregations

#### **Columbus Mennonite Church, Columbus, Ohio**

Columbus Mennonite shares its building with a Jewish congregation for their high holy days. They also rent space to an after-school program and host a woman in sanctuary due to her immigration status.



*On Yom Kippur, a Jewish congregation worshipped at Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church, which also shares its building with an after-school program and a woman living at the church in sanctuary.*

#### **Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Ind.**

A Latino congregation in the Missionary Church denomination rents space from Hively Avenue Mennonite. When the arrangement began, Rios de Agua Viva was a very young congregation that had been meeting in a home. It has now grown so that it needs several classrooms along with the sanctuary when it meets on Sunday afternoons, Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. In addition, Hively has a preschool as part of its ministry to the community and provides space for Goshen College's Music Together program one evening a week.

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## Sharing space (continued)

### **Community Mennonite, Markham, Ill.**

Of the congregations contacted for this issue, Community Mennonite has the most unusual story. It begins with some history:

"We share our building with two different entities—Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Compassion Ministries International (CMI).

"Our church building was built in the 1950s, with active participation in the construction by members of the congregation. Several years ago, the declining membership began to put a real financial strain on our budget. About the time our financial situation was becoming acute, our ever-faithful God stepped in by introducing us to CMI. CMI's Pastor Berry reached out to our pastor unexpectedly at the time, in search of space for his congregation to meet. That initial conversation led to a series of discussions and eventually to the sharing arrangement we now have in place.

"We were fortunate that adjacent to our original church building, CMC also owned a large daycare facility. We moved our Sunday morning worship services to a large common purpose room in that facility. We still use our church building for office space, meetings, midweek Bible studies, funerals and weddings, and other special occasions.

"As an aside, we recently gifted our daycare facility to the local elementary school district. As part of that gift arrangement, the district is allowing us to continue to use the daycare space for worship services free of charge. Between the school district and CMI, we have been relieved of considerable building maintenance and utility expenses, allowing us to focus our financial resources on pastoral care and mission work."

### **Mennonite Church of Normal, Normal, Ill.**

Mennonite Church of Normal reported that another congregation rented their building for a brief period of time and then moved to another location better suited to their needs.

## **Benefits**

**Mennonite Church of Normal** summed up the primary benefit: "We got to know some wonderful people and became more aware of

their ministry and vision."

**Columbus Mennonite** said, "Renting our building with another congregation puts us in direct relationship with that congregation in a unique way. Their rabbi has co-led two CMC Maundy Thursday services and has been involved in our sanctuary work." Because they consider the space theirs, they feel more tied to Edith (the woman living in the church) and to sanctuary ministry in general. The Mennonite congregation also benefits simply by being reminded of the Jewish calendar.

**Hively Avenue Mennonite** also noted the opportunity for new relationships. "This arrangement connects us with our community in ways we would not have opportunities for otherwise. Members of the Rios de Agua Viva

congregation participate in our community garden and some of the children attend Hively's preschool, strengthening all of those relationships with the community around us."

Hively also named a second benefit: sharing the space is good stewardship. "Without

the Latino congregation and the preschool, our building would be unused most of the week."

A third benefit is financial help from the rental payments. **Community Mennonite**, as noted in their history, receives help to balance the budget while they still retain ownership of the original church building.

## **Opportunities for collaboration**

**Community Mennonite** said, "We keep each other in prayer. CMI and CMC have jointly combined resources from time to time to meet the financial needs of individuals and families in the community who are in financial crisis. CMI has always invited our members to their special events, such as their congregational picnic in the summer."

**Hively Avenue Mennonite** shared its lament that it has not developed a closer relationship with the rental congregation. The language difference makes it difficult, because most members of both congregations are not bilingual. However, several years ago, when

*(continued on page 3)*



## Sharing space (continued)

the congregation used volunteers to re-carpet the sanctuary and foyer, members of the Rios de Agua Viva congregation joined in that work. The congregation envisions new attention to interaction now that another sister-church arrangement has ended.

### Challenges

Because of **Community Mennonite's** history, some of their challenges may be unique.

"Probably the principal challenge has been the fact that a couple of our oldest congregational members were around when our original church building was constructed. It has been hard for them to worship someplace else. Change, at times, can be hard."

**Hively Avenue Mennonite's** biggest challenges arise from the language difference. Communication with the Latino congregation often is initiated when there are problems, rather than in more natural, affirming ways. The positive aspect is that it prompts Hively members to work harder at learning Spanish.

Scheduling is another issue for Hively, because of the multiple ways the building is used. Several times a year, Hively must ask the Latino congregation to cancel or reschedule one of their usual Thursday evening services, or Hively must wait to begin any Saturday morning activities until the Latino congregation has ended its morning service.

**Columbus Mennonite** said, "Because the Jewish congregation is in the space only for their high holy days, it is not a regular arrangement and has not presented logistical challenges. When they are here we are in conversation about what of our worship banners they do and don't want hanging in the sanctuary."

### Advice for others

**Mennonite Church of Normal** encouraged interaction; "attend and engage in mutual ministries if at all possible."

**Hively Avenue Mennonite** recommends: "Do the up-

front work of getting to know each other and determine what your relationship could be. Then, if it is simply sharing a building, have the grace to accept that. The stewardship piece is still there, so praise God for what they are doing and what your congregation is doing."

**Community Mennonite** said, "Enter into the process with prayer, asking for God's guidance at each step. It was our experience that God intervened in our situation exactly when needed. Keep an open mind about what God brings to your door in response to your prayers. Be loving, accepting and kind. Welcome the opportunities to collaborate and fellowship together with whoever will be using your facility. Have the sharing arrangement well-documented in writing, with expectations clearly defined. Establish clear lines of communication and responsibility between whoever is using the facility and your congregation. Be respectful of their needs, and honest about your own congregation's desires and requirements. And thank God that we are all part of the larger body of believers, each with a different calling and role to play in God's Kingdom." 10




*The sign on Hively Avenue in Elkhart, Ind., shows the three primary ways the building is used—by a Latino congregation, by the Mennonite congregation that owns the building, and by the Mennonite congregation's preschool ministry.*

## Join the Journey program

Nurture your leadership abilities. Tend to your spiritual formation. Deepen your theological perspectives. The Journey Missional Leadership Development Program offers mentor-mentee partnerships, distance-learning opportunities and community support. Journey is open to all who are exploring what ministry looks like in their life. Early registration date is Dec. 16 at [ambs.edu/journey](http://ambs.edu/journey).



Journey is offered by Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and is sponsored by Central District, Indiana-Michigan and Ohio Mennonite Conferences. Members of CDC congregations qualify for reduced fees. For information, contact Doug Luginbill, conference minister: [confmin@mcusacdc.org](mailto:confmin@mcusacdc.org). 

## Financial report

October 31, 2019

Year-to-date contributed support . . . . .	\$73,292
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$76,208
Difference between giving and plan	-\$2,916
Year-to-date expenses . . . . .	\$72,035
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$78,309
Difference between expenses and plan . . . . .	-\$6,274

Central District Conference had strong congregational and individual contributions in October, which brought us close to our year-to-date income goals for end-October. Together with a modest under-expenditure on the expense side, this leaves CDC in a positive financial position for the current year to date. We look forward to continued strong support for the work of the conference from our member congregations.

*Report provided by Timothy Lind conference treasurer*

## Charles Bontrager honored at First Mennonite Wadsworth


On August 18, First Mennonite Church Wadsworth (Ohio) said goodbye to our Pastor Charles Bontrager. We had been blessed with his leadership for nearly five years.

In appreciation of his time with us, we wanted the transition to be one of reflection, and a celebration of our love for each other. We spent time looking at what we had accomplished together, as well as where we are headed as a small congregation. Charles helped us to reach out of our comfort zone at times, and we continue to build on those foundations.

The last few weeks were tearful, but also a time to give a proper send-off. We hosted a cookout and invited Charles's friends and family. The last Sunday for Charles started off with some comic relief. We all wore suspenders, which is his signature look. The service included communion, a time of sharing and a time to release. We fellowshiped with a meal together following the service. We wanted to give Charles one last send-off—lining the driveway and O-H-I-O (Charles is a Michigan fan) but we weren't quick enough! Charles, may you be a blessing to so many others in your next venture.

— Jenny Newcomer-Haas



*There were suspenders all around for the send-off for Charles Bontrager, who ended his pastoral assignment at First Mennonite in Wadsworth, Ohio. Charles is at the center back.* 



# Doug's Mug: Love

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

*For God so loved the world.*

On October 19-20, I and twenty-one other folks from across MC USA participated in a mini-borderland tour in Tucson, Ariz. While we didn't actually make it to the US-Mexico border, we did hear from several organizations that provided aid and support for individuals who found themselves in difficult situations in their search for a safer and better place to live. We met two families who were granted asylum and were headed to Nebraska and Michigan to be with their sponsors.

One husband and father of a three-year-old had been shot five times and spent several days in intensive care. When he was further threatened not to return home, he and his family made the decision to find safety in the US.

When we asked him what he wanted our churches to know about his situation, he said, "We are not here to make trouble. We just want to be safe and have a better life for our daughter."

*For God so loved the world.*

When I walked into the sanctuary of Shalom Mennonite Fellowship in Tucson, there was a familiar picture on the altar. It was a picture of needlepoint art produced by Liz Wenger. (See the image above.) I first saw the picture hanging in the halls of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary thirty years ago. It is entitled "For God so loved the world." It is a powerful image of God's loving embrace of all creation

and all people.

On October 26 the Central District Conference Leadership Council met at Camp Friedenswald. After breakfast, Amy Huser, Sustainability and Outdoor Education Director, updated us on sustainability initiatives and showed us the recently installed solar panels. These initiatives reduce the carbon footprint and teach campers/retreaters ways we can care for God's world.

*For God so loved the world.*

After our sustainability tour, CDC leaders met for worship, sharing the work of our churches and reflecting on this year's CDC theme, "Spirit, bless our souls with yearning." We responded to the question, "What yearning has the Spirit blessed you/your congregation with? Several responses went something like this; "Yearning for holistic justice and knowing what this looks like."

*For God so loved the world.*

On November 9, I visited Morning Star Church, one of our CDC congregations in Muncie, Ind. Every Saturday morning they

serve a meal, preach the Gospel and provide a bag of groceries to 50-150 individuals from the community. There is no verification of income and no application that needs to be completed. All are served. Pastor Gladys's office is the only pastor's office I know that has four freezers

in it, packed with turkeys for the upcoming Thanksgiving baskets that will be given away.

*For God so loved the world.*

I give thanks for the many and various ways that our congregations and individuals are finding ways to love God's whole world today! ☺

*Image of Liz Wenger art used with permission.*

## Installation



**Scott Coulter** (center) was installed as pastor of congregational life and hospitality and was licensed toward ordination at Assembly Mennonite Church on October 27, 2019. Participating were Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister; Ana, his wife, and their children; and the other three members of the Assembly pastoral team, Anna Yoder Schlabach, Lora Nafziger and Karl Shelly.

## Commissioning

**Randall C. (Randy) Miller** was commissioned as transitional pastor at Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship on Sunday, October 6, 2019. He began on September 16.



## Ordination



**Valerie Showalter**, pastor of youth and children's ministries at Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va., was ordained for ministry on Sunday, September 29, 2019. Gathering around her for prayer were Justin Shenk, her husband; Sharon Showalter, her mother; Moriah Hurst; and Rev. Donna Mack Shenk, her mother-in-law.

## 2020 Regional Gatherings

**P**lan to attend the Regional CDC Gathering near you early next year. These gatherings are an opportunity to learn to know people and congregations in a more relaxed setting and to get updates on what God is doing in the conference.

February 8, 2020: Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana, 10 am–3 pm

February 15, 2020: Raleigh Mennonite Church, Raleigh, North Carolina, 3:30–5:30 pm with meal following

February 22, 2020: Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, Wisconsin, 10 am–3 pm

March 14, 2020: Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship, Cincinnati, Ohio, 10 am–3 pm

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