

January 2020

Conference leaders reflect

What are we yearning for?

Central District Conference's board of directors has chosen as our theme for the next two years the phrase "Spirit, bless our souls with yearning." This issue of *Reporter* shares several reflections on the theme. Matthew Yoder's thoughts capture some tensions in this phrase and open the way for more reflections that follow—yearnings for the conference, our congregations and ourselves.

**Matthew Yoder,
Missional Church
Committee, Grace
Mennonite Church,
Pandora, Ohio**

At the October meetings of the CDC Board, committees and Leadership Council, we had an opportunity to reflect on the theme. Reflections ranged from yearnings for belonging that have found fulfillment in Mennonite church and CDC membership to yearnings for personal learning and growth beyond traditional Mennonite identity.

My own reflections were guided by my initial knee-jerk reaction to the idea that yearning can be a blessing. What is it about the pairing of yearning and blessing that I find so troublesome? As I listened to reflections being shared around the table, some clarity began to dawn. Many of our reflections on yearning were positive, hopeful, and, in the case of yearnings met, filled with gratitude.

I suppose that yearnings fulfilled and

yearnings for that which is altruistic and noble can indeed be a blessing. But what about those in prison who long for freedom, never again to taste of free air? What about those in bondage who go back to the dust yearning for liberation? Or the road of the immigrant that ends in the desert miles from food, water and shelter? What

about the working poor who barely survive yearning for the break that never comes? What about the queer teen who carries an unsatisfied yearning for acceptance, belonging and connection into the void? What about those taken by addiction who yearned

(continued on page 2)



Matthew Yoder talks about his yearnings at the October meeting of CDC committees and board members.

Mary E. Klassen

What are we yearning for? (continued)

to be clean? What about all of those unfulfilled yearnings that stand forever as a monument to unaddressed human suffering? Such yearning can hardly be a blessing, can it?

In my mind, I tend to associate yearning with curse rather than blessing. That is to say, when I think of yearning I tend to think of all the human suffering I see in the world that gives rise to various yearnings. But the more I think about this CDC theme, the more I'm reminded of the ancient traditions wherein it was believed that every blessing held a curse and every curse held a blessing. Perhaps yearning is a little bit like that. Perhaps the coin of yearning has blessing on one side and curse on the other. Perhaps I recoil from the thought of blessed yearning because my frail little soul cannot carry the freight of yearning for justice, mercy and peace for all of those mentioned above and more.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

James Rissler, CDC President-elect, Atlanta (Ga.) Mennonite Fellowship

Spirit, bless our souls with yearning.

I yearn for balance. Of inner care and external activity. Of time and tasks. Of competence and challenge. Of hope, and realism, and commitment to live into hope rather than to settle for current reality.

I yearn for mutual care across our differences, and appreciation for the beauty of the diversity with which God created us.

I yearn for glimpses of the new things God might be doing in the Church, and courage to experiment with different ways of being Christ's body.

I yearn for joy, in the company of friends, in beauty, in music, in conversation.

I yearn for compassion for all, and the knowledge of God's loving presence for all who suffer.

I do not yearn for one particular thing. I am full of yearnings, and I yearn for my soul to expand in God's love, that my yearnings might grow to reflect God's own.

Spirit, bless our souls with yearning.

Valerie Showalter, Missional Church Committee, Madison (Wisc.) Mennonite Church

At Madison Mennonite, we are longing to be brave, praying for courage as we enter into conversations that challenge our racism. We are longing for hope, praying to be witnesses of God's shalom in our communities and our state. We are longing for love, praying that we cultivate spaces of compassion for ourselves and one another.



Justin Shenk

Madison Mennonite Church members were invited to share their questions and longings in a recent worship service (adapted from the Leader resource guide). The invitation of the questions-to-hearts visual is to see our questions through God's eyes—eyes, we believe, that see our questions and longings in love.

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau, Ministerial Committee, Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

What are you dreaming of?

This is the question Eighth Street Mennonite is focusing on during Advent 2019. In worship, we will climb God's holy mountain to be first-hand witnesses of God's dream. We will stay there long enough to prepare and encourage each other to bring God's dream off the mountain. God's dream unfolds in ways we don't always expect and we need help to trust

(continued on page 3)

What are we yearning for? (continued)

that dream. We are not only to trust that dream but live into and live out of that dream. We are to embody God's dream in this world right now. Even though we are committed to living this way, there is much in this world that is threatened by God's dream. We must watch for how God's dream persists beyond all resistance to it. We celebrate everywhere God's dream emerges in this world—especially when it is carried by surprising messengers!

What are you dreaming of?

The congregation will launch into a Visioning Process in December 2019. In this process, we hope for wise discernment which will align our dreams with God's DREAM.

Anna Yoder Schlabach, CDC President, Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

I am yearning for opportunities to have space and time to deepen my ministry. I have developed habits of leaping from task to task without always taking the time to listen, to breathe, and to reflect. I yearn for the discipline to ground my work in God's abiding presence, making space for stillness before diving in to what can easily be checked off a list.

When members of CDC committees and the board reflected on the theme at their October meeting, the sharing included these yearnings:

How do we have an impact in our own community in the midst of injustice?

We need discernment when we have strong desires to impact massive systems; how do we know what is ours to do and what is not ours?

We yearn for holistic justice—justice for everyone.

We yearn for rest in God, recognizing the paradox that God meets our yearning but we cannot be complacent.

We yearn to form deep connections with other people. We are grateful that people are finding a place in our congregations and conference, but we yearn to transcend this and reach beyond.

We want to share power with others, but that means we need to be transformed.

(continued on page 4)



Mary E. Klassen

At the November meetings of all the conference committees and board members, participants had time in clusters to share what they were yearning for. The foreground cluster included Anna Yoder Schlabach, moderator, Robin Walton, Ministerial Committee member, and Phil Martens, board member.

What are we yearning for? (continued)

We yearn for places to use our gifts, energies and ministries beyond the restrictions of our structures.

We yearn for intimacy—deeper relationships that involve vulnerability, risk and mutuality.

We long for others to be welcomed. That may be the easier step; we also need to integrate them so they can fully use their gifts.

How do these hopes and yearnings fit with yours? With what your congregation is hoping for? With how you envision your place in the conference?

Doug Luginbill, conference minister, concluded the meeting by praying the theme, “Spirit, bless our souls with yearning.” He continued, “Pray this prayer of yearning regularly in your congregation. Where will this lead us?”

Financial report
December 31, 2019

Year-to-date contributed support	\$107,684
Year-to-date plan	\$96,250
Difference between giving and plan	\$11,434
Year-to-date expenses	\$108,725
Year-to-date plan	\$117,463
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$8,738

We have completed the first half of our financial year with about \$25,000 of income over expenses year-to-date, thanks to strong congregational and individual giving in December. As reflected above, contributions are also well ahead of our spending plan, while on the expense side we are well under budget.

Report provided by Timothy Lind conference treasurer

Pray for learning tour participants

An exciting new opportunity that CDC has been invited to explore is a growing friendship with SEMILLA, a Mennonite Seminary in Guatemala City, Guatemala. Several members of CDC congregations are participating in a learning tour on January 16-26 to SEMILLA. The purpose of this visit includes:

- To experience the mission and ministry of SEMILLA firsthand.
- To learn about the culture, religion and history of Guatemala.
- To seek a better understanding of why many Guatemalans are seeking to migrate to the US.

Participants are Cate Desjardins, Ardean Friesen, Gretchen Geyer, Julia Gingrich, Doug Luginbill, David Moser, Rachel Stolpe and Anna Yoder Schlabach. Please pray a blessing on their learning and all those they encounter. Look for reflections from them on this experience in a future issue of Reporter.

2020 CDC gatherings

Regional gatherings

Everyone is invited to attend one or more of the Regional Gatherings. These are not decision-making delegate meetings but gatherings for worship and getting to know one another.

- 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

Annual Meeting

June 25-27, 2020: Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio

Doug's Mug: Tears

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

Tears. Salty tears made of vulnerability and anger, disappointment and joy, lament and fear, hope and new beginnings. These tears fill my mug.

I confess that I'm not always comfortable with tears, my own or those of others. Perhaps



nurture and nature have colluded to plug my tear ducts or suppress the emotion center of my brain. I am learning to both receive the tears of others with grace and also allow my own tear-producing emotions to speak a deeper awareness and truth

within me.

It seems like I've witnessed more tears recently.

Tears of hope amidst overwhelming journeys. These are the tears that I witnessed in the eyes of immigrants whom I met last October in Tucson, Ariz. They shed tears of loss and fear as they find themselves in completely new surroundings. They expressed tears of appreciation for Casa Alitas, the facility and organization that was providing them with shelter, food, clothing and rest as they proceeded on their asylum journey. Watch for the tears of the homeless and hopeful.

Tears of respect and consolation. At our final worship service of the bi-national Mennonite conference ministers gathering in Banff National Park, Alberta, there were some tears. Sue Park-Hur led us in worship. Sue is the MC USA denominational minister for transformative peacemaking. Sue invited us to make the sign of the cross on the palms of our fellow ministers and to speak a word of affirmation. While we may still see some things differently in our denomination, there is deep appreciation and respect for one another as well as a collegial understanding of our roles in the denomination. I was moved by the words

of affirmation and the tears of humble respect shared in this holy space. Receive tears of humility and respect.

Tears of disappointment and frustration.

Pastors are people, too! Pastors have family members who are sick and loved ones who die. Pastors have children who divorce and spouses who don't feel welcomed. Pastors get caught in difficult relationships with church leaders and struggle with family dynamics. Pastors wrestle with God and contemplate their call. Hold gently the tears of your pastors.

Tears of deep yearning and possibility.

Spirit, bless our souls with yearning is our CDC biennial theme. While I may not have yet witnessed tears in the eyes of CDC leaders who have engaged with this theme, I sense that the theme is inviting us to a deeper awareness of our own soul-felt yearnings. As we ponder and contemplate this theme, whether individually or at regional gatherings or in other spaces, I pray that the Spirit will capture our attention.

Tears are good. Tears tell us something important about ourselves and what we value. They teach us about love, about injustice, about compassion, about our vulnerabilities and fears, about hope and a brighter future.

May the Spirit bless you with tears ... and an awareness of the well from which they come. ☪

CDC pastor receives grant

Isaac Villegas, pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Church, was selected as a 2020 Pastoral Study Project recipient. Each grantee is awarded funds to pursue a pressing question related to Christian life, faith and ministry.

Isaac's project is "Remembering the dead in the borderlands." His goal is to join in practices of remembrance for those who have died crossing the border into the US, learn from communities and organizations that mark graves and honor these people, and reflect on how the rituals intersect with or develop from Christian forms of attending the dead. Read more: <https://bit.ly/2tdORUZ> ☪

Installations



Valerie Showalter was installed as pastor of Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, Wisc., on November 17, 2019. Doug Luginbill (right), conference minister, participated in the installation service.



Amy Aschliman was installed at Community Mennonite Church, Markham, Ill., on January 12. She also continues as pastor at Christ Community Mennonite Church, which is an Illinois Mennonite Conference congregation. Both positions are half time. Amy began January 1.

Retirement



Jane Roeschley retired as pastor of Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.) at the end of November 2019. On Nov. 24, the worship service included a litany of release and blessing, and people had an opportunity to be anointed. Above, Mark Roeschley, Jane's husband, is receiving this blessing from Jane. Jane served as pastor of the congregation for 19 years and has served in wider church ministry for 30 years. She is a former member of CDC's Ministerial Committee.

Commissioning



Gary Martin (center) was commissioned as Transitional Pastor at Mennonite Church of Normal (Ill.) on January 12. Participating in the commissioning were Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister (left), and Darrel Miller, moderator of Illinois Mennonite Conference, because the church is affiliated with both conferences. Gary began January 1.

Central District Reporter
Volume 64, Number 1, January 2020
Editor: Mary E. Klassen
Email: cdceditor@gmail.com

Reporter is published six times a year. It is the official organ of communication among the churches of Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. It is distributed free to CDC congregations through the CDC spending plan.

Central District Office:
Doug Luginbill, conference minister
Emma Hartman, administrator
1015 Division St., Goshen, IN 46528

Toll-free: 800.662.2264
Phone: 574.534.1485
Email: office@mcusacdc.org
Web: www.mcusacdc.org