

CENTRAL DISTRICT CONFERENCE

Minutes

June 20-22, 2019

Milwaukee Mennonite Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Come, walk with us . . . to God knows where!

Thursday, June 20

Family Day events

- *Disc Golf at Dretzka Park
- *Bike/run/walk (Hank Aaron Trail)
- *Spiritual Practices for the Journey led by Mary Etta King
- *Pastor Appreciation Dinner
- *Backyard Picnic

WORSHIP I: Obstacles

Text: John 4:4-10

Speaker: Anton Flores-Maisonet

- *Ice Cream Social

Friday, June 21

Delegate Session I

Steve Hartman Keiser (Milwaukee) led delegates in singing SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*. Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street) led a moment of centering. She invited participants to reflect on the questions, “When you hear God call your name, what energy accompanies that calling?” Following a period of silence, Brenda shared that joy is experiencing the energy of God’s realm.

Arman Habegger (Grace) opened the 63rd delegate session of Central District Conference with the sounding of the gavel. He invited participants to introduce themselves around the tables.

State of the Conference Address

Arman Habegger (Grace) shared the story of the gavel used by Central District Conference. It is a symbol and icon of the conference history. Over the last four years:

*Central District has accepted four new congregations and three more will be voted on by delegates at this meeting.

*CDC and Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) held a number of conversations about whether a merger would be beneficial to both conferences. Ultimately, AMC decided to retain own identity.

*We have had inquiries from other congregations and visited one of those congregations earlier this month as they try to determine their affiliation for the future. One of the serious questions that emerges from these affiliations, both within CDC and MC USA, is that of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Should we rather promote diversity of perspectives or at least seek to embrace diversity or are we more comfortable with more uniformity of thought within our conferences? We have worked hard to center our voices that have been historically marginalized, but there are still those within the conference who are still on the margins. How do we make space for all voices to be heard?

For our visit to this congregation in early June, Doug Luginbill created a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted features of CDC as it currently stands.

**Over time the conference has moved from more rural congregations to more urban congregations. It will be interesting to see whether that trend continues as the years pass.

**CDC has continued to receive financial support from congregations, individuals, and more recently from an estate gift to maintain a solid financial base. Some other conferences report financial concerns as they continue to operate in faith. But, we voice a cautionary note: CDC operates with a lean staff of two salaried persons, Doug Luginbill as conference minister and

Emma Hartman as conference administrator. Doug travels far and wide because our congregations are far and wide. With the addition of new congregations, most of which are at a distance, we place a greater responsibility on Doug.

*Regional gatherings continue to attract participation. This year we added a gathering in the southeast to make it more possible for persons living in North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida to attend a gathering. The one day gatherings are a more informal opportunity to meet other CDC congregants and to get updates about conference activities. The three other regional gatherings are in CDC East (Ohio and Michigan), CDC Central (Indiana and Michigan), and CDC West (Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota)

*A very recent conversation centers on whether CDC wants to explore a friendship with SEMILLA, a seminary in Guatemala. The board of directors and leadership council discussed this briefly at its last meeting in the Spring. Earlier this month, an exploratory meeting was held in Goshen attended by SEMILLA director Willi Hugo, Charlie Geiser of the North American Board of Directors for SEMILLA, Emma Hartman, and Doug Luginbill as CDC staff members, Tim Stair from the Missional Church Committee, and Anna Yoder Schlabach as president-elect. This group met to get a better sense of how a friendship might benefit SEMILLA and educate and equip conference leaders.

*In August it will be three years since Doug Luginbill was selected as conference minister. Doug has recalled several times since then the anxiety he felt as CDC worked through a peer review process with the Constituency Leaders Council as we carefully described our process of licensing toward ordination a person who identified as LGBTQ. The CLC considered our remarks and a report from a small interview committee. The CLC took no punitive action and recommended that the peer review process be set aside for the future. CDC has since licensed and or approved ordination for LGBTQ identified persons and some pastors have performed same sex marriages with the knowledge and support of their congregations.

*Serving as the board of directors this year are Mary Etta King (Covenant), Tim Lind (Florence), Phil Martens (First Urbana), Carrie Mast (First Bluffton), Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly), Rachel Stolpe (Milwaukee), and Arman Habegger (Grace). The work of the board is made easier by Emma Hartman, who creates the agendas for the meetings and takes minutes. She provides continuity for the board's work.

*SF Pannebecker, wrote in *The History of Central District Conference* published in 1968.

“What does a historian have to say of the future? The moving finger of history writes on but the historian waits for further revelation with assurance that as there has been change in the past, so there will be change in the future. We like to build for ourselves comfortable little nests where there is sufficient challenge to appease a Christian conscience but no so much as to seriously disturb our way of life. God acts in history to disrupt old patterns and force adjustments to the unknown. Our fathers and mothers faced perplexities in a new continent and reacted, hesitantly at times, but with a confidence in God. Only as we are shaken free of old supports and guarantees can faith begin to operate with trust and growth.”

Congregational Story - Milwaukee Mennonite Church (MMC): Steve Hartman Keiser shared that Anton Flores-Maisonet's comments about being vulnerable made him think about the beginning of Milwaukee Mennonite 13 years ago and the vulnerability it took for six households to become a worshipping community together, bringing whatever gifts they had to the community. That willingness to be vulnerable and share gifts marks the congregation today as a lay led congregation of 23 households (about 60 people). Everyone brings a bit of a spark and are willing to share their gifts with each other which makes the lay led congregation work. Some of the symbols of the gifts that are shared are displayed around the church. One member created a wonderful painting that was used by the congregation for covenant Sunday. Others also created visual art used for covenant Sunday that represent the ways each person brings something to the congregation.

While reviewing some notes from 2008, Steve found the following statement, “We are on the cusp of viability.” In a way the congregation is always on the cusp of viability in that they are able to revisit serious decisions that they

make about doing leadership, engaging with community, how to do communion, etc. Revisiting those decisions can be a freeing thing. The Spirit may lead one way now and we can be open to further leading in the future. They also have “lasagna decisions” which are low impact and low cost. Holding decisions lightly and sharing the gifts of everyone is a bit of what Milwaukee Mennonite is about. They are slightly shocked to be hosting the annual meeting, but it is a beautiful thing to see the entire sanctuary full of people who bring their gifts to us. MMC has benefitted tremendously from the fellowship and support of CDC over the years, the depth of thought, the caring, the laughter, and the singing. CDC has been a wonderful home for them.

Introductions: Arman introduced the following:

Resolutions Committee: David Stolpe (Milwaukee), Sueann VonGuten (Hively Ave), George Lehman (First Bluffton)

Listening Committee: Lori Nester (First Bluffton), Tyler Klassen (Hively Avenue), Brenda North Martin (Raleigh)

Parliamentarian: Gerald Mast

Medical Person On Call: Ardean Friesen

Summary Review of 2018 Annual Meeting Minutes: Carrie Mast (First Bluffton) summarized the minutes of the 2018 annual meeting. *A motion was made, seconded, and affirmed to accept the minutes of the 2018 annual meeting as written. [David Moser (Southside), David Rensberger Atlanta]*

Highlight Actions in 2019 Agenda: Carrie Mast (First Bluffton) reviewed the agenda and highlighted actions and agenda for the delegate sessions.

Treasurers Report and Presentation of 2019-2020 Proposed Spending Plan: Tim Lind (Florence Church of the Brethren - Mennonite) expressed gratitude to the congregations who continue to provide support to the conference. The congregational giving report can be found on pp 63-64 of the report book. If the current pattern of congregational giving and additional giving from individual donors along with careful oversight of expenditures continues, it appears CDC will finish the year in the black.

Tim directed delegates to the proposed 2019-2020 spending plan on p 38 of the report book. Action on the proposed spending plan will take place on Saturday, June 23.

Presentation of Gifts Discernment Committee and Slate: Peter Eash-Scott (Milwaukee), chair of the committee, thanked all those who have served on committees or as representatives of Central District Conference. He introduced members of the committee: Sally Weaver Glick (Open Table), Ruth Guengerich (Eighth Street), Jon Hilty (Grace), Brenda North Martin (Raleigh), and Joel Miller (Columbus). Peter directed delegates to the 2019-2020 slate on pp 40-41 of the report book and invited nominees to stand as he introduced them. On behalf of the Gifts Discernment Committee, Peter moved to affirm the 2019-2020 slate of nominees. Jep Hostetler (Assembly) seconded the motion. Delegates affirmed the slate as presented.

Commissioning Prayer: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) invited all new and ongoing committee and board members to stand. He thanked them for their willingness to share their gifts, experience, time and energy to the work and worship of Central District Conference. Doug invited delegates surround them to demonstrate affirmation and support while he led prayer.

Break/Snacks provided by Chicago Community Mennonite Church

Steve Hartman Keiser (Milwaukee) led delegates in singing SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*.

Receiving Americus Mennonite Fellowship, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, and Jubilee Mennonite Church:

Arman Habegger (Grace) moved to receive Americus Mennonite Fellowship, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, and Jubilee Mennonite Church as member congregations of Central District Conference. Paper ballot votes were taken.

Word from MC USA: Michael Danner, associate executive director for MC USA, shared that the entire staff of MC

USA operates with an open inbox policy and is open to answering any questions at any time. MC USA is made up of conferences of congregations. The viability and health of the conferences determines how MC USA is doing as well.

He thanked CDC's leadership and the conference for doing a fantastic job. Michael loves the way that CDC engages, especially at the Constituency Leaders Council level. The CDC leaders are present and leading in that context. They share what they have learned from the conference and represent CDC well. He expressed appreciation for the way that Doug Luginbill engages other conference ministers on issues related to all kinds of things with kindness and grace even though it is not always an easy space for him. He also expressed appreciation for CDC as a conference. He noticed that CDC takes its work as a conference seriously and that it is done with intention and great care. CDC is driven by a clear sense of values and identity about who it is as a people and about where you want to go. It makes a difference in leading from the position of knowing who you are and where you are headed.

Michael is in a settling phase from just having begun his work last year. Most of the executive board staff has turned over within the past year and they have spent the past year getting to know each other. They have recently had other staff changes in the communications staff. While they are sad to see these people go, it has created opportunities to make a change in the way communications are done. Will Laviest will become the CEO of communications. The goal is to pull together the fragmented way communications are done across MC USA, making it more streamlined and efficient and allowing people to go to one source to find information about any part of MC USA. MC USA will also be putting more staff time toward the Women in Leadership project. There are two full-time openings in MC USA: communications production coordinator and multi-media news editor. He invited delegates to share names of possible candidates with him.

Steve Hartman Keiser (Milwaukee) led delegates in singing SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*. Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street) led a moment of centering: Joy is more than energy for difficult times, it is also what powers abundance and being lavished in love. She invited delegates to reflect in silence on the question, "What abundance and being lavished in love has landed on you in recent days?"

Sharing around tables/open mic: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) shared that the board met in August to choose a theme for the next year. The theme that emerged was "Come, walk with us . . . to God knows where! The theme can be interpreted several ways, depending on where you put the emphasis. In Doug's experience as conference minister over the past three years, there have been surprises that have come our way in terms of where God might be leading. One of those was conversations with Allegheny Mennonite Conference. We didn't anticipate that before we got a call from them asking us to walk on a journey with them that turned out to be very fruitful. Even though our two conferences remain as two separate conferences, it built relationships. That was an unknown journey that we did not know where it would go.

About a year ago, Doug had some conversations with Charles Geiser from SEMILLA, a seminary in Guatemala. Again, we don't know where a relationship with SEMILLA might go, but we want to walk this journey and discover together where it might be leading us.

Doug provided some background information for the table discussions.

For thousands of years people have been on the move. Our faith, as part of the Abraham and Sarah story, is a journey story. Some of our stories are heroic and awe-inspiring; crossing the Red Sea to escape slavery and oppression. Some of our stories are horrific and awful; invading Caanan and destroying its inhabitants. Our God has been called Yahweh the warrior and El Shaddai the life-giver, the lion of justice and the dove of peace.

Our faith also includes the story of a young family fleeing death threats by an envious king, returning to their homeland only after the king has died. Settling in a Galilean fishing village, the family's young son, Jesus, matures and becomes an itinerant preacher and rabbi, announcing the reign of God, a kingdom of peace. His invitation to repentance and radical discipleship was good news for all people, Jew and Samaritan, male and female, slave and free, religious and suspicious. His death on the cross and remarkable resurrection despoiled the principalities and powers of politics and religion and set free the body and soul of all humanity. Salvation!

We cannot read our faith story without encountering migration and immigration, strangers and foreigners, angels and saviors, conflict and hospitality.

Hear just one small selection of scripture that speaks to this ongoing encounter with the stranger. Deuteronomy 10:17-22; *The Inclusive Bible*

YHWY is the God of gods,
the Sovereign of sovereigns,
the great God,
powerful and awe-inspiring,
who has no favorites and cannot be bribed;
Who brings justice to the orphan and the widowed,
and who befriends the foreigner among you
with food and clothing.
In the same way, you too must befriend the foreigner,
for you were once foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt.
It is YHWY, the God Most High,
whom you must serve with awe;
whom you must cling to and by whom you must swear;
who is your God;
who has done great things which your eyes have seen with awe.

I've been reading a book recently released by Herald Press by Karen Gonzalez entitled, "*The God who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong.*" The book is an autobiography of an immigrant from Guatemala. And it is written through the lens of scripture and faith. I highly recommend it. In the Foreword to the book, Sandra Maria Van Opstal states, "The story of Scripture is the story of displaced people. **Showing hospitality is not only for the benefit of the 'stranger' but for the mutuality and strengthening of the church.**"

Where is God leading us? How can we as individuals and as congregations of Central District Conference learn from one another about showing hospitality to the stranger? How might we be transformed by such hospitality?

Doug invited delegates to turn to pages 42-46 of the report book which outlined examples of resources that MC USA and CDC have used over the past 15 years to address migrant justice and racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation. The missional church committee has recently developed a task group to more specifically address these concerns.

Doug invited table groups to respond to the following questions:

- *What questions would you invite the Missional Church Committee task group to address in regard to racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation?
- *Are there activities and resources from your congregational experience (or other places) that have helped build relationships across race, culture and nationality? If so, please share an example.

Karla Minter (Open Table, Missional Church Committee) shared background information about SEMILLA. After Karla shared, table groups were invited to discuss the following question:

- *Have you or your congregation developed relationships with individuals or communities in Mexico, Central America and/or Latin America?

Open mic: Doug's replies are in italics.

**Kerry Strayer, Columbus:* Table 16 - The table group shared a number of activities that people are doing, such as having people in sanctuary, sister church relationships, and outreach to local communities. They struggled with the question of how do churches without obvious relational connections engage these issues. The group liked the idea of friendship as a two-way relationship.

**David Rensberger, Atlanta:* Table 2 - The group noted that relationships need to be mutual. We white folks need to make sure we are needed and wanted and have something that others want. We need to ask questions and listen.

**Joel Miller, Columbus:* Joel's family, including wife and three daughters, went to SEMILLA for three weeks last

summer. They found it was a very valuable learning environment for all ages. There were opportunities for language learning and relationship building. Understanding our own history is very intertwined with that of Guatemala and the region because of military political histories back to the cold war era, suspicions of land reform, and up to the present moment of the migration that is happening. Joel affirmed SEMILLA as a wonderful place to be a learner.

**David Moser, Southside:* Loren and Rachel Johns are serving as hosts for guests coming to SEMILLA. SEMILLA hosts ~7000 guest nights a year. He invited delegates to hold Rachel and Loren in prayer as they are currently walking with Rachel's sister Carol, who is dying of cancer.

**Annette Brill Bergstresser, Faith:* Annette's table group wondered how a relationship with SEMILLA might empower congregations relating to immigrant neighbors. They noted that Anton Flores, who spent significant time at SEMILLA, mentioned that a number of immigrants have internalized oppression and how churches have participated in that. He would find it liberating for congregations to offer retreats, encounters and curriculum to help undo internalized oppression. For example, looking theologically at questions such as, "Is it a sin to use fake papers to get a job?"

**Beth Peachey, Chicago Community:* Beth asked, "Where are we in this process? Are we still in the discerning stage and learning more about SEMILLA or have we actually approached them about a relationship?" *The initial conversation with Central District Conference happened when Charlie Geiser, North America representative to the board of SEMILLA, approached Doug and asked if he would like to get to know Willi Hugo. They met for coffee and got acquainted. Since then Doug has had different conversations with Charlie and explored what it might mean to have a formal relationship with SEMILLA at regional gatherings, with several people at AMBS, and with leaders from Central District at the Leadership Council. Feedback indicated that the leaders wondered about what a "formal relationship" might mean. They also recognized that some congregations are thinking about immigration and migration. In response to a question about what SEMILLA might want, Willi Hugo said that friendships have happened in a variety of ways with different organizations and churches throughout the history of SEMILLA. They are interested in welcoming us as learners with them and welcome financial support as encouragement for their ministries to share Anabaptist theology and understanding across the Spanish speaking world. It is a two way street. We are currently continuing to gather feedback and sharing the SEMILLA story. We are in educational mode of sharing the story of SEMILLA so we can know more about it.*

**Ron Guengerich, Eighth Street:* Ron was on a fellowship and learning tour sponsored by MMN and Central Plains Conference recently. Central Plains has the type of relationship we are talking about with the Ecuadorian Mennonite Church. It might be helpful to talk with people from Central Plains to see how they established their friendship and what it meant.

**Justin Weaver, First Mennonite Bluffton:* Justin went to SEMILLA through Bluffton University as a junior in high school. The experience gave him the chance to gain more confidence in speaking the language, learning about the culture, and hearing stories from the people. He learned about their experience during the civil war and how US was partly the cause. They also got to hike up a volcano and roast marshmallows on top of it.

**Elli Winter, St Paul:* The statement says it is about racism and antipathy amongst different cultural groups. How should the church address racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation? Elli wondered how the church connects with the diversity of modern day America? Why is the church itself so self-segregating? Jesus did not do that, he went where people are different.

**Matthew Yoder, Grace:* The conversation was very confusing to Matthew until he understood that SEMILLA needs money and that CDC has money. We don't want to be in a patron/client relationship but we want to be in a mutual friendship. What can we do about that? In exchange for our money, SEMILLA has goods of cultural competency and Anabaptist in a Latin American context that we as people trying to do this cultural competency work might benefit from in a mutual friendship relationship and financial partnership with SEMILLA.

Introduction of Jane Wood: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) introduced Jane Wood, President of Bluffton University to the delegates and offered a prayer of blessing.

Introduction of Guests: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) welcomed and introduced guests and representatives from Mennonite Church USA executive leadership and its agencies, Mennonite schools and from other organizations related to the conference.

Lunch, Visiting Displays

Delegate Session II

Steve Hartman Keiser (Milwaukee) led delegates in singing SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*.

Announcing Membership Vote and Presentation of Blessing Cups: Arman Habegger (Grace) announced the votes to accept Americus Mennonite Fellowship, Emmanuel Mennonite Church, and Jubilee Mennonite Church into membership were unanimous. He presented each congregation with a cup filled with blessings from Central District Conference congregations.

Term Review of Conference Minister: Delegates affirmed the recommendation from the board of directors to renew Doug Luginbill's term for another three years.

Congregational Story - Madison Mennonite Church: J Denny Weaver shared the following story:

Madison Mennonite is a predominantly white, middle class, relatively well-educated congregation. In recent conversations we have begun addressing white privilege and our role in it. The question is, "What does it mean for a congregation like ours to be welcoming, both in our worship services and in our daily lives?"

*Conversations about these issues are difficult, and we are not all in the same place. However, our walk to "God knows where" includes a number of prophetic voices and examples that show a way forward. Pastor Tim's listening sessions at the beginning of his transition ministry surfaced this challenge. Alison Brookins, now pastor at Chicago Community Mennonite Church, brought her theatre piece to Madison and taught us about the Doctrine of Discovery. This race-based doctrine became the justification for the entire colonial enterprise around the world; we are still feeling its impact in our country. In their work with the University of Wisconsin, both Jocelyn and Ruth have made us aware of issues facing the indigenous people of Wisconsin. Valleri's husband came from El Salvador, which means that Valleri brings a diverse family to our congregation. She also has a ministry of befriending and bringing people to church with whom we might not otherwise worship. Jeremiah is leader of members of our congregation that do repair and remodeling with the Nehemiah Center, a black-led, anti-racist program in Madison. Lonna led a group in reading and discussing the book *White Fragility*. Miriam, who came from India but who has now left the country because her visa expired, challenged us to recognize our biases and blind spots and to take real steps to counter them. For myself, I am engaged in an ongoing conversation with an African American pastor about his experiences in making his congregation a satellite of a large evangelical church in Madison. He and I are working towards a conversation between members of his congregation and Madison Mennonite. Rather than seeking a lowest common denominator, our goal is to discover how we can learn from and be enriched by our distinct identities.*

These examples are steps Madison Mennonite is taking along the path to "God knows where." We are discovering as we go where that path may lead, as we continue to ask how our congregation can be welcoming to people who do not look like us, in our worship services and in our daily walk.

Storytelling stations: In keeping with the theme, *Come, walk with us. . . To God knows where!*, delegates were invited to participate in the following four storytelling stations. Each station told their story four different times, each 25 minutes in length. After 25 minutes, the participants rotated to another storytelling station.

- *Biblical Storytelling - Prophetic Voices: Moving toward right relationships with Karla Minter and Deron Brill Bergstresser
- *How Camp Fridenswald Changes Lives with Jenna Liechty Martin
- *Stories of Call from AMBS with Janeen Bertsche Johnson
- *Congregations and Prison Ministry with Tim Lind and Christine Nofsinger

Break with snacks provided by Milwaukee Mennonite Church

WORSHIP II: Perseverance/Persistence

Hymnsing in MMC sanctuary

Song/worship leader: Andrea Welty Peachey

Offering for Central District Conference

Communion

Dinner

Seminars

- *Looking Forward to #MennoCon19 led by Michael Danner
- *Sanctuary for our undocumented neighbors led by Isaac Villegas and Joel Miller
- *Faith Formation for Children and Families led by Lora Nafziger
- *A Life in Story led by Jane Wood

Saturday, June 22

WORSHIP III: Thriving

Speaker: Alison Brookins
Text: Luke 19:1-10

Break with snacks provided by St Paul Mennonite Fellowship

Delegate Session III

Steve Hartman Keiser (Milwaukee) led delegates in singing SS #39 *Will you come and follow me*.

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (Eighth Street) led a moment of centering. She invited participants to reflect on the following question, “When you hear God call your name, what energy accompanies that calling?” Following a period of silence, Brenda shared that joy is experiencing the energy of God’s realm. Desmond Tutu has said that “Joy is available right now without waiting for anything.” Participants engaged in a few moments of silence.

Missional Church Committee Report: Committee members introduced themselves: Karla Minter (Open Table), Tim Stair (Hively Avenue), Valerie Showalter (Shalom Mennonite Congregation), Matthew Yoder (Grace), Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community), Mark Rupp (Columbus), Matthew Morin (Milwaukee)

Using a skit, the committee shared about their work:

****Reign of God grants:**

A grant of \$1200 was awarded to the northwest Ohio congregations of First Mennonite Bluffton, Grace Mennonite, Lima Mennonite and Salem Mennonite (Ohio Conference) to bring Bryan Suderman Moyer to the area for a weekend event that was free and open to the public. These events included a Friday night concert at one of the sponsoring churches, a Saturday workshop at a sponsoring church, and Sunday morning worship at one of the sponsoring churches.

Bringing Bryan to the Bluffton, Ohio area provided an opportunity for Anabaptist Mennonites and other people of Christian faith in our communities to re-ground their lives in a Christ-centered biblical approach to Christian faith that cuts through and rises above divisive political rhetoric in public discourse. This was an opportunity for Christians in our communities to remember who we are and whose we are. It was an opportunity to re-imagine better ways forward for individuals, families, communities and society than are being offered by the current political sector, and the 7-minute news cycle that provides an endless flow of commentary on the political sector. It was exciting to be with people who are imagining new ways of being church and implementing them already.

****SENT conference:**

Carolyn May (Columbus) shared what she experienced at the 2019 SENT conference. Carolyn attended the SENT conference because she is interested in exploring what it might be like to have a new congregation in the Columbus area. She learned that there is not a ten-step process to planting a church but that it is very contextual to the area. There are a lot of conversations, dreaming, and collaborations that will take place during the process. It was also valuable to Carolyn to meet a number of Mennonites who have done this work and to become aware of the resources that will be available to her in the church planting process.

****Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Reconciliation Task Group (Kiva Nice-Webb)**

People on the task group are: Annette Bergstresser (Faith), Charles Bontrager (First Wadsworth), Sandra Miller (Silverwood), Kiva Nice-Webb (Chicago Community, chair and committee rep), Cyneatha Millsaps

(Community), and Isaac Villegas (Chapel Hill)

The initial charge for the task group was to enhance the missional capacity of congregations and provide essential and needed resources for them to effectively minister in their contexts. The charge to the task group was to develop strategies for addressing racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation. Such strategies should include, but not be limited to, an assessment plan to determine where different congregations are on the journey to addressing racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation and providing congregations with four short provocations to begin, further or reignite conversations about racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation work in their contexts.

The task group was to be made up of five white people - one from the Missional Church Committee and four from CDC at large - and was to be accountable to two persons of color who would advise the task group without being required to attend all meetings. The rationale for this configuration was based on the idea that white supremacy creates blind spots that greatly benefit from the checks and balances of accountability provided by folks of color.

What we have been doing

The structure has been generally a check-in, sharing regarding the practice we tried in between the meetings (different each time), receiving feedback from the Accountability members, and setting a practice to try before the next meeting. Examples of practices have been gathering stories of transformation (no matter how small) in the area of RER reconciliation from within our CDC congregations, taking a personal inventory on ourselves and RER reconciliation work, and holding everyone in interculturally tense situations as “whole and complete” (including ourselves). Each of these practices has emerged from our conversations, as we’re trying to be careful to not posit ourselves as “experts” but as intentional explorers about how to scale RER reconciliation work so that we are not doing nothing or forgetting the ongoing nature of the work in our congregations, selves and world but are also not overwhelmed into inaction. Good guidelines from the Accountability members have been the reminder that the trust needed to do serious, deep racial reconciliation work takes years to develop, and that while white people figuring out their own depths of internalized racist behavior and thoughts is good, the work of this task group must eventually lead to action, not just more talking.

Goals

We started out trying to figure out if an assessment tool was needed to do this work for CDC congregations, or how to gather information about all CDC congregations and their work (or gaps in work) towards Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation. But then we realized that we might need to slow down and get out of our heads, because an opportunity would be missed if we just recommend more “book learning” or trainings with just head knowledge about racial injustice.

So, we’re trying to figure out what happens when we develop trust and have real conversations about race, and how that feels, what works and what doesn’t, where we get stuck, and in so doing “practice” so that we can offer testimony and models from what we’re practicing. It’s turning into almost a small group model. I think a challenge for us moving forward will be to constantly be connecting our reflection practices with work out in the world. That’s usually where our individual reflections come from — us practicing out in our contexts and bringing that information back to our meetings, but I’m interested to see where we go from here, with an eye towards giving CDC congregations the four provocations that John Powell originally envisioned as a product from this Task Group. One might be the formation of small groups specifically focused around developing the trust needed for accountability, challenge and support as folks in congregations work towards racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation in their contexts, but it’s perhaps too early to tell.

Defining “The Problem”

Isaac Villegas suggested that we name The Problem, model sharing vulnerably/transparently from our struggles/successes in grappling with The Problem, and invite folks to make commitments to work personally and systemically to address The Problem in their own contexts.

We see the core problem that our task group is addressing as understanding and naming that we are part of a

society that has been structured around (1) assigning value to people groups based on traits such as skin color, ethnic background, religion, ability, gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (among others) and (2) giving benefits and power to those who are defined as being at the top of this hierarchy (the dominant group/s). The resulting power/principality of white supremacy is an economic, social, political and theological system that centers and privileges white (male/cisgender/heterosexual) bodies and the white (male/cisgender/heterosexual) experience and European expressions of Christianity and disempowers those who do not fit those identities (who are considered “other”). The problem is not primarily about individual bias or relationships, though both are important, but about the systemic and structural ways the whole world has been set up by white people to benefit white people. Whiteness is not a cultural category but a power relationship category.

Those of us who are white people within CDC acknowledge that our whiteness has let us ignore white supremacy. As mostly white congregations in mostly white areas, we’ve largely been able to talk about racism in terms of personal bias and offload it as a problem that other white people have. We often haven’t done, or felt a need to, or known how to do the hard work of confronting white supremacy in our lives and our communities. The lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in our conference could be seen as an external manifestation or symptom of this core problem — not the problem itself but a harmful outgrowth of the false superiority of whiteness as the norm for human lives, instead of God’s norm for human lives.

Whiteness as an ideology does harm and prevents right relationships between us and others and with ourselves, which is a justice problem and a spiritual problem within our own lives. Following Christ calls us to strive toward ways of relating that regard everyone as an equally beloved child of God and to challenge the racialized hierarchical categories and power structures that the U.S. was founded upon and that we have been steeped in through living in our place and time.

In *Trouble I’ve Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (Herald, 2016) Drew G.I. Hart writes, “Christians must do a better job of thinking, analyzing, discussing and ultimately transforming our racialized lives into anti-racist and anti-hierarchical ways of life that conform to the way of Jesus. We must learn to see and understand the racism all around us so that we can faithfully resist being complicit in its patterns. Once we are able to see it, we must engage in initiatives of deep metanoia, or repentance — initiatives that change us from racialized accommodation to resistance” (23).

Our struggles and successes

The format of our meetings has generally consisted of those of us who identify as “white” grappling with whiteness and imagining what might constructively exist in its place if it were dismantled with accountability to communities of color. Our Accountability members have borne witness, gently calling out blind spots when they arise and offering perspectives and direction.

Through our conversations in our meetings and our relational/attentiveness experiments in between meetings, we have discovered a common thread of the disconnect between “book learning” about racial injustice and experiential transformation in our relationships to self, God and others through deconstructing our attachment to the lies of whiteness ideology or white supremacy.

Some of the lies of this ideology are that white people have to be right and to be in control of situations; there is only one good way to do things; results matter more than process; white people have boundless power; mistakes are the end of the world; etc. To expand our ability to resist these lies within ourselves and our relationships, we have been trying experiments in being wrong, making mistakes, exploring multiple good ways to do things, practicing humility, etc. This has required vulnerability and does not always feel good or clear — least of all, “productive.” But we have noticed the Spirit moving with us as we stumble and try experiments. We have given thanks for the grace of relationships across cultural differences. We have felt despair at how to shift something so large and harmful and have felt comfort in the reminder that we are not God.

We want to note that we’ve also struggled with how to write this report. We recognize that the work of dismantling white supremacy is primarily work that white people need to own, including white people within

CDC. But is our language in this report excluding people of color in CDC or somehow misrepresenting our conference? That's not our intention, and we need help in addressing this blind spot.

We note that we have focused more on racism than on the ethnic and religious portions of our group's mandate. We acknowledge that those of us who are white ethnic Mennonites have tended to use our ethnicity to shore up in-group status, identifying as white and using knowledge of Mennonite cultural traditions and "Mennonite last names" to show that we are "real Mennonites."

An invitation

For those of us who are white and want to engage transformation in these areas, we find that being willing to spend time sitting with and exploring questions that feel difficult and uncomfortable is a necessary part of such a process.

"If we are to better interpret racialized situations and moments, we must begin to look for widespread patterns through history and society and to listen attentively to the voices of those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in America," writes Hart (55). We've grown from and been humbled by seeking to understand history from the perspectives of those who have been oppressed and marginalized, acknowledging how we and others have benefitted from unjust actions. Here are some questions that have come up for us:

- *Whose land am I/are we living and worshiping on? Have I/we repented of how we have benefitted from its unjust seizure from the Indigenous people who inhabited it?
- *How could we or our parents afford to buy houses? (For example, housing acts in the 1930s and 40s prohibited African Americans from purchasing homes – and thereby from accumulating generational wealth through property value appreciation and inheritances – and also created greater racial segregation in housing.)
- *Have I/we reflected on the Mennonite assumption of white identity in the wake of the anti-German sentiment during and after the World Wars?
- *How am I and how are we in CDC holding to slave holder theology, which upholds unjust systems while simultaneously exonerating those of us who perpetuated and benefitted from these systems? What are we doing that allows us to separate our theology from the work of justice?
- *Why is CDC such a comfortable conference for white churches?
- *Why have non-white Mennonites not sought CDC out as a place where theological diversity is welcome?

We'd like to invite you, in your contexts, to:

- *Give us your reactions to what you've heard from us (positive and negative).
- *Commit to seek out and cultivate relationships of accountability where you can share in experiments in unlearning whiteness ideology in your contexts and in yourselves. (Build on existing relationships; don't try to use other people as new relationships for your own growth.)
- *Commit to sharing with others about your experiences.

None of this work should be in place of action towards racial justice in a systemic way, but externally focused activism or education alone cannot be the whole project.

Congregational Story - Covenant Mennonite Fellowship: Mary Etta King shared the following: Covenant Mennonite Fellowship in Sarasota, Florida is a Mennonite church dedicated to sharing the good news of God with our Sarasota community and to the broader world. Our mission is to follow the way of Jesus in the Anabaptist peace tradition.

Covenant Mennonite Fellowship believes that in our worship, our fellowship, and our every-day lives, the Spirit of Jesus meets us exactly where we are with healing, hope, and wholeness. Our hope is to provide a contemplative, welcoming, Anabaptist community that inspires people to joyful living, healing, peace, reconciliation, and mercy for all and for our natural world.

At Covenant, we seek to practice a spirituality of hands, hearts and minds. We sing hymns old and new, share about our vision for peace and justice, celebrate through intellectually engaging worship, and bless one another in authentic Christian community. We find spiritual meaning through our scriptures, silence, the arts, sacred symbols, thought-provoking discussion, and more! At Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, we find the encouragement to actively participate in a new culture of God – a culture of grace, peace, nonviolence, joy, and service in Jesus' name.

Covenant Mennonite Fellowship was the result of a vision for a nontraditional Anabaptist presence in the Sarasota community. Talk of forming the church began in the early 1990s with members of other local Mennonite congregations. They met as a small group for a few years and then disbanded.

In January of 2000, a remnant of the original group met to reorganize the effort. It was clear they wanted to identify with the Mennonite Church denomination because of their Anabaptist beliefs. On June 18, 2000, the church held its first public worship service. The fellowship was accepted into full membership in the Southeast Mennonite Conference in 2003. When Randy Spaulding came out as a gay pastor to the church community in 2009, the Southeast Mennonite Conference removed his credentials. After a couple years of dialogue and discussion with the Conference, Covenant withdrew its membership in 2011. Covenant reaffirmed a commitment to Christian Anabaptist and Mennonite values and requested membership with Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. The church was accepted into CDC in 2014.

In 2017, the church outgrew its location and moved to 1400 S. Cattleman Road. Even there because of a swell of people who visit sunny Florida during the winter months and particularly those who want to be in a Mennonite Church, our numbers have grown even more. It's an unusual phenomena that a church of 40-50 people grows to 140 through the months of January-April. Because of this we met in a conference room at the Carlisle Inn. Attendance dips back to the usual size for the summer months.

The church has been served by several pastors and interim pastors throughout the years:

Barry Loop: 2000-2001
Randy Spaulding: 2003-2011
Jim Miller: 2012-2014
Melissa Roth: 2014
Tara Plank: 2014-2016
Andrew Hudson: 2016-2017
Linford and Mary Etta King: 2017-Present

Covenant Mennonite Fellowship is a peace church in the Anabaptist tradition. We are made up of a mixture of people of Mennonite and non-Mennonite backgrounds who bring various traditions together. Our model for living is the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who called people to live lives that reflect the compassion, healing, peace, justice, and mercy of God to all peoples and nations, regardless of culture or creed, and to all creation.

Our values include:

Following God in the way of Jesus

Faith as a journey with intellectual and spiritual integrity
Service, non-violence, reconciliation, and care of the environment
The truth and vitality of Christianity while respecting the beliefs of other faiths
Equality and the use of all people's gifts in the church
The arts, music, symbolism, liturgy, and contemplation in worship
Non-violent and inclusive language
Broader Anabaptist relationships through Central District Conference and Mennonite Church USA

Ministerial Committee Report: [Committee members]

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, Dean of Lifelong Learning at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), expressed appreciation for the opportunity to partner with Central District Conference to offer the Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program. The Journey program is designed for people exploring a call to pastoral ministry, as well as for pastors and other congregational leaders called without specific training for ministry. Learners follow a curriculum focused on six guideposts: spiritual disciplines, theological and biblical studies, character development, mentoring and community, gift development, and leadership skills. An important part of the program is the mentor that each participant receives. They meet every other week and meet together twice a year with all the other mentor/mentee pairs in learning retreats. The Journey participants do online studies the rest of the year.

Currently, Dennis Miller (Silverwood) and mentor John Heyerly (Silverwood), JP Schumacher (First Bluffton) and mentor Gloria Hernandez Bucher (First Bluffton), and Jan Croyle (First Wadsworth) and mentor Marilyn Rossiter (Summit) are participating in the Journey program. Ardean Friesen (Silverwood) and Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) serve on the Journey board and Donna Mast (Silverwood) is an online instructor.

Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton) introduced Dennis Miller (Silverwood) and presented a certificate of completion for the Journey program and a journey lamp. Jewel presented gifts from AMBS: a registration to Pastors and Leaders 2020 and a subscription to *Vision: A Journal of Church and Theology*. Dennis thanked Jewel and Doug for the opportunity to participate in the Journey program.

Doug Luginbill recognized those who have been newly licensed, ordained, or serving in new ministries the past year from July 1, 2018 - May 31, 2019.

Melissa Florer-Bixler (Raleigh) ordained

Sally Weaver Glick (Open Table) licensed toward ordination

Catherine Lee (Chapel Hill) licensed toward ordination

Anna Yoder Schlabach (Assembly) licensed toward ordination

Isaac Villegas (Chapel Hill) received and reactivated credential

Matt Pritchard (Berea/Campus Ministry at Georgia Tech) received credential from Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference

Jane Hooper Peifer (Shalom Mennonite Congregation) received credential from Atlantic Coast Mennonite Conference. Jane is assisting Eastern Mennonite Seminary with a pastor mentoring program as well as providing spiritual direction

Janice Troyer (Silverwood) installed as a member of the pastoral team at Silverwood

Rachel Taylor (Raleigh) installed as the intergenerational pastor at Raleigh

Tom Kauffman (Assembly) commissioned as transitional pastor at Paoli

Sarah Thompson, licensed for specific ministry (May 2018-May 2019) with the Mennonite

Boomerang project

Doug thanked them for their leadership and ministry. He led in a prayer of affirmation.

Ardean Friesen (Silverwood) invited committee members forward. Ray Person (First Bluffton) recognized the pastors who were credentialed with CDC and have died this past year.

Alice Ruth Ramseyer, died November 25, 2018

Howard Habegger, died December 28, 2018

Buton Yost, January 7, 2019

Ardean directed participants to the committee report on p75 and encouraged them to read it. The committee has worked this year to create and update policies and procedures, including the Healthy Boundaries Training and have worked on the roles and responsibilities for the conference minister. The committee has decided not to do automatic credential reviews for pastors who perform same sex ceremonies if they do so with the backing of their congregation. They will only do a pastoral credential review if there is a complaint received.

He thanked Doug Luginbill on behalf of the ministerial committee for his work for the conference.

ACTION: 2019-2020 Spending Plan: On behalf of the Board of Directors, Tim Lind (Florence) moved to adopt the 2019-2020 spending plan as presented. The motion was affirmed.

Everence: Steve Bustos (Silverwood) shared some of the resources available to congregations at Everence. More information can be found on the website at everence.com

*Sharing Funds

*End of life issues

*Challenging capitalism

*Lily grant to support pastors on their financial journey, debt relief, provide financial planning subsidy, and provide educational events

*Endowments, long term planning

*Online process to use pastor salary guidelines

Open Mic: Arman Habegger (Grace) invited participants to share comments.

**David Rensberger (Atlanta):* David has heard second hand comments from rural white Mennonite churches puzzling over what they can do in the way of racial reconciliation. He grew up in such a church in Indiana and remembered that in the early '60s his dad told him about Simmie Bontrager, who owned the local feed mill. Simmie wrote a letter to John Howard Griffin, who had written *Black Like Me* to come and talk at their church. Our rural churches are part of their community and their community is part of our country. Whatever you can say and do within that community, whoever you can invite to come in and speak at your church, whoever you can build relationships with can change and have an effect on, not only your congregation, but maybe on your community at large. It really is a process of small changes. The changes that happen in the smallest places can sometimes make the biggest difference.

**Walter Sawatsky (Hively Avenue):* Walter shared that there were planes in the air for about an hour before the President cancelled the attack on Iran. Walter thinks it is a slight sign of hope that we may get back to appropriate treaties with Iran. He hoped we could say a prayer of thanks.

**Russ Miller (Jubilee):* On behalf of Jubilee, Russ thanked everyone for the welcome they have received at CDC.

Constituency Leaders Council (CLC) Report: Doug Luginbill (First Bluffton)

Twice a year, three representatives of each of the 17 MC USA conferences and other groups gather for the Constituency Leaders Council. The purpose of CLC is "to worship and pray together, to encourage faithfulness, to share ideas and resources, to process concerns, and to provide discernment and give counsel to MC USA Executive Board and to each other on issues of life and faith in MC USA."

Our CDC representatives are chosen based on position; President, President Elect and Conference Minister. The past two years this has been Anna Yoder Schlabach, Arman Habegger and Doug Luginbill. Observations from our October meeting in Chicago and our March meeting in Hesston:

*Glen Guyton, our new Executive Director of MC USA, is committed to transparency, speaking the truth in love, and moving forward with those who are committed to MC USA.

*There is a bit more focus on resourcing or equipping leaders at CLC. Michael Danner, Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality and Engagement, whom we met yesterday, thinks about organizational health. He wonders if leaders in MC USA have perhaps over functioned in “polity” and under functioned in “theology.” It is sometimes easier to think about and focus on right and healthy structures and relationships and sidestep the more difficult theological differences that are uncomfortable. Yet, tending to healthy structures and creating safe spaces allows us to have the harder theological conversations.

At the fall CLC meeting Michael also briefly summarized “The Five Disfunctions of a Team” by Patrick Lencioni, which are:

- **Absence of Trust
- **Fear of Conflict
- **Lack of Commitment
- **Avoidance of Accountability
- **Inattention to Results

*At the spring CLC meeting, Michael made the following observation:

“Section III of the Membership Guidelines of MC USA continues to cause some tension, given the variety of opinion and practice related to pastors living in same-sex relationships, for credentialing pastors in such relationships, and to the permission for pastors to conduct same-sex marriages. There is a separation between what we say we believe, and the practice of some conferences and congregations in opposition. There is a call by some for the Executive Board of MC USA to take some kind of action... The ultimate question is, what are we going to do with the Membership Guidelines?”

Michael then led a process to seek responses to the question, “What is the best way for MC USA to discern the future of the Membership Guidelines?” CLC participants engaged in a healthy conversation over two days and offered various ideas and suggestions for the MC USA executive board to consider. Ideas ranged from “setting aside” the guidelines to inviting every congregation to participate in a process of discernment regarding the guidelines. No decisions have yet been made by the Executive Board and there are no plans to engage delegates at Convention in Kansas City around this topic. Perhaps something will be brought to the delegates in 2021 in Cincinnati.

*The possible merger of *The Mennonite* and *Mennonite World Review* is back on the table.

*A final observation is that CLCs can be fun!

Camp Friedenswald Highlights: Jenna Liechty Martin (Emmaus Road, Executive Director)

Jenna brought greetings from Camp Friedenswald. She finds joy in hearing stories of Camp Friedenswald from others and how the camp impacts their lives. She shared there are 30 summer staff are helping, 11 of them from seven CDC congregations. She asked some of the staff why they said yes to serving at camp this summer. Some of the responses included:

- *I really wanted to come and experience a chance to grow and develop as a leader.
- *To spend some more time in a place that has been formative in my own life.
- *I came because I felt called.

When she asked how they felt called, many responded that someone had tapped their shoulder or encouraged them to step into a role of leadership. Camp has been serving the church through the young people who give up their summer for service. Through their service they experience growth and development as leaders and many go on to serve the church in other capacities throughout their lifetimes.

She expressed gratitude for the pastors who have agreed to serve as camp pastors this summer, including Carrie Mast, First Bluffton; Matthew Yoder, Grace; Melissa Florer-Bixler, Raleigh; and Michael Crosby, First Urbana.

Jenna shared camp staff has taken time to tend to aging buildings and spaces that have been around for about 70 years. This past year areas that have been updated include: the main beach and new, natural sea wall that was put in, an amphitheater seating area, a new slip and slide where the tube run is, a new trail map and guide. Over the past two years, camp has been making strides towards becoming a more sustainable and resilient organization. She shared numbers and ways about how that has been happening. Jenna shared ways delegates can get involved:

- *Mentor/mentee retreats
- *Church retreats
- *Sustainability retreats
- *Making comforters and blankets for camp

MCC Great Lakes Report: Eric Kurtz invited everyone who has served or volunteered with MCC to stand. He thanked them for all the ways they have participated in MCC. Eric gave a brief history of the formation of MCC and shared about the centennial celebration.

Listening Committee Report: Arman Habegger (Grace) introduced the members of the Listening Committee: Brenda North Martin (Raleigh), Lori Nester (First Bluffton), and Tyler Klassen (Hively Avenue).

*Brenda shared impressions of the delegate sessions. Through sessions punctuated by bodies and chairs falling, our songs, prayers, and laughter rising, the CDC delegate body and guests journeyed through our agenda. From the invitation to remember joy manifested in our lives to the challenge to recognize and address the self-segregation of our worshiping communities we walked together listening to the congregational, personal and organizational stories. We invited three new congregations to accompany us on our missional journeys. Our conversations at table helped us get acquainted and reacquainted along with further discussions about how we are being called to partner with diverse folk and organizations, specifically SEMILLA, the Anabaptist seminary in Guatemala. A significant vote of confidence came when the delegate body voted unanimously to extend Doug Luginbill's tenure as conference minister for an additional three years. She thanked Doug for his love for the congregations and pastors that make up the delegate body that is evident in word and deed. She thanked Arman for his wielding of the gavel so effectively these past two years. Brenda thanked Emma for keeping us organized beyond our wildest dream from Milwaukee to Sarasota and all points in between.

Tyler shared that our conference theme was "Come, walk with us... To God knows where?" In our worship, we walked through obstacles into thriving. Thursday's worship started our walk with the theme "Obstacles on our Journey." Litanies and hymns reminded us of the difficulties we face as we try to remain faithful to God's call. Anton Flores-Maisonet called us to recognize the Undocumentable in our midst and the Undocumentable inside of ourselves. He called us to live a Subversive and radical gospel. He reminded us that we may be on Journeys, not of our own choosing but that our journeys intersect with, and in ways that bring us closer to God's hopes for us and our church. He showed us the power of vulnerability as we live our call of radical community and witness. Let us not be so tired out! Let us sit by our own wells and practice good self-care.

Friday's hymn sing, was a reminder of the power of community: The light, colors and shape of this space guide our hearts and spirits toward God. Our soaring voices together brought us closer to God with hymns of praise, blessing, encouragement and, worship. The scripture called us to genuine love and to remember

the genuine steadfast love of God. And as the echoes of our singing and scripture rumbled in our souls, we took and broke the bread, and we took the cup as we remembered and celebrated the life of Jesus and his death for us. As our worship came to an end, once again our voices soared into song, this time *Praise God from Whom*, HWB #118.

Saturday, we were lifted into joy and God's good pleasure. We gratefully sang our praises, shared pipe cleaners and were bathed in glorious morning light. Alison Brookins shared with us her message: Bailing out Noah's ark with a teaspoon. Her message told us that joy is a "God thing." She spoke of the beauty of Jesus' face, and what can happen when we fully look at that face, how threading the needle of entering into hope of following the unexplainable. She spoke of living in the deepest and most profound joy, and how we thrive in joy not by what we know but by what we hold here... to follow the longing deep... that thing that just wants to be a little bit closer. To go and to find that thing that is the source of the deepest joy in your life. She called us to orient ourselves toward joy, with hope, with courage, with persistence, and with faith.

Tyler thanked the following people:

- *Those leaving leadership positions in Central District for work, dedication and vision to CDC.
- *Those coming into leadership positions for committing their time, energy and vision to the future work.
- *Those who serve on boards and other committees.

Lori shared that they have heard many conversations. The analogy of Central District being like a family, that we are all adult siblings definitely feels very appropriate. This feels like a family reunion. Some have been coming for many years and others more recently. The hope is that those who are new do feel welcome. It has been a wonderful time to reconnect with friends. A common theme throughout the weekend was the weather and how much rain has been in our home areas. We are grateful for the beautiful weather we experienced here. We've heard many stories of what is happening in the different areas of the conference even during breaks and mealtimes. We have been open and honest in our sharing around tables and have been vulnerable with each other. We've heard stories of places such as Camp Friedenswald, which we have declared the best and stories of other projects. We've seen the knitted items from a prison ministry. We are excited to have intentional listening, being vulnerable and exploring the path of the journey together even though it may be difficult at times.

Lori thanked our hosting congregation of Milwaukee Mennonite and the other CDC West congregations who provided the snacks and helped care for the other details involved in hosting.

Evaluations/Committee Nominations: Arman Habegger (Grace) invited delegates to fill out the evaluation forms and share suggestions for committee nominations.

Close of Delegate Sessions: Arman announced that next year's annual meeting will be June 25-27, 2020, meeting place TBD. Arman handed the gavel to president-elect Anna Yoder Schlabach, who closed the 63rd delegate session on Central District Conference with the sounding of the gavel. She thanked Milwaukee for hosting the annual meeting in their space.

Songs/Benediction: Steve Hartman Keiser led in singing SS #40 *Som 'landela (We will follow)* Doug Luginbill ended with a benediction.

Close of Annual Meeting

Emma Hartman
Recorder