

## Annual Meeting, June 27

### Worshipping “together, apart”

With the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and weeks of unrest because of racial injustices, Central District Conference held its 2020 Annual Meeting by video conferencing on June 27.

Opening the recorded worship service, Doug Luginbill, conference minister, acknowledged that the representatives from the conference's 46 congregations in 11 states were worshipping “together, apart.” He said: “We are a resilient people, a faithful community, a conference of Anabaptist Jesus-centered congregations, knowing God's love and answering God's call in whatever situation we find ourselves. I pray we can learn from one another, speak uneasy truths with one another, lament and cry with one another, and allow the Spirit to bless us with a yearning so compelling we can do nothing but follow her leading.”

Glen Guyton, executive director of Mennonite



Doug Luginbill opened the video worship service from his home congregation, First Mennonite in Bluffton, Ohio. The worship space featured four works of art, created with the conference theme, “Spirit, bless our souls with yearning.” To view the worship service, visit <https://vimeo.com/430229775>

Church USA, also used the conference's theme, “Spirit, bless our souls with yearning” in his sermon. He said, “I want the word of God to stick to my ribs. I want that passionate yearning that you talk about to stay with you all day long. We want to be filled with the Holy Spirit and we want that to be part of our being, that lasting substance, that *ruach*, that breath of God.”

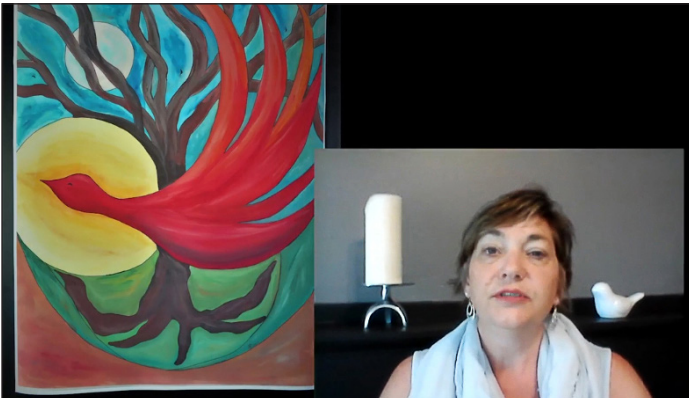
He ended with a clear call to the church, “I challenge our church to bring the peace ... to extend peace to our communities. That needs to be part of our yearning. We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms and all places. That's part of the call of this church.”



Glen Guyton, in his sermon, challenged listeners to let people see what we say.

## Art pieces expand the theme: “Spirit, bless our souls with yearning”

Four artists, one from each of the regions in the conference, were commissioned to create a work of art that reflects the theme of yearning. In the recorded worship service, each artist shared about the thinking, hopes, processes or yearning that were part of their creative work.



**Kay Bontrager-Singer, Faith Mennonite, Goshen, Ind.**

“My art piece is about my yearning for the Holy Spirit to show up and transform the ordinary. It’s about God disrupting and disorienting my humdrum ways of engaging the sacred, so that something new and holy can be born within me, something new and holy can be born within and among us.”



**Eugene Stutzman, Covenant Fellowship, Sarasota, Fla.**

Eugene Stutzman called the stole he created “Yearning hands.” It uses “one of the most iconic images in the Anabaptist canon, Jan Luyken’s 1685 etching of Dirk Willms turning back to rescue his pursuer.

“When I was given the theme of the 2020 Annual Meeting, my first thought was to work with the hands of the etching; especially in this time of pandemic and social injustice, our hands need to be yearning to help, to lift up, to show love and to show compassion.”

**Anita Lehman, First Mennonite, Bluffton, Ohio**



Anita Lehman used the first line of text of the hymn “Healer of our every ill” as the foundation of her piece. She put the words and corresponding notes on the canvas, then added shapes and lines to make a composition.

“My wish is that for you who see it, you will be able to find the words and not only find the words within the images, but also experience the words in your own life and circumstances.”

**Rachel Horst Lehman, First Mennonite, Champaign-Urbana, Ill.**

Rachel Horst Lehman created a land mosaic of the CDC West region with the names of indigenous people groups printed over the areas they tended, text from a land acknowledgement, flower and corn beadwork motifs inspired by Potawatomi designs, and one bead to correspond with each CDC congregation in the region.



“My hope for this piece is to communicate a sense of yearning for social justice for claiming our part in history and actively seeking peace.”

To hear the artists’ statements in their entirety, view the worship video:

<https://vimeo.com/430229775>

Screen captures from recording on Vimeo.



Annual Meeting


# The business of CDC

Anna Yoder Schlabach, conference president, wove the conference’s theme with current issues in her opening report. She asked: “How shall we respond to the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor? How shall we join our voices with the chorus of voices for racial justice? How are we living out Christ’s ongoing invitation to make manifest the reign of God?”

“Throughout this year, the Spirit has been at work among us. Each of us in our own contexts has been discerning how to follow the Spirit’s surprising and unpredictable stirrings.”

Conference delegates voted to approve two items of business:

- the slate of officers, with new and returning

- members to the Board of Directors, conference committees and the Camp Friedenswald Board of Directors.
  - the spending plan for 2020-2021. The spending plan is similar to that for 2019-2020; however, the board also prepared a contingency plan in case contributions decrease significantly.
- Listen to a recording of the Annual Meeting business session: <https://mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/> The Annual Report book is available on the CDC website; follow the link at [mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/delegate-information-2020/](https://mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/delegate-information-2020/) 

## Singing the conference theme

The new hymn “Holy Spirit, bless us with a yearning,” opened the worship and delegate sessions of the Annual Meeting. The song was created by Adam M. L. Tice of Assembly Mennonite in Goshen and Katie Graber of Cincinnati (Ohio) Mennonite, with translation to Spanish by Marie Eugenia Cornou.

Copyright arrangements have been made so CDC congregations may reproduce and sing this hymn for the next year. Download it from the Annual Meeting web pages:

[mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/worship/](https://mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/worship/) 



An online ensemble of vocalists and instrumentalists recorded the hymn for the Annual Meeting. “Longing for more, longing for more; Holy Spirit, come,” the refrain of the theme song repeats; “¡Ven sin tardar, ven sin tardar; ven, Consolador!”

## Financial report

### June 30, 2020

Year-to-date contributed support .	\$217,155
Year-to-date plan . . . . .	\$228,625
Difference between giving and plan . . . . .	-\$11,470
Year-to-date expenses . . . . .	\$215,537
Year-to-date spending plan . . . . .	\$234,926
Difference between expenses and plan . . . . .	-\$19,389

This is the last report for the 2019-2020 financial year, though there may be some adjustments when the year-end accounts are closed in a few weeks. Congregational contributions were about \$7,000 less than budgeted for the year, and in view of the change to a virtual Annual Meeting, both income and expenses for the gathering were significantly reduced. Our overall income for the financial year is about \$11,600 above expenses. We give thanks to our member congregations for their continued strong support despite the challenges and unknowns of the global epidemic crisis.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

# Doug's Mug: Lament and Protest

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

One of the first resources provided by Mennonite Church USA following the murder of George Floyd was a collection of prayers of lament ([mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/lament-violence-of-racism](https://mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/lament-violence-of-racism)). I encourage you to find them and pray them out loud. Here's a brief sample.

- *How long, O Lord?* Jason Timothy Smith
- *Love is moving at a snail's pace.* Cyneatha Millsaps
- *We are not as we ought to be.* Melissa Florer-Bixler
- *God let your spirit reenergize us.* Jerrell Williams
- *God, we lament the damage that our silence in the face of racial violence has done.* Clara Weybright
- *God of the Oppressed, how long must your body endure this suffering?* Danilo Sanchez

First Mennonite Church of Bluffton, where I am a member, has embarked on a worship series using Psalms of lament. Here's a brief sample.

- *How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?* Psalm 13
- *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Psalm 22
- *Let them be turned back and confounded who devise evil against me.* Psalm 35
- *Incline your ear to my cry for my soul is full of troubles.* Psalm 88

Angela Khabeb, one of the pastors of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis, was asked what she thought of those who had lent a hand to clean up after protests and riots left many buildings with graffiti. She said, "At the most basic level, people are saying, 'Let's clean it up, this is unsightly.' People want to physically do something .... But there is a time for lament, and we can sit in this uncomfortable space for a while." (*Christian Century*, July 1, 2020, p. 25-26)

**How long, O Lord,** must we sit in this uncomfortable space where our sanctuaries remain silent and our streets are in an uproar?

**How long?** As long as it takes for lament to

seep into the marrow of our bones and make us aware of our deepest yearnings; that space where God's image in us is most present. **How long?** As long as it takes for a seed of protest to sprout in our souls and begin to bear the fruits of justice, healing and hope.



Things are not OK in our world. There is plenty to lament. There is also opportunity to take action and to protest; protest born out of faith-filled lament and consistent with our spiritual call to non-violence.

Just as lament is uncomfortable space, so is protest. Comfort is often our beverage of choice. Like Jesus, let's take a drink from the well of protest, learn from those who are often considered "other," listen to the stories of the oppressed, challenge our elected leaders, walk with the grieving, welcome the stranger and offer cups of cold water to enemy and friend alike. ☮

## Join a webinar from CDC

### Climate and Community

July 30, 2 pm

led by Amy Huser, sustainability and outdoor education director, and Jenna Liechty Martin, executive director, Camp Friedenswald

Register here: [shorturl.at/lrl03](https://shorturl.at/lrl03)

### Report on SEMILLA Learning Tour

August 26, 7:30 pm

led by tour participants and Willi Hugo Pérez, SEMILLA academic dean

Register here: [shorturl.at/dmBW3](https://shorturl.at/dmBW3)

### Anabaptism as a Spiritual Tradition

September 16, time to be announced

led by Jamie Pitts, associate professor of Anabaptist studies, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

# Learning to know Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship

by *Alaina Dobkowski*

Grand Rapids (Mich.) Mennonite Fellowship has asked to join Central District Conference. After a year of discernment, delegates to the 2021 Annual Meeting will vote on the congregation's membership in the conference.

Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, our house church community could be found gathering at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings on the Southeast side of Grand Rapids. We meet in two houses, next to each other, that are owned by members of our community. Kids get settled in one house (with supervision of course!) and adults gather next door.

Most mornings, there is a sense of peace as we walk in, grab a cup of coffee, and soon begin with a Call to Worship and singing. Often we'll spend time reading the Revised Common Lectionary Scriptures with a reflection and time for discussion. We spend time checking in with each other and close in prayer. Then, a couple adults head over to get the kids and we do a children's lesson, followed by a shared potluck meal all together. It gets loud, messy and wonderful all at the same time. We're thankful for how God's presence shows itself in the quiet and loud moments of our gatherings.

Since our state (Michigan) has had a Stay-at-Home Order, we have adapted to Zoom meetings. We found comfort in our first few meetings, needing the time to check in and pray with one another during a time that suddenly felt uncertain. We have gotten into a rhythm of scripture reading, sharing and check-ins, but we're not afraid to be flexible as needed. The last Sunday in May we spent time reading a variety of prayers of lament for the lives lost to COVID-19 and to racism and police brutality. We reflected, prayed and discussed the actions steps we were planning to continue to take towards antiracism and real change.

Our community began in August 2018. Susan and Chip Kragt along with Beth and Seth Caldwell began conversations about what it could look like to start a Mennonite house church community. Susan reached out to Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship (about an

hour away) to the founders (now retired) Will and Bess Fitzgerald. They began to open a door for continued conversation as the Kragts and Caldwells explored this idea. They both knew other families who were struggling to find a place to call home for worship, and invited us all together for our first meeting in August. The five families who met that first week are all still involved! The Spirit of God met us in our gatherings and we knew something meaningful was happening. We're thankful for others who have joined us along the way.

Currently we have a three-person lay leadership team that coordinates and organizes our times together, yet everyone is actively engaged—leading worship, kids lessons and more. We've worked through our common and shared beliefs, both with each other and the Mennonite Church USA. Our core purpose is to be a Jesus-centered community committed to peacemaking and doing life together. We seek to be a peace community, sharing the faith perspectives of the Mennonite USA [\*\*"What is A Peace Church?"\*\*](#) document. We are a community that desires to be a place where all people experience God's justice, peace and joy. We are committed to the work of antiracism and pursuing liberation for all people from oppression. We denounce white supremacy and seek to root out its ideology from ourselves and our systems. We strive to use inclusive language in our gatherings. We invite everyone, without qualification, to full participation in our community and life together. We welcome and affirm LGBTQ persons for membership, marriage, ministry, and leadership.


We embrace the mystery of faith, freeing us from thinking we have arrived or have it all together. The rituals and sacraments we practice together help us engage God, but they are not the be all or end all. They are parts of our community that serve as an invitation to life with Jesus and to God's grace. Life together often looks like text messages with prayer requests, silly pictures shared to bring joy and the chaos of kids playing in the backyard. At times it looks like a friend coming over to fix a

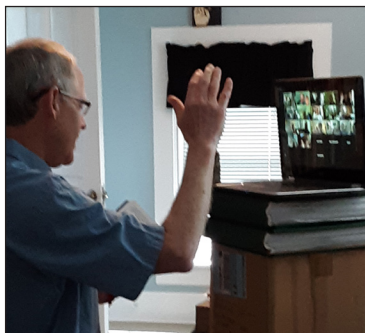
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## Commissioning


Jeff Boehr was commissioned as interim pastor of Lima (Ohio) Mennonite Church on June 7. He is a member of First Mennonite Church in Bluffton and lives in Bluffton. Emily Hedrick completed her ministry with the congregation on January 31.

The congregation had not met together since mid-March, but resumed worship via Zoom on June 7. Doug Luginbill, conference minister, reported that this was the first act of this kind (installation, commissioning, licensing, ordination) that he conducted by Zoom. 




## Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (cont.)

plumbing problem, a meal dropped off during a tough week or a needed conversation. Community is not contained, but it grows through shared life and love for one another.

We are so thankful to have found what we hope will be a lasting home for our community with the Central District Conference. We desire to be a part of a larger community pursuing faith in Jesus while seeking peace, justice, and inclusiveness for all God's people. We look forward to when we get together in person with more of you and are thankful for those we have met already. 


## Ordination

Laura Brenneman-Fullwood was ordained at First Mennonite Church, Champaign-Urbana, Ill., on June 28. Laura is a chaplain and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) educator at Carle Medical Center in Bloomington, Ill.

Two pastors from the congregation, Debra Sutter and Michael Crosby, were present. For the "laying on of hands" portion of the service, members of the congregation cut out tracings of their hands and wrote blessings on them for Jo Brenneman-Fullwood, Laura's spouse, to pour over Laura's head. 



## New position

Cate Dejardins, a CDC credentialed leader, has begun as executive director of Mennonite Healthcare Fellowship. Cate holds a Master of Divinity from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and a Master's degree in Public Health. For more information, visit [www.mennohealth.org](http://www.mennohealth.org). 



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