



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

August 2020

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Webinars emphasize conference priorities

Four webinars this summer and fall take the place of seminars that would have been offered at the Central District Conference Annual Meeting, which shifted to an online format. These webinars are recorded so they are available to everyone conveniently at no cost. This issue of *focus* shares from the first two webinars; the others will be featured in upcoming newsletters.

Taking each next step: Anti-racism in our homes, churches and conference

Hosted July 16 by the CDC Missional Church Committee

Dismantling racism and white privilege has been a central effort of CDC's Missional Church Committee for two years, and a task force assigned to foster this in the conference shaped their work around "Three Provocations." The webinar presented an outline of these along with personal sharing from members of the Missional Church Committee.*

The task force, led by Kiva Nice-Webb, noted three areas in which we need to continue our efforts for recognizing white privilege and dismantling racism: conference, congregation and individual. In each area, they considered what could provoke us toward sustained work, especially what is needed for taking a next step.

For the conference and congregation, two considerations are central:

- Make resources available for the work, including money and time.
- Make positions of power accessible to people of color and people who are not traditionally in these positions.

Other steps include:

- Constantly question the status quo to see what barriers are present to people of color.
- Give incentives to white leaders to continue their work of antiracism.

For individuals, several factors make next steps more possible and effective:

- Be vulnerable, recognizing that we will make mistakes
- Overcome our culture of "nice-ness" so we can be honest with each other
- Do this in settings where we have taken time to build trust.

The task force had five white members and two people of color who served as accountability partners, giving counsel as they saw need. In the webinar, Kiva shared two learnings from the accountability partners that she found helpful:

** Webinar presenters were Valerie Showalter, Tim Stair, Brian Sauder, Kiva Nice-Webb. Task force members were Kiva Nice-Webb, Annette Brill Bergstresser, Sandy Miller, Brian Sauder, Charles Bontrager; accountability members were Isaac Villegas and Cyneatha Millsaps.*



Kiva Nice-Webb introduces the "Three Provocations" in the July 16 webinar.

To learn about upcoming webinars and watch webinar recordings, visit <https://mcusacdc.org/annual-meeting-2020/talking-together/>

Taking each next step (continued)

- Trust is essential in doing this work, and developing trust takes a lot of time.
- The work of antiracism requires action; even imperfect action is better than simply talking about the issues.

The webinar ended with each presenter sharing a hope. Brian Sauder said, “My hope is that we begin to name white supremacy as the

greatest enemy to the gospel. My hope is that we claim that the ubiquitous nature of white supremacy is the root cause of all injustices, the root cause of the ways we have not proclaimed the gospel to each other.”

To read the task force’s “Three Provocations” document, visit <https://mcusacdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/202003-Three-Provocations.pdf>

Also visit <https://mcusacdc.org/white-privilege-racism/> for a rich array of resources.

Climate and Community: Creating and implementing plans for positive change

hosted July 30 by Amy Huser, Camp Friedenswald

In a webinar focused on climate issues, four presenters worked from very concrete, practical steps to overarching intersections of racism, COVID-19 and climate injustices. Each approached the topics from their base of work, bringing faith and justice into the discussion.

Amy Huser and Jenna Liechty Martin from Camp Friedenswald shared not only what the camp has been doing to become more ecologically sustainable; they also emphasized how these steps are inherent in the camp’s identity and mission. Jenna, executive director, said, “Our core values led us in the direction of making decisions that were consistent with what we find ourselves doing with our plan.”

She also shared how having a sustainability plan has benefitted the camp—focusing a vision, shaping decision-making, prompting more careful monitoring of progress and helping to tell the story of the camp.

Amy, who is sustainability and outdoor education director, shared more specifics of what the camp has done, while emphasizing that the overall goal is resilience and sustainability. “Things will change,” she acknowledged, “and we need to adapt and bounce back. We need to live within boundaries and live holistically.”

Doug Kaufman, director of pastoral ecology for the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions¹ looked at climate through the lens of peacemaking and justice. Using the term “slow violence,” he noted how climate change has

a greater affect on the poor, racial minorities, indigenous communities and other species, while they are the least responsible for what is happening.

He concluded by saying that it is important for congregations to be places where we can talk about these concerns. We need rituals around lament and grief and ways to find hope. We need to encourage each other to be advocates for climate justice.

Brian Sauder, executive director of Faith in Place², shared the way they support congregations who are working in their local settings with the environmental, social and political aspects of climate change. A main focus is having coaches who work with Green Teams in congregations, helping them sustain their work toward the goals they have set.

¹ The Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions is a collaborative initiative of Eastern Mennonite University, Goshen College and Mennonite Central Committee to lead Anabaptist efforts to respond to the challenges of climate change. <https://www.sustainableclimatesolutions.org/>

² Faith in Place empowers Illinois people of all faiths to be leaders in caring for the Earth, providing resources to educate, connect, and advocate for healthier communities. <https://www.faithinplace.org>

In Indiana, Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light does similar work. <https://hoosieripl.org/> These organizations can help you find similar support groups in your region.

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