

January 2021

Columbus Mennonite budgets funds for reparations

by JoAnn Knapke, Mission Coordinator, Columbus Mennonite Church

In a recent church newsletter article, John Martin of the Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church (CMC) Leadership Team wrote, "As a mostly white congregation, we are the indirect beneficiaries of slavery and Native American land theft." With its 2021 budget, CMC is about to engage in what we hope will be real actions of reparation towards Blacks and Native Americans.

John's article continues, "While one could identify many causes of our current contentious environment, a major root is the original sin of our nation, the belief that white people are superior and that those that are not white are less than human. The taking of Native Americans' land, culture, and the resulting genocide, combined with slavery, fueled the economic growth of this country that benefited not just those who directly participated, but indeed all of white America We did not, nor did many of our ancestors, have slaves, but they did benefit from goods and products made

from free labor. We did not, nor did many of our ancestors, directly take native lands, but we did farm and live on those lands."

CMC's thoughts on race relations have been forming over the past five to six years through worship themes and Christian Education classes. In 2016, worship services focused on racial disparity, and a group of congregants joined members of Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship for a guided tour of the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

In 2017, CMC invited Drew Hart, author

(continued on page 2)

Central District Conference leaders have made a commitment to undoing racism and building intercultural competence, encouraging congregations and members throughout the conference to do this in their own contexts. We hope to share stories of these efforts in the upcoming newsletters, *Reporter* and *focus*. Please send stories of what your congregation is doing to cdceditor@gmail.com.

This issue also features ways CDC congregations have worshipped and responded to needs during the pandemic.

— Mary E, Klassen, CDC editor



Eliza Leahy, member of the Columbus congregation, took this selfie that reflects her alignment with the congregation's goal of acknowledging and resisting injustice.

Columbus Mennonite and reparations (continued)

of *Trouble I've Seen*, to present at our winter seminar and his book was the subject of a Sunday School class. This led to more classes on race relations using books such as *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander and *Stamped From the Beginning* by Ibram X Kendi. Another class studied the Doctrine of Discovery, a concept used by the Christian churches during colonial times to justify land theft and genocide of indigenous people.

How do we start to make reparations? Knowing that the property on which our church building stands was originally Native American land, and knowing that our church neighborhood was “green-lined” in the era of “red-lining,” the Leadership Team thought about the amount of property tax we would be paying if we were not a 501c3 tax-exempt entity.

Although we cannot commit this amount right away, the congregation has approved \$5,000 for the 2021 budget designated for reparations. Our hope is to add to this amount until we reach at least \$20,000 per year.

Our congregation does not know the best way to use this money. Instead, we have set initial parameters that it is to go toward Black and Native-led organizations and that the money be given without stipulations for how it is spent. It is important that CMC not control how the organizations use the money.

As we begin the new year, a recently formed committee at CMC will begin researching and networking for how to go about reparation efforts. The goal is to have something to present to the congregation by our April 2021 business meeting. ⑩

Evanston Mennonite responds to need in Iran

by Doug Hostetter

When the pandemic hit I learned that the World Health Organization indicated that Iran was one of the countries most devastated by COVID-19 while U.S. economic and banking sanctions against Iran made it difficult or even impossible for their hospitals to buy the supplies and equipment needed to deal with COVID. I worked with a small group of Canadian and US Mennonites to try to find a way for Mennonites to send COVID relief to Iran.

Evanston Mennonite Church agreed to set up a Who is my Neighbor Fund to receive contributions for that aid, but we soon discovered that U.S. sanctions had driven most U.S. relief organizations from Iran. We finally discovered one California organization, Moms Against Poverty, that had obtained the U.S. licenses necessary for assistance to Iran and was continuing their work in Iran.

While looking for an agency to send the aid to Iran, we discovered that there were other Christians who wanted to assist the people of Iran in their time of need. In June 2020 we formed a new U.S. ecumenical organization, LUKE 10 (in reference to the Parable of the Good Samaritan). with leaders from Catholic,

Protestant, Evangelical and Historic Peace Churches to send aid and do peacebuilding with Iran. Ed Martin of Lancaster, Pa., and I were among the founding members of the board of the LUKE 10 organization which has now sent over \$70,000 of medical assistance to Iran, \$26,500 of those funds came from Canadian, Dutch and U.S. Mennonites given through the Who is my Neighbor Fund at Evanston Mennonite Church. ⑩



Dr. Ashkan Taghipour (standing at right), director of the Moms Against Poverty partner NGO in Tehran, supervises his staff and volunteers as they repack masks sent to Iran by LUKE 10.

Photo gallery

Congregations worship and fellowship through 2020's challenges

Americus Mennonite Church, Americus, Georgia



Americus (Georgia) Mennonite Church helped members through times of isolation in 2020 by sharing Easter lilies and poinsettias. Members who received them included Wayne Perkins, Jim Von Bramer (with Max) and Cherry Tietjen. Photos provided by Brian Kilheffer.

Hively Avenue Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana



Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., held an outdoor Christmas Eve service. Several members of the congregation read portions of the prophets that foretold Jesus' birth and the New Testament birth story, while other participants walked a luminary-lit path and sang familiar Christmas hymns.

Photo gallery

Congregations worship and fellowship through 2020 challenges

Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio



On December 22, Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio, invited the community to a drive-through live nativity. The entrance “fee” was a donation for local food pantries. Pastor Matthew Yoder explained, “This activity was in lieu of an important part of our traditional Christmas Eve service that we were not able to hold in-person this year, and as a way for us to get to see each other briefly since we don’t have the opportunity to worship together on Christmas Eve.” More than 30 cars came to view the nativity stations and food was donated to Bluffton Community Assistance Program, West Ohio Food Bank in Lima and The Ottawa Food Pantry.

Financial report

December 31, 2020

Year-to-date contributed support	\$129,419
Year-to-date plan	\$115,207
Difference between giving and plan	\$14,212
Year-to-date expenses	\$102,155
Year-to-date plan	\$118,944
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$16,789

With the December report, the 2020-2021 financial year has reached the halfway point. Giving to Central District Conference, both from member congregations and from individuals, continues to be strong and well above budget. Meanwhile expenses are under budget, particularly in the category of Conference Leadership expenses, due to the elimination of most meetings and meeting costs. As always we give thanks for the continuing support of member congregations.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

Creating resilience and choosing joy

Guest column by Jane Wood, president, Bluffton University

Perhaps there was never a year so joyfully embraced as 2021. It appears that 2020 will long be remembered as the year that brought us COVID-19 and so many lost lives; the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many other unarmed Black and brown people; and even greater political upheaval amidst a divisive presidential election. Certainly, we have great cause to mourn.

Thich Nhat Hanh, in his slender, but profound, spiritual text, *Being Peace*, writes that we must embrace sorrow and still find room to smile. Although Hanh is Buddhist, we also see this duality regularly in the Bible; one of my favorite verses, Psalm 30:5, speaks to finding joy after a dark time:

“For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (KJV)

This passage speaks to me of the passing nature of pandemics (though indeed it seems long when we are in it), and other seriously difficult times, and gently reminds that God favors our resilience—we should indeed lament, but that one morning, as sure as the sun greets us in the east, joy will return.

Resilience is a topic we think about regularly here at Bluffton University. We have designed a new four-year, integrated set of courses called the Bluffton Blueprint to intentionally build both community and resilience as a key part of our student experience.

The first-year course is created around the question, “Who Am I?” and invites students to reflect on their current paths in life as well as what they imagine for their futures. The

entire first-year class will travel to the Great Smoky Mountains during fall break. During this retreat, they will get to know one another and build relationships and community as they contemplate their vocations.



In their sophomore year, all students engage with the course “Learning in Community,” which invites reflection on “Who Am I in Community,” and all students will complete a mini-internship in Lima or another nearby non-profit to learn about living and leading in community.

Juniors will be asked to reflect on “Who Am I in the World,” and students will travel to another culture and/or participate in a study abroad opportunity.

The question for their final year that weaves all of the connected courses together is from John the Baptist, “What then shall we do?” Students engage this question in their Capstone course in which they draw on what they have learned

about themselves, each other, the global community, and how to become more resilient throughout their journey through the Bluffton Blueprint to solve a problem in their community.

Resilience has been important to the world in 2020, and it will remain vital as we imagine 2021 and beyond. So many lives were lost during the last year and our thoughts often became prayerful as we asked for healing, reconciliation and peace. As we live into the promise that hope dwells in us and among us, may we embrace both resilience and joy. Blessings for 2021! 🍀

CDC pastors awarded study project grants

2021 Pastoral Study Project Grant

Celeste Grace Kennel-Shank Groff

Chicago Community Mennonite Church
Chicago, IL

Gathered and Scattered: The Life and Death of an Innovative Urban Church



2021 Pastoral Study Project Grant

Joel Miller

Columbus Mennonite Church
Columbus, OH

Marking time, becoming human: Creating a congregation-based multi-generational adult rite of passage



Two pastors of conference congregations have received Louisville Institute Pastoral Study Projects grants.

Celeste Grace Kennel-Shank Groff, Chicago (Ill.) Mennonite Community Church, will explore the life of an urban congregation in Chicago from beginning to end. The congregation began in 1965 and attracted people who were disillusioned with traditional religious institutions. "I will seek to learn how it became primarily lay-led, with ordained clergy playing a guiding role. I will also explore what dying well looks like for a congregation," she writes.

Joel Miller, Columbus (Ohio) Mennonite Church, will focus on creating a rite-of-passage experience for a cohort of adults in the congregation. The intent is to work with a group of eight to fifteen adults with ages ranging from 20s to 80s. Conversation across generations will be an important feature as the cohort looks back on their lives along with honoring the present and looking ahead. Joel plans for this to become an annual event for a new cohort each year.

Read more: <https://louisville-institute.org/our-impact/awards/pastoral-study-project/>

Central District Conference 2021 gatherings

Mid-year Gatherings (formerly Regional Gatherings) will be held by Zoom on two dates from 9:30 am to noon:

Saturday, March 6

Saturday, March 27

Participants can choose which session they want to join.

The Annual Meeting will be held by Zoom in late June. More information will be shared when it is available.

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