



A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

Reporter

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—
ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

September 2021

Believe and Be Baptized

November 6 workshop to feature conversations about baptism

Baptism is central to the Christian faith, and for Anabaptists and Mennonites the practices of baptism have served as distinctive differences from other Christian groups and as a significant point of identity.

We are approaching the 500th anniversary of the first voluntary baptisms on January 21, 1525, in Zurich, Switzerland, that we view as the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. Despite its central importance, baptism has continued to generate a host of important questions in Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations.

A workshop, cohosted by Central District Conference and Ohio Mennonite Conference on November 6, will explore some of these questions:

- does the mode of baptism matter?
- what is the appropriate age of baptism (especially for those who are raised in the church?)
- how do we know if a candidate is ready for baptism? what kind of instruction is required?
- what is the link between baptism and church membership? or Christian discipleship?
- how do we appropriately invite young people and visitors to baptism?
- what is the relationship between God's initiative of grace and the human response?
- can adult baptism be repeated?
- should newcomers who were baptized as infants be rebaptized?
- what is our understanding of baptism for the cognitively impaired?

The Believe and Be Baptized workshop, led by historian John D. Roth, will introduce participants to a recent dialogue about baptism among representatives from the Mennonite World Conference, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity—a ground-breaking five-year ecumenical conversation.

At the November 6 workshop, we as Mennonites will be invited to come to a deeper understanding of baptism through conversations with each other and with local Lutheran and Catholic clergy.

Please note details below, including an online form to register.

Believe and Be Baptized

November 6, 2021

9:30 am to 2:30 pm, Eastern Time

Location:

Columbus Mennonite Church
35 Oakland Park Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43214

The event is free. Lunch will be provided.

Register by October 25:

mcusacdc.org/believe-and-be-baptized/

Choose life

by Doug Hostetter, Peace Pastor, Evanston Mennonite Church

With Afghanistan at the forefront of our news and with the 20th anniversary of 9/11 this month, these reflections from a life-long peacemaker can help us get perspectives not only on today's news, but also how we can join in efforts to witness to peace. - Editor

I was still unpacking the boxes from my move to Evanston, Ill., when a call from a friend alerted me. I turned on the TV in time to see the plane hit the second tower and later watched in horror as the World Trade Center collapsed, killing thousands of people.

A few days later I realized that the U.S. was about to attack the poorest country in Asia—Afghanistan, where 70 percent of the population was undernourished and a quarter of the children born would not survive to see their fifth birthday. I called Mitch Brown, the pastor of Evanston Mennonite Church, who a week before had asked me to start a Peace and Social Concerns Committee.

"Shouldn't the Mennonites be offering an alternative to war," I had asked. "Perhaps we could send the Afghans the things that they really need, like food and medicine rather than guns and bombs?" He readily agreed and encouraged me to explore the possibilities.

I had previously worked for both the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and knew the Asia Program Directors in both organizations. I called them and proposed that the Historic Peace Churches quickly organize a delegation to take humanitarian supplies to the people of Afghanistan as an alternative to what our government would soon be sending.

I had also realized that this new war was going to be a war on

Islam, so I proposed that we should work in cooperation with a Muslim organization. MCC and AFSC both responded affirmatively but expressed doubts. The Taliban had expelled all international organizations and closed their country's borders, and no one knew of a Muslim organization with whom we might collaborate in this effort, but both encouraged me to explore any possible options.

I soon learned from a Muslim friend in the Fellowship of Reconciliation that there was a small organization, Help the Afghan Children, started by an Afghan American woman, Suraya Sadeed, who had been working with children in Afghanistan for more than a decade. I also learned that Sadeed was planning to return to Afghanistan in a few weeks to deliver food to displaced persons in the northern part of the country. After an introduction by a mutual friend, Suraya Sadeed indicated that she would gladly accept Mennonite and Quaker funding to increase the food purchase for her upcoming trip and would welcome Mennonite and Quaker participation in the trip. MCC and AFSC both asked if I would represent them and join Sadeed on the trip to Afghanistan that was leaving on October 22.

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Doug Hostetter poses next to one of the food trucks in Afghanistan.

Choose life (continued)

In a few weeks' time I was able to collect \$60,000 from MCC, AFSC and Evanston Mennonite Church family and friends, to add to the \$70,000 that Help the Afghan Children had already collected. We then had \$130,000 to bring to



Suraya Sadeed, Director of Help the Afghan Children, in Kunduz Province

Tajikistan to purchase food for Afghanistan. We found a supplier in Tajikistan who could convert our funds into 239 tons of wheat, sugar and cooking oil (in the proportions needed to make Afghan flatbread), load that onto 19 trucks and ship it to Afghanistan. The only crossing still open between Tajikistan and Afghanistan was a pontoon ferry on the Amu Darya River in Takhar Province.

We accepted the supplies at the border where they were transferred to Afghan trucks and quickly taken to Khawja Badauddin, Kunduz Province. There Afghans who had fled from the U.S. bombing of the Taliban front lines a few kilometers to the south were gathering in displaced persons' camps.

With the assistance of a French NGO that had staff in the area and local connections but no food, we were able to divide our bulk food into family packets, which could feed an Afghan family of seven for one month. In a week's time we were able to distribute family food packets to 3,600 families in a variety of displaced persons' camps in Kunduz Province.

Eight months later, after Al Qaeda had been driven from Afghanistan and the Taliban had fled from Kabul, MCC asked

if I could return to Afghanistan to visit an MCC-Church World Service home-rebuilding project 70 miles north of Kabul in Parwan Province. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan homes had been destroyed by the American bombing and the preceding decades of fighting. At that time, in mid-2002, there was optimism that peace would prevail and Afghans displaced by decades of war would be able to return to their villages and rebuild their destroyed homes. Rural Afghanistan homes are largely made of mud, so when MCC/CWS provided a home kit composed of a latrine, doors, windows, wooden beams and planks, cement and pipes, the homeowner with friends could provide the mud and labor, and a home could be rebuilt for \$935.

When I returned, Evanston Mennonite Church in cooperation with MCC/CWS established The Afghan Home Reconstruction Project, to rebuild Afghan homes destroyed by the US military. I remembered, eight months earlier, when I was with Suraya Sadeed in Tajikistan and she received calls informing her of the destruction caused by U.S. bombing in Afghanistan. Three of her staff from the Help the Afghan Children Clinic for Women and Girls in Kabul—Chief Pediatrician Dr. Belquis,

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Haji Mohammed Aslam, 70, who has 12 children and nine grandchildren, stands in the home that he was rebuilding with the assistance of MCC/CWS. His home had been destroyed two years earlier in fighting between Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

Internist Dr. Rahma and a registered nurse—had all been killed in their homes in the first weeks of U.S. bombing.

Although the efforts to feed people displaced by rockets and rebuild homes destroyed by bombs seems insignificant in comparison to the devastation of war, it is a choice. We can choose to stand on the side of life and hope.

Financial report

August 31, 2021

The August 2021 Central District Conference financial report continues to reflect the trend of strong giving and under-budget expenditures that the conference has experienced for several years. Congregational giving has been unusually even from month to month, surpassing monthly spending plan goals. Expenses still reflect the predominant use of virtual rather than face-to-face gatherings and meetings as an effect of the ongoing pandemic.

The inseparable interweaving of racial justice, climate justice and gender justice was at the heart of the message Rachel Litwiller brought to the Central District Conference Annual Meeting on June 26. The seminar she led, “Climate Justice is Pacifism,” explored these issues of injustice how they intersect.

Using a collaborative online platform, Rachel invited participants first to name the underlying core values that shape our commitment to peace and justice. With these at the roots of the “tree,” participants then named concrete examples of what we would experience in a world free of violence and injustice.

Rachel is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. She works with the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions [sustainableclimatesolutions.org], a program of EMU, Goshen College and Mennonite Central Committee.

The diagram is a large tree with a thick trunk and many branches. The trunk is labeled "authenticity". The canopy (leaves) contains various values and themes, while the roots (ground) contain others. The canopy includes: Sustainable Collective Leadership, COME-NET, JOY, healthy natural foods for all, Feeling safe not losing a car, Improved health, Creative IT, Welcome, necessary to medical resources, Joy, Freedom to worship, clean air for everyone, respect for each other, Mercy, Access to Green Spaces, Diverse landownership, Clean water, climate change, water, energy, water, and the earth in 2010, EARTH feels welcome in the church, Education, Information, and Innovation, and others. The roots include: we are limited by oil and goods (truth), Caring, Respect, Community, Truth, Center, Joy and Laughter, Phann, Peace, Intergo to neighborhood relations, Love, Salience, Justice, Recognition of Ourselves Presence in all, and Truly values. Accountability is also listed near the roots.

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Doug's Mug: Transformation Part II

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

In my last Doug's Mug I reflected on my readiness (or lack thereof) for change or transformation. Little did I know at that time that Mennonite Church USA would choose **"Be Transformed"** as the theme for the next two years. And little did I know that the theme for Central District Conference for the next two years would be **"Tending Transformation."** I honestly did not know! So now the idea of "transformation" has caught my attention! It appears I will keep drinking from the mug of transformation for a while!



Is a mug of transformation to be sipped slowly or gulped down quickly? Occasionally in scripture, transformation happens suddenly and quickly. Perhaps Saul, transformed to Paul on the Damascus Road, may be the best known example of a rapid transformation. But even for Paul, his understanding of how God was working through Jesus took time. The Book of Acts and Paul's epistles demonstrate the ongoing "conversion" of his soul and mind.

So I'm thinking that transformation is best sipped slowly, so as not to burn your tongue or freeze your brain. Our CDC theme, **"Tending Transformation"** also offers a sense of careful, slow and deliberate attention to how God is calling us to be transformed.

On August 21, our CDC board of directors, chairpersons of our missional church and ministerial committees, and the Camp Friedenswald executive director gathered virtually to consider a new two-year theme. We kept being drawn to the image of trees. Each of us seemed to have a tree encounter that somehow shaped our faith and drew us to a greater awareness of and relationship with our Creator. My story was experiencing the beauty and wonder of creation at Camp Friedenswald as a fourth or fifth grader. Sitting silently with

my back to a tree, I learned the discipline of contemplation. (I didn't know the word for it until decades later!) Contemplation is basically paying attention to the presence of God.

Transformation happens when we are "paying attention!" The words "tending" and "attention" are from the same root word *tendere* which means "to stretch, to expect, to wait for." If we are a people who are Tending Transformation, we are expectant people, watching attentively as we expect to be stretched.

As a conference of churches, we continue to be stretched. In the last five years, we have grown from 39 to 47 churches. There are several emerging Anabaptist communities of faith across CDC that are seeking guidance, resources and connections with us. While this is indeed exciting and nothing less than the movement of the Spirit, our leadership, including me, was not prepared to respond to such inquiries and requests. We are trying to pay attention, tending to the needs of these emerging communities, and being stretched.

As a conference, we are being transformed! This is both exciting and daunting as we seek additional financial and human resources to respond to this transformation.

I am grateful for the strong financial support CDC continues to receive. At our August 20 board meeting, we established an "emerging communities fund" to provide financial assistance to new communities of faith. Some of the excess income over expenses from 2020-2021 will be placed in this emerging communities fund. Additional gifts to this fund are welcomed.

If I've learned anything about the church in my 35+ years of ministry it is that the church is continually being transformed. May God's wisdom and mercy continue to help us tend this ongoing transformation of the church in ways that bring glory to God and Christ Jesus, our Lord. ☪

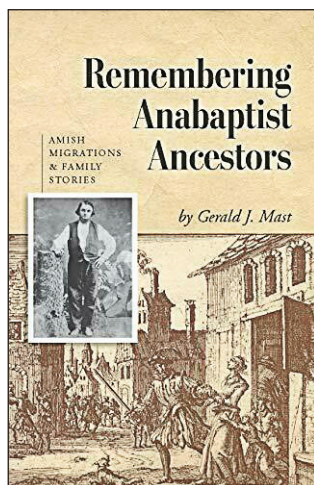
Bluffton to host tour of Europe featuring Mennonite migrations

Bluffton University is planning a tour of Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands with an emphasis on sites related to early Anabaptists. The tour is scheduled for May 12 to 23, 2022, with Detroit, Mich., as the point of departure and return.

Bluffton president Jane Wood and professor Gerald Mast will host the tour. Gerald is coordinating it, tying the itinerary to content of his new book, *Remembering Anabaptist Ancestors: Amish Migrations and Family Stories*.

For more information about the tour, visit the Bluffton website: www.bluffton.edu/blufftonalumni/connect/euro2022.aspx


For information about the book, *Remembering Anabaptist Ancestors*, visit www.masthof.com/products/remembering-anabaptist-ancestors-amish-migrations-and-family-stories 



Keller Park Church baptism at Camp Friedenswald


Keller Park Church, a South Bend, Ind., congregation that joined Central District Conference in June, worshiped at Camp Friedenswald on Sunday, August 22. In their service, they baptized a young member of the congregation. For some worshipers, it was their first opportunity to enjoy Camp Friedenswald, a CDC camp near Cassopolis, Mich.



Keller Park pastors, David Cramer and Carrie Badertscher, baptize a young member of the congregation. 

Anti-Racism Grants available

In response to the Racial, Ethnic and Religious Reconciliation (RER) Task Group's **Three Provocations** document, the CDC Missional Church Committee is offering a grant to CDC member congregations whose congregants are committed to engaging in anti-racist work together. The committee

administers grants funded by the Missional Activities Fund. All CDC member congregations are eligible to apply for a grant. For more information about the grant and to apply, visit mcusacdc.org/resources/anti-racism-grant/ 

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