



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

October 2021

KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

Shaping leaders with vision and skills for the church and world

Journey is a program offered by Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., and Central District Conference is one of the sponsoring conferences. In this program, people can pursue training as leaders within their own congregations and contexts. The undergraduate study involves each student with an instructor and with a mentor. Content includes the Bible, Anabaptism, God's mission and the witness of the church, worship and proclamation. For details, visit amb.s.edu/journey.

Current CDC participants are Charles Baraka, a member of the Madison (Wisc.) Mennonite congregation; his mentor, Lavon Welty; and Lois Johns Kaufmann, chair of the Journey board. Here each reflects on their involvement.

Charles Baraka

I am Burundian by nationality and my country was affected by ethnic conflicts for many years. In Burundi we are three tribes—Hutu, Tutsi and Batwa. I am Hutu, and my uncle and other friends were killed in different ethnic wars. I grew up with wounds and hate for other tribes (especially Tutsi). Even if I was Christian, my heart was full of anger and hate. After I attended a workshop of healing and reconciliation, God healed my heart, and I became a new creation. Since 2006, God called us into a ministry of reconciliation. We started to run workshops in different churches for different tribes in Burundi, Rwanda, DR Congo, Kenya and Malawi, helping different tribes in our communities to forgive one another and live in peace and unity.

In 2008, God gave us a vision of Amahoro Ministries for Communities (AMC). We work in Burundi, DR Congo and Malawi in three activities: healing, peace and reconciliation; community development; and helping refugees.

I became a pastor and I continue to do pastoral care in Mennonite Brethren Church Malawi and continue the ministry of reconciliation in different communities, living in Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi.

I got involved in Journey because I saw the program going with my vision and my calling: Through healing and reconciliation, we intend to equip the church to become an agent of national healing and restoration of peace and cohesion and unity for sustainable development. My intention is to empower and equip the church to be transformed and become light, salt and a witness of Jesus Christ in order to accomplish the mission of God.

The three years that I pass in Journey was important in my spiritual and leadership life. The courses helped me to understand deeply



J. Tyler Klassen for AMBS

Charles Baraka participated in a Journey Weekend Learning Event on September 11 at Amigo Centre near Sturgis, Mich. All Journey participants gather twice a year for weekends of enrichment.

the mission of God not only as a pastor but also as a Christian. AMBS helped me to develop different strategies to better serve the churches and communities through AMC. I feel I can offer myself to help end ethnic conflicts and racist practices in the Great Lakes region of Africa and in Madison, Wisconsin.



J. Tyler Klassen for AMBS

Lois Johns Kaufmann and Lavon Welty visit at the September 11 Weekend Learning Event. Lois chairs the Journey board and she served on the board previously when she was Central District Conference conference minister.

Lavon J. Welty

I became the third mentor to work with Charles Baraka beginning nearly a year ago. From the outset, our contacts exceeded the required bi-weekly conversation; until summer we met twice weekly (via Zoom). Our conversations were always interesting, not only focusing on the content of the lessons but also our common experience of living in Burundi, Charles' home country, where I also lived for two years.

It was clear that Charles's interest in developing his leadership skills was not solely for possible leadership in the church of his new homeland but for ministry back home. His was a view toward calling churches and their leaders to the better way of building peace. Part of my effort has been to connect him to persons in U.S.-based mission organizations where his ministry might find a home.

Lois Johns Kaufmann

When I was conference minister of Central District I served on the Journey Board, attended the twice-a-year Weekend Learning Events. I would anticipate the events feeling I was too busy to give this a whole weekend. Then afterwards I would be glowing with a sense of wonder and gratitude that God had been faithful and present to us, and thankful for the privilege of being part of this small "body of Christ."

The weekends are only one part of the program. Students also meet a couple of times a month with a mentor to discuss the online assignments. Most of the work is done by the student working alone and applying the learnings in the home congregation. Conversations with a wise and an experienced pastor, who serves as mentor, deepens the learning. But the weekend events bring together all the students with their mentors, conference ministers from three conferences, AMBS leaders, and resource people from across the Mennonite church. They are rich times of learning, conversation and worship.

I have asked myself why these weekends are so rich and satisfying, so good for the soul. The single most recurring answer has been that the diversity of those gathered reflects what Jesus yearns for the body of Christ to be. The students are Hispanic, African, Anglo, Asian, both Mennonite and from other denominations, young, mid-life and retirement-aged, some who reside in the mid-west, and some who participate mostly via Zoom from the west coast. The theological streams vary also. Yet together there is a focus on learning to lead in the way of Jesus, and differences are accepted and respected.

I have been inspired by the people from our Central District churches who have joined Journey at various stages of life as they felt a nudge to take a next step in their faith, to respond to a need, to lead with more effectiveness, or to deepen their journey of following Christ. It is my hope that many more will join the journey.

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