

Annual Meeting, June 23-25

Transforming minds, congregations, trees, lives

A clear thread carried through the three-day Annual Meeting of Central District Conference: transformations—of trees, swords to plowshares, congregations, minds, lives. “Tending Transformation” is the two-year theme for the conference, and it provided a frame and foundation for worship, reports, seminars and business sessions.

This Annual Meeting, held June 23-25, was the first hybrid event, with the gathering at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., also being accessible by live-streaming and Zoom. The pandemic prompted the previous two Annual Meetings to be held online, and this year’s gathering added the distance option for

people who could not come to Goshen or chose not to travel.

In the first worship service, the call in Galatians 6 to be transformed into a new creation was the text for David Cramer, a member of the pastoral team at the conference’s newest congregation, Keller Park in South Bend, Ind. Paraphrasing Paul, David emphasized, “be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Then you will see each other as the unique persons you are ... each offering unique gifts to the good of all. When all gifts come together, then and only then can we collectively discern what the will of God is—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

In the final worship service, Susannah Larry, also of Keller Park Church and a Bible professor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, brought the encouragement that “God has always transformed us from the beginning ... because we make our home at the roots of the tree of life. To that home let’s invite the stragglers, the outcasts, the broken, the sinner—that is, all of us—to drink of those clear, clean waters of life to take that living water and the medicine of Christ’s tree and be forever changed because the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”



Photo by J. Tyler Klassen

The Friday afternoon worship service featured a musical, performed by Goshen area children, based on the book From Swords to Plowshares, which tells the story of a Ukrainian teacher in the 1920s who made a medallion from bullets to thank American donors for food and relief supplies. The musical was created by Eliza Stoltzfus from the book written by Lisa Weaver, a member of Madison Mennonite Church.

The conference is “expecting” and “transforming”

Central District Conference President James Rissler, in his state of the conference opening comments, said the word he believes describes CDC is *expecting*. We are “looking forward to something with hope or desire for an outcome, but not necessarily with clarity about what that outcome will be.”

The first example is the Sacred Listening process with the plan that representatives will visit all 46 congregations in CDC to hear stories of how God’s Spirit is transforming them. These stories will be a basis for examining how CDC might better serve all of its congregations.

A second major effort is responding to small groups that are exploring whether and how they can form new communities of faith. “We expect new models for church to emerge,” James noted, and in order to better respond to these groups, the conference is seeking to

hire an associate conference minister. A fund-raising campaign has begun to support this new position, to support the emerging groups, and to support other missional activities in the conference. (See more on page 3.)

Another significant transformation James noted is the Repentance and Transformation resolution, which was adopted at the special delegate session of Mennonite Church USA in late May. “For many, this is a long-delayed moment to celebrate the full inclusion of our queer siblings in our denomination,” while it also is a time to wonder what will happen in the coming months. James concluded, “I hope—deeply hope—that the care with which so many of us engaged one another [at the MC USA delegate meeting] will be carried back to our congregations and to our conferences and that we will trust God’s spirit to guide us together into the future.”

Artists explore “Tending Transformation” theme

Seven artists contributed their work to explore the theme of Tending Transformation. These pieces provided the backdrop for the worship services in the College Mennonite Church sanctuary. The media included fiber arts, paintings, wire art and a digital animation accompanied by an original piano composition.

The artists:

Alison Troyer, Grand Rapids (Mich.) Mennonite Fellowship

Kathy Stiffney, Southside Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind.

Joanne Murray, Oak Grove (Ohio) Mennonite Church

Julian Harnish, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio

Ron Headings, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio

Rylee Weishaupt, Silverwood Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

Susie Huser, Nelsonville, Ohio

Photo by Mary E. Klassen



Artwork from seven artists helped Annual Meeting participants reflect on the CDC two-year theme, Tending Transformation. To see these and read artists’ statements, visit mcusacdc.org/2022-annual-meeting/

Tending Transformation Campaign

by James Rissler, Conference President


At our recent annual meeting, we publicly announced a three year, \$350,000 Tending Transformation Campaign. This campaign will provide grants to emerging communities of faith (\$170,000), support the hiring of a new half-time Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith (\$100,000), and provide resources to the Missional Church Committee (\$40,000) and the Ministerial Committee (\$40,000) for missional activities and clergy development.

Doug Luginbill, conference minister, has been quietly approaching individual donors over the past six months, and has secured commitments of over \$200,000 so far. We invite individuals and congregations to consider whether they can support this campaign. The CDC website has pledge forms, which can be returned to Emma at the CDC office, or you can email information to her (office@mcusacdc.org). These forms include invitations to partner with emerging

communities of faith or to learn more about an existing CDC congregation, as well as to give financially. We want to encourage each other to learn one another's stories, as we are invited to do by the Sacred Listening process.

We are excited about the new possibilities for transformation that these resources will allow us to tend well. If you have ideas for an emerging community of faith, or for ways that your congregation might want to significantly revitalize, please reach out to Emma Hartman or anyone on the Missional Church Committee to inquire about the grant process.

For additional information, visit mcusacdc.org/tending-transformation-campaign

Missional Church Committee members are Karla Minter, Xaris Martinez, Tim Stair, Matthew Pritchard, Valerie Showalter, and new members David Voth and Brian Moll. 

Doug Luginbill affirmed for a new term as conference minister

"Doug is identified as a skilled listener, a calm and calming presence and a thoughtful counselor," James Rissler, conference president, said in summarizing a recent review of Doug Luginbill's ministry.

The CDC Leadership Council conducted a survey of Doug's work along with a questions about challenges and opportunities for the conference. Sixty-six people responded and the responses, according to the printed report,

were "overwhelmingly positive, appreciative and affirming."

With such strong affirmation from within the conference and from peer respondents in Mennonite Church USA, the Leadership Council appointed Doug to a new three-year term. Those gathered at the Annual Meeting affirmed this with extended applause. Doug responded, "It is indeed a privilege and joy to serve with you in this ministry." 



Photo by Mary E. Klassen

Doug Luginbill, CDC conference minister, was affirmed for a new three-year term. James, Rissler (right at front), CDC president, led a blessing for him as he was surrounded by other members of the review committee, left to right at back: Phil Martens, Ray Person and Karla Minter.

Annual Meeting seminars and storytelling sessions

Brenda Sawatzky Paetkau (1) and Kay Bontrager Singer led a pre-conference seminar that helped participants delve first into the story of Abraham greeting strangers outside his tent and then into a personal story to reveal God's Spirit moving in their own experiences.

Jane Roeschley (2) reflected on the experiences and benefits of pilgrimages in a storytelling session. She is a leader, along with Karla Minter, of the Celtic Pilgrimage scheduled for June 2023. "Pilgrimage is different than being a tourist—traveling lighter, paying attention to the stirrings of the Spirit, being part of a community," Jane said.

In the storytelling session marking the 65th anniversary of CDC, **David Bertsche (3)**, now a member of Eighth Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., shared memories of the first gathering on April 27, 1957, in Normal, Ill. Hillary Bertsche and Ron Ropp also shared memories of that gathering. Perry Bush and Janeen Bertsche Johnson co-led this session.

Charles Baraka (4) led a storytelling session

about his ministry in Burundi and other African countries. Charles is director of Amahoro Ministries and, now living in Madison, Wisc., is a participant in the Journey program of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. One objective of his work is to help people heal from the wounds of conflicts and to help tribes understand the advantage of living peacefully. Charles said he works to "build hope in hopeless people." Lavon Welty, Journey mentor for Charles, participated in the session.

Julia Schmidt (5) from the Center for Healing & Hope in Goshen, Ind., shared how Natural Helpers links immigrants with people who speak their language and can refer them to resources for food, transportation, jobs, housing, language classes and legal help.

Brian Sauder (6) of Faith in Place, Chicago, Ill., shared resources and encouragement for people to work at the climate crisis in their own communities.

Perry Bush (7) helped participants share and listen to stories of their roots in Ukraine and then led a discussion of how our Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment to peace and non-resistance might be a tool for transforming the current conflict there.

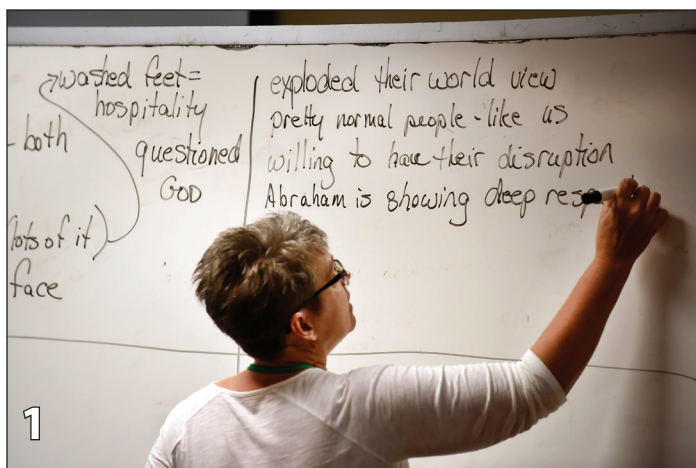
Other leaders not pictured:

Lisa Weaver led a workshop on her book, *Let the Children Come*.

Bluffton University staff shared the Great Adventure program for first-year students.

Mariah Martin shared about the podcast she hosts, "Called to be bad."

Listen to all sessions at www.mcusacdc.org. 



Doug's Mug: Gratitude

by Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister

My mug is overflowing with gratitude! As the spirit of our Central District Annual Meeting continues to linger in my heart and in my office space, I have much for which to be grateful. Our delegates last met in person in 2019 in Milwaukee. It was wonderful to be together again! For those who couldn't make it, please take time to view some of the videos of worship, seminars, storytelling and delegate meetings. You can find them at mcusacdc.org.



I am grateful for Emma Hartman, our CDC administrator, who worked closely with Goshen College and College Mennonite Church, to pull off our first hybrid Annual Meeting. Emma did so much more as well!

I am grateful for the board of directors and committee members who tend the mission of CDC throughout the year and who helped out throughout the Annual Meeting.

I am grateful for Mary Klassen who has covered the news across CDC over the past seven years and produced excellent *Reporter* and *focus* newsletters! Mary is retiring after the September issue of *Reporter*. (Mary, enjoy your retirement and whatever the next season of life brings!)

I am grateful for the artists who captured our theme, Tending Transformation, in so many lovely ways. I include the children who performed *Swords to Plowshares* as artists, as well as Eliza Stoltzfus and Lisa Weaver who created the story and music. I was moved by the poignant message of peace they proclaimed! And thank you to the artists whose work was auctioned off, raising \$1,600 for the Emerging Communities Fund.

I am grateful to the worship planners, preachers, musicians, scripture readers, ushers, communion servers and everyone who had a hand and voice in worship! Powerful messages of hope, justice and transformation were

proclaimed in multiple ways.

I am grateful for storytellers and seminar leaders who inspired, challenged and taught us. Our journey of faith continues as we grow in understanding and our perspectives are expanded.

I am grateful for donors who gave generously to our Tending Transformation Campaign and who contributed to the three offerings received during worship services.

I am grateful for guests who represent our broader Mennonite ministries. It is wonderful to walk this road with others. We are not alone!

I am grateful for every person who considers a CDC congregation their home. Christ's Spirit of hospitality, welcome, peace, hope and transformation dwells among us.

I am grateful for the cloud of witnesses, both past and present, who tend and proclaim God's message of shalom in our world.

May these words of the Psalmist fill your mug!

*Enter God's gates with thanksgiving
and the courts with praise!*

Give thanks to God!

Bless God's Name!

For YHWH is good;

*God's steadfast love endures forever,
and God's faithfulness*

to all generations.

Psalm 100, *The Inclusive Bible* 100



Children in CDC congregations colored paper leaves, which were given to Annual Meeting participants as reminders of the Tree of Life with leaves for the healing of the nations.

Installation



Jason Kuniholm was installed as pastor of Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, Sarasota, Fla., on May 15. The flower arrangement began as lilacs from Lancaster, Pa., where Jason is from, and Covenant members added flowers from their gardens. Linford and Mary Etta King, former pastors at Covenant, retired in May.

Ordination



Kiva Nice-Webb was ordained at Chicago Community Mennonite Church on June 5. Kiva is a campus minister of retreats at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. Kiva is a member of CDC’s Missional Church Committee.

Financial report, June 30, 2022

Year-to-date giving	
total income	\$258,262
Year-to-date plan	\$238,500
Difference between giving and plan . . .	\$19,762
Year-to-date expenses	\$234,273
Year-to-date spending plan	\$247,049
Difference between expenses	
and plan	-\$12,776

This is the final report for 2021-2022, though there may be a few minor changes to the figures above before the report is finalized. It has been another very good financial year for Central District Conference.

Congregational giving exceeded budget by about \$10,000, and the overall surplus of income over expenditure was nearly \$33,000. Not included in these figures is an additional \$52,000 already contributed toward the new Central District Conference Tending Transformation campaign. Expenditures for the year reflect pre-epidemic levels, though there remain some shifts in categories. We once again express our gratitude to member congregations and individual supporters for ensuring strong financial support throughout the epidemic years.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

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