



December 2022

Central District Conference Connector

Stories and News from across the conference

What are you going to do with the Sacred Listening stories?

Many have asked what will become of the stories gathered during the *Sacred Listening* visits? We want to share snippets with our CDC congregations so we can learn from and get to know one another better. We also intend to share lengthier stories as well. We will also look for common themes to discover ways we might resource or support one another. And we will highlight unique ministries, programs, or worship experiences that inspire us and expand our understandings of what it means to be the church today.

Read a sampling of a Sacred Listening Stories to the right.

"I Just Want to Make a Difference"

by Sarah Werner



Back in March members from CDC visited Americus Mennonite Fellowship as part of the Sacred Listening Project, and the story of Nashua "Nash" Chantal stood out as epitomizing the Mennonite imperative to live a life that works to bring love and justice to a hurting world. A while ago Nash came to live in LaGrange, Georgia to rest for a while after spending 18 months working in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He quickly found Alterna, an intentional community of solidarity with undocumented immigrants, and became close friends with Anton Flores, one of its founders. He noticed that many of his Latino neighbors were struggling and started going door to door, meeting people and passing out flyers with information about assistance available for them in the community. When families were getting robbed, he helped put stronger doors on their homes. He and the church also helped when families had material needs like refrigerators or food, or assistance with home repair.

When he moved to Americus, he worked to build community there in the same way, visiting neighbors and gauging needs. He reached out to GLARE, a Latino Christian organization in Atlanta, and started passing out flyers for them that had information about farmworker rights and phone numbers where they could seek help locally. Nash said that even though these seem like small efforts, "Little things

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Doug's Mug: Threads of Heaven

By Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister



Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and descend, make the mountains shudder at your presence— As when a forest catches fire, as when fire makes a pot to boil— To shock your enemies into facing you, make the nations shake in their boots! Isaiah 64:1-2 The Message



I had the privilege of worshipping with Hively Avenue Mennonite Church on Dec. 11. Pratik Bagh was commissioned as their interim pastor and licensed as a minister of the Gospel. Praise God! Behind the pulpit was a banner which bore a duct-taped patch, a burnt-hole, and a flap of cloth torn at a ninety-degree angle. The ripped cloth reminded me of one of my favorite images of the Advent season, proclaimed in the text from Isaiah 6 quoted above.

All I want for Christmas are some of those stray threads, rained down from heaven, collected from across the world! Shreds of sky blue and golden star dust, cottony cloud and grey thunderhead, crimson sunset and rainbow hews. Not for their colors alone would I cherish this mug of heavenly thread but for the terrifying and beautiful reminder

of God afoot on the earth. The Incarnate Word, stubbing toe against mountain, pulling slivers of redwood from thigh, wading across ocean depths, reclining among desert dunes. This giant of a God, asleep in a manger, vulnerable to disease, storm, occupying armies, and the righteous religious.

Who is this God I dare to worship; five-star general or unhoused migrant? World-cup star or tossed-aside stadium contract laborer? Mighty king or marginalized infant? Perfect Marvel hero or death-row inmate?

If God had not ripped apart heaven's veil, I would have chosen the general, soccer star, king and punishing hero. If God had hid away in a heavenly throne room, decreeing thus and so, and commanding armies to destroy, I would have prayed for the final reckoning.

But God ripped open the heavens, raining shreds of sky across the earth, clogging-up unfiltered world-views and mucking up the wheels of progress.

“I Just Want to Make a Difference, cont’d”

like that just start to matter after a while.” He started visiting Latino churches to learn more about the issues they were facing. With the assistance of the church, he was able to lend money to people who needed it and help people repair their homes. “When people aren’t being taken care of, the Mennonite church steps up and helps,” Nash said, and everyone in the church wants to get involved in this kind of work, adults and children alike, because it builds community with their neighbors. In Nash’s words, “you basically develop a big family after a while.”

Nash had a rough start in life and ended up in prison when he was nineteen. He said it was a lifechanging experience for him. He started helping other prisoners, mediating arguments between ethnic groups and even stopping riots. Nash said, “My prison experience taught me something about life. I’m sorry I did that horrible thing, but that’s why I became involved in the peace movement.” He realized that the US government is involved in systematic killing through war, creating violence in other countries through programs like the School of the Americas at Ft. Benning (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). “This is what I do. Because of the crime I did a long time ago, I gave my life to justice. The government is hurting lots of people. All we can do is walk beside them. I’m there for people. Any kind of injustice I’m there.” Nash said he sometimes feels helpless in the face of so much injustice, but during our conversation he reiterated again and again that all he wants to do is make a difference for people in any way he can.

Nash thanks God for walking with him throughout his life and for giving him the chance to help people. He has taken in ten people in the last ten years to help them get out of bad situations, whether it be domestic violence or unemployment. “I take care of people in general. If I see something, I take care of it,” Nash said. He also reported that Americus Mennonite Fellowship has been like a lighthouse for the community. Church members intervene when migrants are arrested and sometimes the police release them without even impounding their vehicles. Most of all Nash likes what he does because it makes him happy. “We’re all needed. Everyone is needed. You can make a difference in someone’s life so easily.”

Doug’s Mug, cont’d

I’m grateful for the threads and watch with delighted dismay as God’s army of spinners and knitters and sewers weave fabrics of healing and hope to clothe every vulnerable and shivering being on the face of earth and heaven.

Who is this God I worship? I worship a vulnerable God who brought heaven low through its rending and lifted up creation through its incarnation. And the Word became flesh...

I give thanks for you spinners and knitters and sewers of healing and hope. Continue to gather the threads and make the world more beautiful with your love. Have a blessed Christmas!

FAITH FORMATION CONVERSATION

Grab your favorite hot beverage and bring some ideas to share as you relax with other CDC faith formation leaders on Friday, January 20, 2023 from 10:30-12:00 eastern time via Zoom. This is for anyone in the church who leads or assists with children, youth and family faith formation. Lisa Weaver, from Madison Mennonite Church, will serve as a facilitator for this informal conversation to resource, support and encourage one another. There is no cost but please register [HERE](#) to receive the Zoom invitation. For questions, contact Doug Luginbill, conference minister at confmin@mcusacdc.org.



An Invitation to Be Heard

The CDC Leadership Council met at Camp Friedenswald on October 29. One agenda item included responding to the question, “How shall CDC live into the resolution on [Repentance and Transformation](#)?” which was passed by MC USA delegates in May. Many ideas were generated. One thing that was clear is that CDC leadership is called to **listen to the stories of those who have experienced harm by the church or whose gifts have not been welcomed in the church because of their sexual identity or the sexual identity of a family member.**

The CDC ministerial committee encourages anyone or any congregation who would like to begin a conversation to contact either Gayle Gerber Koontz, ministerial committee chairperson, or Conference Minister Doug Luginbill (contact information below). The members of the ministerial committee and their responsibilities can be found at <https://mcusacdc.org/who-we-are/ministerial-committee/>. We want to listen well. We want to tend transformation in our conference. We long for healing and hope.

When someone contacts a member of the committee, the following questions will be asked:

- * How would you like to share your story? In writing? Meeting in person with someone? Meeting over Zoom? Other?
- * With whom would you like to share your story? Conference minister? Member of ministerial committee? With someone else?
- * Would you like to invite a support person to be with you when you share your story?
- * What would you hope for by telling your story?
- * Is there anything else you would like us to know before we hear your story?
- * Stories that the ministerial committee hears will not be shared except with permission by the story teller.

To begin the conversation or to learn more about sharing your story, you may contact:

Doug Luginbill, conference minister; confmin@mcusacdc.org

Gayle Gerber Koontz, ministerial committee chair, ggkoontz@ambs.edu

Communications Coordinator Needed:

Central District Conference seeks a part-time member of the conference leadership team to share stories of how CDC congregations and leaders are fulfilling our mission: Knowing Christ's Love. . . Answering God's Call. The successful candidate will be able to gather stories from across the conference and share these stories clearly and compellingly across various media platforms. Skills in content management will allow this person to work with existing staff and conference leadership to develop a strategic approach to sharing our stories. Travel to conference events expected. The position is up to half-time. Salary commensurate with experience and training.

**To inquire, contact Emma Hartman,
office@mcusacdc.org**

Financial Report

Nov 30, 2022

YTD Contributed Giving:	\$105,133
YTD Plan:	\$115,990
Difference between giving and plan:	-\$10,672
YTD Expenses:	\$97,323
YTD Plan:	\$130,574
Difference between expenses and plan:	-\$33,251



Pratik Bagh was licensed for specific ministry and commissioned as the part-time interim pastor at Hively Avenue Mennonite Church on December 11. Tim Stair continues part time as well." Pictured L to R are Shanice (daughter), Shabnam (wife), Pratik, and Doug Luginbill. Photo taken by Tyler Klassen.

The Central District Conference Connector is an interim publication following the retirement of Mary Klassen as the editor of *Reporter* and *focus*. This publication will be distributed approximately every four to six weeks by CDC staff; Emma Hartman (office@mcusacdc.org) and Doug Luginbill (confmin@mcusacdc.org).

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