



May 2023

Connector

Central District Conference

A conference of Mennonite Church USA

Knowing Christ's Love...
Answering God's Call

Stories and News from
Around the Conference



The annual meeting will include programming for children of all ages with the theme "Compassion All Around Us."

Tending Transformation at Annual Meeting

by Sarah Werner

This year's CDC Annual Meeting will be June 22-24 in person and via zoom at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana for three days of meaningful community-building activities including worship, seminars, and time to socialize. The gathering will host an art auction featuring the work of CDC artists, which anyone is welcome to participate in [online](#). Childcare will be provided for infants and preschool-aged children, and there will be special programming for children in grades K-12 with the theme "Compassion All Around Us."

The gathering begins Thursday afternoon with a seminar on the theme of "Transformation as a Sacred Journey," facilitated by Naomi Wenger, a spiritual director, retreat leader and past co-director of The Hermitage retreat center in Three Rivers, Michigan. The worship service Thursday night will be centered on the theme "When the Church is the Church, the Community Rejoices" with Matt Pritchard, the Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith, preaching. The service will be followed by an ice cream social.

On Friday morning the first delegate session will

In this Issue:

Annual Meeting Preview	pg. 1
Annual Meeting Schedule	pg. 2
Role of the Ministerial Committee	pg. 3
Queer Mennonite Visioning Retreat	pg. 3
Sustainability and Restoration Retreats at Friedenswald	pg. 4
No Draft Video/Essay Challenge	pg. 5
Installation Services	pg. 6
Financial Report	pg. 6

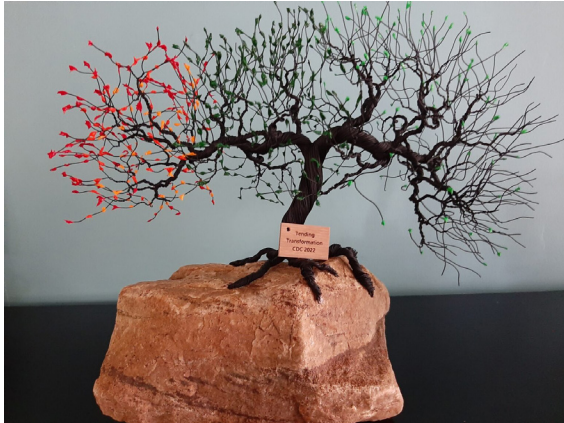
include committee reports, sharing from several emerging communities in the conference, and the introduction of St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship. The afternoon delegate sessions will center on the resolutions passed at last year's MC USA delegate session on accessibility and repentance and transformation.

Friday evening seminars include offerings about various aspects of church life. Joel Miller, pastor of Columbus Mennonite, will lead a workshop on marking adult life transitions through ritual and reflection, a project he has led for small groups at CMC for the past several years. Matt Pritchard will present a seminar on practical ways of observing and exploring God's presence in your community. Lora Nafziger, pastor at Assembly Mennonite Church, will lead a workshop on integrating the Bible with the book of Creation for an intergenerational audience using storytelling, Bible study, and ritual. Conference Minister Doug Luginbill will lead a panel discussion on tending transformation in agencies throughout the conference, with sharing from Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee, Bluffton University and Everence.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

In our worship service on Saturday morning we'll hear from retired pastor Wanda Stopher on the theme of transforming practice. This will be followed by the final delegate session and the results of the art auction. We hope you can all join us for this fun and important gathering. The deadline to register is June 10.



Visit the CDC website

For details on the Annual Meeting, go to:

<https://mcusacdc.org/2023-annual-meeting/>

There you can find more information including:

- Registration form for the gathering, child-care and children's activities, Pastor Appreciation dinner, and more
- Delegate Report Book, including items requiring action
- Information about housing and meal options
- Speakers and seminars
- Slate of nominees for the CDC board and committees
- Link to the auction of CDC theme art

Annual Meeting Schedule

Thursday, June 22

2:00 pm Registration begins

3:00 pm Transformation as Sacred Journey
led by Naomi Wenger

5:00 pm Pastor Appreciation Dinner

7:30 pm WORSHIP I

Theme: When the Church is the Church,
the Community Rejoices

Texts: Proverbs 11:10, John 4:4-42,
Jeremiah 6:13-14; 8:10b-11; 29:5-9

Speaker: Matt Pritchard

Offering: Anabaptist Disabilities Network

9:00 pm Ice Cream Social

Friday, June 23

8:30 am Delegate Session I

Welcome and State of the Conference,
Congregational Story, 2022 Annual Meeting
Minutes, Treasurer's Report, 2023-
2024 Leadership Slate

9:45 am Break/Snacks

10:15 am Panel discussion committee reports,
Congregational Story, Introduction of
St Louis Mennonite Fellowship, Sharing
around tables

11:45 am Lunch in the dining hall or on your own

1:30 pm Delegate Session II

Tending Transformation: Accessibility

3:00 pm Break

3:30 pm Delegate Session III

Tending Transformation: Repentance and
Transformation

5:00 pm Dinner in dining hall or on your own

7:00 pm Free Time or Seminars

Saturday, June 24

8:30 - 9:30 am WORSHIP II: CMC sanctuary

Theme: Transforming Practice

Speaker: Wanda Stopher

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Offering for Central District Conference
Communion

9:30 am Break:

10:00 am Delegate Session IV

Art Auction announcement, Tending
Transformation: Justice in the Criminal
System, 2022-2023 Spending Plan and
Listening Committee Report

11:45am Evaluations/Committee Nominations

11:55am Songs/Benediction/Prayer

12:00 pm Close of Annual Meeting

The Role of the Ministerial Committee

by Gayle Gerber Koontz, Committee chair

Did you know that when your congregation requests someone to be licensed for ministry that the candidate goes through a significant process of questioning and reflection?

First, a candidate prepares or updates what is called the Ministerial Leadership Information form (MLI). They do not just record their educational, work and volunteer history, but are asked to identify and comment on three biblical texts that are foundational for their faith, life and ministry. They are also asked to write about three areas of the 1995 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective that they strongly affirm and three areas they find challenging.

Candidates are invited to tell the story of their Christian commitment, growth and call to ministry, and to reflect on their spiritual practices. They focus on self-awareness and emotional health, including their ways of dealing with conflict and stress management. They reflect on missional theology from an Anabaptist perspective and how they see God at work in areas outside the church. They also write about leadership and their understanding of power and authority in congregational life. Finally, they note on a checklist what they believe to be their pastoral skills and gifts and they secure three recommendations in support of their pastoral call.

Based on this written material, the CDC Ministerial Committee begins its work, personally interviewing all candidates for whom congregations have requested licensing for ministry. Between July 2022 and April 2023, the Committee interviewed 12 people for licensing for ministry and were encouraged by the high quality of candidates. Because our district is spread from Florida to Ohio and from Virginia to Illinois, and the availability of Zoom, we have carried out most of our interviews online for the past several years.

Candidates meet members from the committee that currently consists of three active pastors, a retired chaplain, a retired counselor, a retired seminary professor, and our conference minister Doug Luginbill for about an hour of questioning. Candidates are often asked to provide more detail regarding their theological views, to give specific examples to illustrate written comments, to expand

on statements that may be of concern to the committee, and to follow up on notes made in references. One exercise included in the MLI process asks persons providing references to strongly agree, agree, or disagree with each item on the list of pastoral skills and gifts that candidates fill out. In our ministerial pool it is common for references to rate someone more highly in a number of areas than they rate themselves.

Following the interview the Committee, without the candidate present, reflects on what they heard, decides whether or not to grant the licensing request, and determines what areas of affirmation or counsel they want to pass on to the candidate. The candidate rejoins the committee for closing words and prayer for them and their ministry. With Committee affirmation, licensing is celebrated in the congregation shortly after, usually with the Conference Minister present.



CDC leaders at the Leadership Council retreat at Camp Friedenswald in April.

Queer Mennonite Visioning Retreat at Camp Friedenswald

by Michelle Burkholder, Michael B. Crosby, Xaris A. Martínez, Annabeth Roeschley, Randy Spaulding, Rachael Weasley

On behalf of the organizers and attendees of the recently concluded Queer Mennonite Visioning Retreat, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to Camp Friedenswald and Central District Conference (CDC) for their support in making it possible for sixteen queer and trans Mennonite leaders and committed accomplices to reconnect, process, and strategize. At the Leadership Council meeting last October, we were encouraged to hear that conference leadership was seeking concrete ways to

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

express lament over past harms to the queer community and that Camp Friedenswald was interested in repairing their relationship with the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC).

When we reached out to conference leadership with a concrete proposal for a gathering, we were heartened to receive immediate and enthusiastic offers of financial support from Camp Friedenswald and from the CDC Board, Ministerial Committee, and Missional Church Committee—and even more heartened to know that this support came out of long-term commitments from all of these entities to “tend transformation” at the individual, congregational, and conference level.

BMC also invited four local Supportive Communities Network (SCN) congregations to provide meals to retreat participants as a way to extend care and repair to the LGBTQIA+ Mennonite community: Assembly Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN), Eighth Street Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN), Silverwood Mennonite Church (Goshen, IN), and Southside Fellowship (Elkhart, IN). We were especially grateful to share one of these meals with Camp Friedenswald staff members Jane Litwiller, Jess Whicker, and Jenna Liechty Martin—all of whom did so much to ensure that retreat participants felt welcome in the “peaceful woods.” Invitations to the retreat drew on existing relationships of current BMC and Inclusive Mennonite Pastors (IMP) leaders. Participants represented varying degrees of official engagement in Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) and included those with both newer and longer-term engagement in LGBTQIA+ Mennonite movements. The sixteen retreat participants came from nine states and were predominantly pastors, as well as chaplains and movement leaders.

Our time together centered around shared meals, unstructured time for rest and recreation, and morning and evening group sessions where we spoke candidly about our hopes, needs, stories, grief, and flourishing. We benefited greatly from the diversity of experiences and gifts that retreat participants brought to the gathering, while also acknowledging that many of our beloved queer kin were, for various reasons, not in the room with us. We rejoiced at being able to laugh, sing, walk, tie-dye, and play together “in real life” rather than through a computer screen. We spoke many of our

dreams out loud, including our hopes of organizing a second “Fabulous, Fierce & Sacred” gathering of the Anabaptist LGBTQIA+ community in 2024. And we concluded our time together by celebrating communion and singing “Sing a New World into Being” (VT 809): “Sing a new world into being: live the promise you believe!”

Thank you for responding to our invitation—and the larger invitation to the MC USA denomination articulated in “A Resolution for Repentance and Transformation”—to live into the promise we believe. We would welcome the opportunity for further collaboration, and we hope that CDC and Camp Friedenswald will continue to take concrete steps and measures to ensure that all are welcome in our conference, camps, congregations, and homes.



Worship at the Southside Fellowship sustainability retreat at Camp Friedenswald.

Sustainability and Restoration a Focus of Church Retreats at Camp Friedenswald

By Amy Huser, sustainability and outdoor education director

Camp Friedenswald recently hosted Southside Fellowship (Elkhart, IN) for a Sustainability and Restoration Retreat. Over 60 people from the fellowship participated in the weekend church retreat that was funded through the Lily Foundation as part of Pastor David Moser’s upcoming sabbatical.

The retreat was co-led by Amy Huser, Camp Friedenswald’s sustainability and outdoor education director, and Doug Kaufman, director of pastoral ecology with the Anabaptist Climate Collaborative and co-pastor at Benton Mennonite Church. The retreat focused on empowering participants to

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

be engaged in climate change work and action by moving through Joanna Macy's [Spiral of the Work that Reconnects](#). Participants were invited into Macy's spiral practices of coming from gratitude, honoring our pain, seeing with new eyes, and going forth. In addition to times of engaging input and reflection, there were also activities for people of all ages to help connect with one another and the world around them. From cricket cookies to birding hikes, there were opportunities for building relationships and growing as a community.



Following the retreat, Moser reflected on the retreat sharing: *The retreat was a great success. I*

heard numerous positive comments throughout the weekend. When we got home Ingrid said, "I think that was the best church retreat I have ever been on." I am not sure how you can improve on that!

Structuring the retreat around Joanna Macy's spiral worked really well. The input from Doug and the activities Amy offered for each session fit together perfectly. The rituals with clay were very effective, and the conclusion of listing our commitments on paper leaves and placing them on a tree was a perfect ritual for sending us forth. The balance between input sessions, optional activities, and free time could not have been better.

Additionally, the food was outstanding! I heard people saying things like, "This is the best food I've ever had at camp." It was really meaningful having input from Eric, the food service director, at the start of each meal about the local farmers he used to source the meals we were eating. Each meal gave us a wonderful tasty reminder of what we can do to promote sustainability. Thank you to everyone behind the scenes as well who offered us a clean camp that ran seamlessly all weekend. It was a renewing and transforming weekend.

Camp Friedenswald is pleased to offer this opportunity to other congregations within Central District Conference and beyond. If you are interested in a similar experience for your congregation or community, please contact Amy Huser at 269-

476-9744 or email amy@friedenswald.org. To see a schedule of the Southside Fellowship retreat, [click here](#). The schedule can be customized to meet the needs of your congregation.



At left and above left: a clay art project during the sustainability retreat. Above right: Doug Kaufman speaking.

#NoDraft Video/Essay Challenge

- A contest open to high schoolers, grades 9-12!
- Submit your short video telling the world why you oppose the draft and Selective Service registration!
- Top entries win cash prizes, up to \$1,000!
- Deadline 6/30/2023, 11:59 pm Pacific time
- Every entry can help raise awareness of the injustice of drafting young people to fight and kill in war!

The Center on Conscience & War (CCW) is hosting a video essay contest for teens to spark a real conversation and inspire a movement to end Selective Service and the draft once and for all! To enter, [submit your short video and brief essay](#) telling the world why you oppose the draft and why you think the US should repeal Selective Service, ending decades of draft registration and overturning damaging penalties against those who do not register. The original media you create will help educate and motivate others to take action to end the draft once and for all.

Winners will be announced on Saturday, Sept. 16, during an online presentation on the anniversary of the Military Selective Service Act becoming law. Full details, contest rules and more can be found on our website: [CCW's #NoDraft Video Essay Contest](#). Feel free to call us at 202-483-2220 or email ccw@centeronconscience.org.

Installations



Anton and Charlotte Flores were commissioned as interim pastors at Atlanta Mennonite Church, Atlanta, GA on April 9 and Anton was licensed for specific ministry in Central District Conference.



Annali Smucker-Bryan and Peter Eash-Scott were commissioned as interim pastors at Madison Mennonite Church, Madison, WI, while Pastor Valerie Showalter is on sabbatical through June. Peter was also licensed for specific minister as an interim pastor. Peter is a member of Milwaukee Mennonite Church.

Financial report April 30, 2023

Year-to-date income	\$235,852
Year-to-date plan	\$231,981
Difference between giving and plan	+\$3,872
Year-to-date expenses	\$209,426
Year-to-date plan	\$261,148
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$51,722

With two-thirds of the financial year completed, congregational contributions are nearly \$11,000 ahead of projected spending plan needs. Expenditures continue to lag well behind spending plan projections due primarily to the timing of new staff hirings.

The CDC Tending Transformation campaign is a special fundraising effort officially begun in the current financial year. The goal of the three year campaign is to raise \$350,000 for additional staff and program funding for emerging communities of faith. To date \$200,800 has been received.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

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