



Conference Minister's Report 2024

Listen! Wisdom is calling. This is the theme carrying us through our 2025 Annual Meeting. The theme is inspired by Proverbs 8:1 (Does not wisdom call and does not understanding raise her voice?) and Ephesians 3:10 (Through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.) Wisdom (Chochmah in Hebrew and Sophia in Greek) is always personified as female. She hovered over creation from its beginning, an eternal partner with God. She is a collaborative relationship builder. Sophia bears the fruits of wisdom, love, justice, purity, and peace. She arises most prominently during seasons of confusion, exile, loss, and disillusionment. She is both mystery and enlightenment. Jesus identifies himself with Sophia most directly in Matthew 11:18-19, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Paul declares in I Cor. 1:30, "God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God..."

In this season of political polarization, climate crisis, destructive war, growing nationalism, institutional skepticism, and shifting understandings of the church, how are you experiencing Sophia? Does God still entrust Divine wisdom to the church? As Anabaptists approach our 500th year, have we lost our way? Or is Sophia hovering above us and among us, guiding us in creative ways to live into the beloved community of God?

I am grateful for the wisdom of our CDC staff; Emma, Beth, Sarah, and Matt. I experience wisdom among our Leadership Council. I am inspired by the wisdom of our pastors, lay leaders, and parishioners as I visit our congregations. As Matt likes to say, "It is a great time to be a Mennonite!" This is not a hurrah to exceptionalism but a testament to a way of being church that is welcoming, affirms the face of God in all people, believes in the way of peace, and seeks to "answer God's persistent call to share love with one another and the world." (CDC Mission)

We are experiencing wisdom as we welcome St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship as a member congregation and as we welcome Peace Mennonite Fellowship and Knoxville Mennonite Church as Provisional Members. (Provisional Membership is a new category that we invite delegates to affirm.) We are welcoming wisdom as we get to know new pastors, chaplains, and other credentialed leaders.

We are finding wisdom as we reflect on the Civil Rights Learning Tour that took place in May. We are seeking wisdom through a conference-wide book study, worship series, quarterly spiritual retreats, and an Our Whole Lives human sexuality curriculum training.

We are seeking wisdom as five congregations remain in pastoral search. This is the lowest number of churches in pastoral search in several years. Praise God for calling and blessing pastors to serve in leadership. At the same time, all of us are called to name, encourage, and bless others with gifts for ministry among us. Sophia will walk with them and with us!

We all know that God's church is broken and beautiful. Some people are hurt even as others find healing. I look forward to listening to Carol Penner and Sibonokuhle Ncube as they share their wisdom with us in worship and conversation. May we be brave in our sharing, courageous in our caring, sincere in our confessing, and joyful in our worshipping. For we are 45 and soon to be 48, parts of the body of Christ, the wisdom of God.