



November 2024

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



Angelica and her parents at her child dedication service at Lima Mennonite Church. Photo: Jeff Boehr.

God's Presence in Newness

by Jeff Boehr

On the first Sunday after Lima Mennonite began to meet in person again after the Covid pandemic, we were gathered with a feeling of joy at being together and a sense of mystery about our way together with God. We said a prayer together asking for where we were being called to serve in what felt like very different times. It read: "Our Lord Creator, the presence and message of your Spirit is filled with goodness; as often as we notice them, may the spirit of our being, be ready to absorb them. What you bring to us, sustains us for the living of each day; for the purpose of helping to make your love visible in the world. We ask to be ready to notice and take in your goodness to share. Amen." We have been on a journey of watching, listening, living, and dreaming since.

A little over a year ago a connection began with a group of Haitians that came to Lima looking for sustainable living conditions. They left the violence and instability of their homeland that had also been devastated by natural disasters. Even today as I write this, gun violence directed at planes in Port-a-Prince

In this issue:

Sharing with Haitians in Lima	pg. 1
MCC Comforter Projects	pg. 3
Doug's Mug	pg. 5
Cincinnati Celebrates 50 years	pg. 6
Installation	pg. 6
Financial Report	pg. 6

has caused a pause in flights to the country. In Lima a language and tutoring academy has been formed to help persons arriving from different places in the world. The academy was started by a woman from Tunisia to help people learn English and other languages. It is financially challenging for Haitians without a job or even with an entry-level job to afford this service.

Sandra Liechty, a member of Lima Mennonite has a long connection to the international community living in Lima. She and her husband Carl served in Japan through Mennonite Mission Network and she is skilled in teaching English as an additional language. Sandra met four Haitian men and a married couple seeking to learn English and offered classes to them without cost. She led classes at the public library before asking Lima Mennonite if we could host the class at the church during the Sunday School hour. We agreed that this would be a fitting ministry for the congregation.

It didn't take long for word to get out to the Haitian community, and more students arrived of all ages. Mary Hostetler of Lima Mennonite started providing a light breakfast for the group coming, which included some parents with children. The class participants were

Continued on pg. 2

Continued from pg. 1

invited to stay for our worship service after the class. Some did, even though the language difference was still a challenge. Our Haitian friends that came to worship with us are people of faith. From the beginning, there was a sense that we were sharing the presence of God with us and among us, even though our words were a mystery to each other. On one Sunday morning as we were singing a hymn, I could hear the voice of one of the Haitian women singing out in Creole. It was a familiar hymn to her and she shared her heart with us all through the music of her voice.

We are learning that the Haitian immigrants to our area are of both Catholic and Protestant traditions and some are not affiliated with any tradition. Many churches in Lima are opening their doors to Haitian immigrants but with separate worship times. My hope is that we can continue to share our worship time, listen for, and experience the presence of God together in our uniqueness.



Early on, our worship together has been aided by a gifted person of faith named Amos Marcelin. Amos speaks fluent English and has cared for our worship and relational life together as an interpreter on Sunday mornings. He also interprets in many public settings in support of the Haitian community. He grew up in the Haitian countryside near the ocean. His father was the leader and preacher of a Baptist church as well as a fisherman. He lost his father when he was 11 years old and he experienced a series of harsh challenges going forward, including being a “boat person” as a child. Rescued at sea, he was sent to Guantánamo Bay where he spent 11 months before being sent back to Haiti. His mother died three years later. There is much more to his

story, and it includes a call from God to care for children in Haiti that are orphans, as well as the disabled, abandoned, and poor. Amos has started an organization called Good Heart Ministry to live into this call.

Below left: Participants at the TESOL class, which meets during the Sunday school hour in the church basement each week. Right: Some of the new Haitian friends. Photos: Jeff Boehr.



We continue to listen to and learn about the variety of stories that our new friends bring, and I expect their stories will move and shape our own path of faith. We are on this journey of newness and life together in the fullness of God. God is responding to our prayer and we pray to be faithful in sharing God’s love.

Jeff Boehr is the pastor at Lima Mennonite Church in Lima, Ohio.

*

MCC Comforter Project

Many CDC congregations contribute to Mennonite Central Committee’s (MCC) comforter project, which sends handmade blankets to communities in need throughout the world. Comforters provide warmth and are a reminder that there are those who care about them, even from far away. Columbus Mennonite Church (Ohio) attaches gift cards to their comforters which read, “Please know that other people around the world think of you with love and hope that you find a good place to live for you and your family.”

Last year, MCC shipped 53,601 comforters to communities in Canada, El Salvador, Malawi, Ukraine, the US, and Zambia. The stories below feature just a few of the many congregations who participate. For more information about the comforter program visit: <https://mcc.org/get-involved/kits/comforters>.

A Summer of Comfort—MC of Normal

by Gerry Schrock, Deb Stenger and Mary Ann Watkins

The summer of 2023 began with a committee from the Community Life Commission at Mennonite Church of Normal in Illinois, working and planning to make comforters for MCC. The ladies began meeting every week to piece together tops to knot together into comforters at a Comforter Bash in September. Six or more people usually came to help out and all had a job. Some would cut out the pieces in simple quilt patterns, while others would lay out the cut pieces ready to be sewn together. Some would bring their sewing machines and sew pieces together, and still others would press the seams after sewn. For some folks sewing a quilt top was a new learning experience.



Above: Members of the Mennonite Church of Normal quilting group display one of their finished comforters. Right: Comforters being displayed in the sanctuary at Mennonite Church of Normal. Photos: Gerry Schrock.



At the end of September 2023 we held a Quilt Bash at Mennonite Church of Normal where MCC brought frames, and we knotted the comforters over a two-day period. Other area churches were invited to join us in knotting together the quilt tops and they brought additional pieced tops to be knotted as well. Several people brought sewing machines to sew the binding and complete the comforters.

Many came each day to help with this project including women, men, youth, families and seniors. More than 50 quilts were completed!

After the quilts were finished, several men from the church hung the comforters all around the sanctuary in the church so all could see what was done. It was a beautiful display, and a special blessing was given for the complete work. Several weeks later the quilts were picked up and sent to MCC and were then on their way to help keep someone warm. Although this project was a lot of work we were blessed to help those in need in this small way.

*

A Long History of Quilting at Grace MC

by Jill Hilty

Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio has been making comforters for MCC since the church's founding in 1904. There were many different women's groups that have made comforters over the years. These groups included Women in Mission, Dorcas Missionary Society, Mary Martha Society and the current group under the name of "Threads of Grace." The current name was chosen because it now includes men who help with the comforter making. In the earlier years quilts were also pieced and quilted and sent to relief sales in addition to the comforters that were made and sent to MCC. The current group also coordinates the making of school kits and hygiene kits for MCC.

The main mission of "Threads of Grace" is to make and knot comforters for MCC. Baby comforters are also made to give to newborn babies within the congregation. Meeting together is more than just for making comforters. It is also a time to get together and share what is going on in our lives. Fellowship is an important part of the group and friendships have formed and grown deeper within the group as we bond and support one another. We celebrate the good times and care for each other during the tough times in our lives. It is also a place for sharing our faith and encouraging each other. We are always looking for new ways to support the mission of the local church and the Church beyond our walls.

Peace by Piece at Covenant in Sarasota

by Gretchen Miller McTavish

Covenant Mennonite Fellowship has a small but dynamic and committed group of comforter creators, aptly named Peace by Piece. We have completed over 100 comforters for MCC so far in 2024 with many more in process. Winter residents add to our group and greatly assist in getting the comforters completed. We meet several times a month and include a range of members who cut, design, sew, knot, bind, and deliver the comforters. Meeting and working together builds friendships and community. We pray that our work brings warmth and comfort to the recipients.



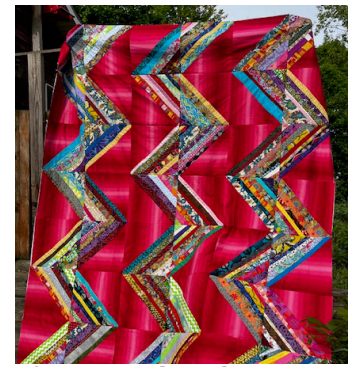
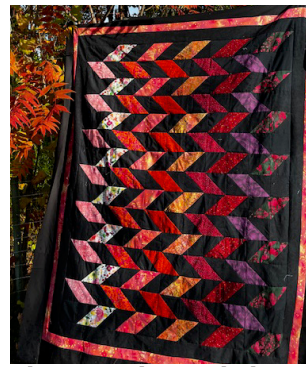
Above: Members of Peace by Piece knot a comforter at Covenant Mennonite Church in Sarasota. Photo: Gretchen Miller McTavish. Right: volunteers knotting comforters at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio. Photo: Jill Hilty.



Designing for Beauty

by Chris Nofsinger

I attend Florence Church of the Brethren/Mennonite in Constantine, Mich. and am largely responsible for making the comforters. I design and sew the comforters and Faith Carpenter knots them. I do this because it's a way of combining my interest in design, color and beauty with making something that will provide comfort to someone who needs a warm blanket. I like to use the most beautiful fabric I can find and only make comforters that I would want in my own home on my own bed. When I am sewing I like to imagine and think about the journey this comforter will make as it finds its new home. Before we send a batch off to MCC we have a blessing of the quilts at church.



Above: quilts made by Chris Nofsinger and Faith Carpenter at Florence Church of the Brethren/Mennonite. Photo: Chris Nofsinger.

Piecemakers in Columbus

by Marlene Suter

The Piecemakers at Columbus Mennonite Church in Ohio officially began in 2009 with 8-10 people, several of whom had been making comforters at home for years, and the group gradually grew to around 25-30 regular attenders. We meet twice a month, and enjoy a potluck lunch together once a month. We have quilt frames for knotting comforters, while other Piecemakers sew comforter tops, cut backings and battings, trim the knotted comforters and prepare them for binding, and design fabric combinations for comforter tops.

Our church administrator's parents, Marion and Norma Mast of Wooster, cut hundreds of squares with a special fabric press in their basement. What a blessing it has been to have their help! As each comforter is completed, a label is added to the back which includes the MCC logo and reads 'This comforter was joyfully made for you by the people of Columbus Mennonite Church in the year ____.' We don't know where all our comforters end up, but it's our humble hope and prayer that they serve as messages of God's love and peace to people in need of comfort.

The first year we completed 36 comforters for MCC; in 2024 we completed 290. Before 2016, when we started receiving an annual mission budget allocation, we were entirely funded through individual contributions and two fund raisers each year. In the winter we have a "Soup-er Pie Supper and Knotting Party," with homemade soups, breads and pies donated by our members and supporters. In the spring we have a plant sale, co-sponsored

Continued on pg. 5

Continued from pg. 4

with our church garden group. Many church members donate plants, and many members and our neighbors in Clintonville come to buy them.

Every summer, we have a comforter blessing during a worship service, with all comforters displayed on the backs of the pews. At the end of the service, comforters are loaded into cars, to be delivered to MCC Connections in Kidron the following day. Gift cards are attached with messages including: "Blessings for your journey. A warm embrace for love and caring. I'm not simply a blanket, I was created for you by many hearts and many hands to bring you special comfort a place safe and warm, where you may find peace."



Comforters in the sanctuary of Columbus Mennonite Church for the annual blessing of the comforters.

Doug's Mug: A Mug full of Stupid

by Doug Luginbill

It's the economy stupid!

In other words, we know who our God is in a capitalist and materialist culture. Even though our money says, "In God we trust," it's just another lie we keep trying to convince ourselves is true.

I trust in God, and then I check to see how the stock market has affected the balance of my retirement accounts.

I trust in God, and then I search the internet for the best deal on the latest Brooks Ghost running shoe.

I trust in God, and vote "yes" for safety services for the Village of Bluffton, including increased support for policing.

I trust in God and am glad I can pay my insurance premiums.

I am a capitalist. I am a materialist. I know who my God is. I'm not stupid!

And then I sit in a circle with six Haitian refugees who are anxious to practice their English and anxious about their ongoing life in this country.

And then I listen to Sarah Augustine speak at Camp Friedenswald, reminding me that I am a benefactor of land my Swiss Mennonite ancestors bought dirt-cheap from President Jackson because it was suddenly "empty" thanks to the Indian Removal Act.

And then I give thanks to generous donors who support the ministries of Central District Conference.

And then I read "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20)

And then I read, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'" (Mark 10:21)

I am so confused! Am I stupid or am I wise? Is money God or is Yahweh God?

I do not bemoan those who vote with their wallet. I vote every day with my choices and my actions.

And still I wish to follow more closely the way of that foolish Jesus who refused to make bread out of rocks, who preached an economy of enough, who praised the two-penny-dropping widow, who said "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," who rode that silly little donkey into Jerusalem, and cried out on a cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

God, I don't know what I'm doing. Forgive me. Teach me a better way. Fill my cup with the foolish way of Jesus and give me the courage to drink from it so that I and your church might become wise as Sophia. Cheers!



Cincinnati Mennonite Celebrates 50 Years Installation

by Ed Diller

Current and former members and friends of Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship in Ohio gathered Oct 12-13 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the congregation. The theme of the weekend was “Our Life Flows On,” reflecting the experience and hope of our Ohio River City church. Former member Ron Headings served as Master of Ceremonies for a Saturday evening program that featured in-person comments and shared messages from current and former pastors. The evening festivities also featured plenty of congregational singing and special music from CMF members. During the Sunday morning worship service, messages of congratulations from MC USA and MCC were also shared. Conference Minister Doug Luginbill participated in the Sunday service and brought greetings from CDC and from Ohio Conference who both helped plant the church. The weekend was a wonderful time of connecting with friends, celebrating the impact of CMF over the years and setting the stage for the future for the congregation.



James Rissler was installed as pastor of Atlanta Mennonite Church on Sunday, October 20 in Atlanta, Ga. James recently finished a term on the CDC board of directors. Photo: Doug Luginbill.

Financial report

October 31, 2024

2024/2025 to-date income	\$ 96,773
2024/2025 plan	\$ 122,174
income shortfall against budget . . .	\$ 25,401
2024/2025 to-date expenses	\$106,589
2024/2025 spending plan	\$ 122,175
Under-expenditure against plan. . . .	\$15,586

As is often the case, the initial months of a new fiscal year bring below-budget giving. With a third of the year completed, income from Congregational contributions is almost right on budget, though income from all sources is about \$26,000 below the year-to-date spending plan.

On the expenditure side, we are over \$15,000 under the year-to-date spending plan. Income for the 24/25 year-to-date is nearly \$10,000 less than expenditure.

The Tending Transformation campaign contributions total very close to \$300,000. Our overall goal is \$350,000 by the end of the current fiscal year.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

Central District Connector
Volume 3, Number 11, November 2024
Editor: Sarah R Werner
Email: sarah@mcusacdc.org
The *Connector* is published monthly. It is the official organ of communication among the churches of Central District Conference of Mennonite Church USA. It is distributed free to CDC congregations through the CDC spending plan.

Central District Office:
Doug Luginbill, conference minister
Emma Hartman, administrator
Matt Pritchard, minister for emerging faith communities
Mailing address: PO Box 1199, Goshen, IN 46527-1199
Phone: 574.534.1485
Email: office@mcusacdc.org
Web: www.mcusacdc.org
Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @centraldistrictconference