



January 2025

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



Members of the Camp Friedenswald board listen to consultant Nekeisha Alayna Alexis of AMBS speaking about diversity, equity, and inclusion at the board meeting in October, 2024. Photo: Jenna Liechty Martin.

Camp Friedenswald Works Towards Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

by Sarah Werner and Jenna Liechty Martin

Camp Friedenswald, a CDC-affiliated camp in southwest Michigan, has been taking steps over the past six years to make camp a place where all who come to the peaceful woods feel welcomed and experience belonging, particularly those who have faced social and systemic barriers in the past.

Our work has been multi-faceted, including adopting an inclusive hiring policy and welcome statement, training and education for staff, and renovating buildings and outdoor spaces with an eye to physical accessibility. We have joined the Repair Network, an outgrowth of the Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery, and made commitments to repair in our local context, including increasing education for campers and guests on Indigenous history. We have also become a member of the Supportive Communities Network, a program of the Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Interests

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(BMC), and have taken action to welcome people who are LGBTQ+. Our work has included reviewing our camper policies and procedures through the lens of inclusion, and increasing the amount of camper scholarships provided in order to remove financial barriers to participation in programs.

This work has been led and supported by the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) task force that includes both board members and camp staff. Since 2019, we have valued consulting with Nekeisha Alayna Alexis in her role as Intercultural Competency and Undoing Racism Coordinator at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). Nekeisha has served as both "ally and agitator," helping us to vision and dream and to set actionable goals. She most recently worked with us in the fall of 2024, meeting with the full board to offer training and support for the next steps in our journey.

Our most meaningful work to date has been to seek repair with BMC for an incident that happened in 2005, where they were disinvited from hosting their annual retreat at Camp Friedenswald. A process of reparative truth-telling began in 2022 and culminated in

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a narrative ritual of repair held at camp on November 2, 2024 with members of BMC, CDC leadership, and the camp board and staff all participating.

While we share and celebrate the steps that we have taken to move us towards greater welcome and belonging, particularly for those facing systemic barriers to camp, we also recognize that we still have work to do. We are committed to ongoing learning and to taking steps that will help more people know true belonging at Camp Friedenswald. And as we do, we know that Camp Friedenswald will be a more vibrant and thriving place.



Yard signs displayed last fall at the annual pumpkin sale at Atlanta Mennonite Church (Ga.) invite visitors to attend church, Photo: Matt Pritchard.

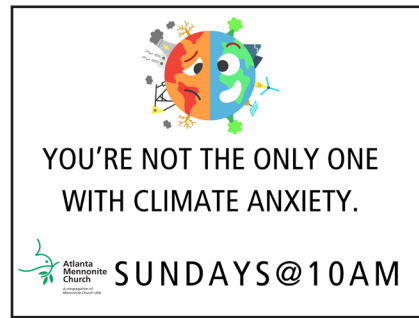
Signs of Peace

by James Rissler

Atlanta Mennonite Church (Ga.) shares our campus with several partners, including The Language Garden preschool, a dual language preschool that primarily meets outside, and the Paideia School's Urban Agriculture program, which farms several acres of our land.

I began as pastor at AMC at the beginning of October, just as The Language Garden and Paideia began their annual pumpkin sale. The pumpkins are provided by the Navajo Nation, and the proceeds are split between them and the sponsoring organizations.

In a conversation after my first worship service, Matt Pritchard wondered whether there would be any way to let people know that there is a church just across the parking lot from the pumpkin patch, as they are selecting their pumpkins. The next day, I wondered



graphics that could be printed as yard signs.

By the end of the week, we had chosen eight signs to print. Some of the more humorous efforts were left out as we tried not to be inadvertently offensive. On the next Sunday, a couple of our members brought pumpkin pie to share not only with those of us worshipping, but to take out and share with those shopping for pumpkins.

In the past weeks, no one new has attended worship because they saw our signs. But we hope that hundreds of people have a better sense of who we are as a church community.

Atlanta Mennonite is in the process of discerning one or two outward-facing ministries that we will experiment with in the new year. I am glad that as I began, I found a congregation willing to experiment immediately and look forward to seeing what kind of fruit our experiments bear until the pumpkins arrive again next October. If you are interested in adapting these designs for use in your own congregation, please email James Rissler at pastor@atlmengo.org.



Top, above, left: yard signs created to share the mission of Atlanta Mennonite Church with visitors. Designs by Matt Pritchard.

Communities of Refuge and Hope: Resources for the Journey

by Doug Luginbill

The Church faces growing challenges in the United States as we seek to be the beloved community and the presence of Christ in our world. The threat of the mass deportation of immigrants, the growing boldness of hate groups to recruit, train and demonstrate, the deterioration of social trust, and the rise in Christian Nationalism are some of the challenges we face.

Ephesians 3:10-13a states, "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. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray, therefore, that you may not lose heart."

I have been heartened by three pastor peer conversations that took place in December. We have been able to encourage, resource, and support one another as we seek to be the Church that God is calling us to be today. Indeed, God's Wisdom is being made known.

The link below contains various themes and resources that came out of these discussions and other conversations that I've had. I am grateful to all who shared resources and hope they are helpful to your congregation.

<https://mcusacdc.org/communities-of-refuge-and-hope/>



The winter camps at Friedenswald were blessed with an abundance of snow. Above youth enjoying ultimate frisbee. Photo: Allan Blunt.

Winter Camps at Friedenswald

by Gwen Gustafson-Zook

Each January Camp Friedenswald holds special weekend winter camp sessions for junior high and high school youth as well as families. It provides a chance for youth from CDC congregations to come together outside of the summer camping season and enjoy worship, fellowship, and a variety of winter activities.

This year 97 high school youth and sponsors joined with 23 college-aged volunteers for a weekend of fun and renewal, January 3-5, 2025. Sarah Werner (CDC communications coordinator, author, and member of Columbus Mennonite Church) led the group in spiritual practices geared toward nurturing mindfulness while past Camp Friedenswald summer staff led the music as we named, nurtured, and celebrated Sacred Connections with self, others, nature, and God.



Junior high youth gather for worship at winter camp. Photo: Jackson Steinmetz.

The junior high winter camp, January 10-12, found 122 junior high youth and sponsors greeted by even more snow! Clayton Gladish (pastor at Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.) led the youth in exploring Sacred Connections through the use of legos, drama, play, and creative meditation. He was joined by 20 past and future summer staff who led music, helped with activities, and assisted throughout the weekend.

Both weekends were full of fun activities such as snow tubing, candle-making, cross-country skiing, and as always giant Dutch Blitz. Youth also participated in a

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Above: youth sing during worship at high school winter camp at Friedenswald. Photo: Jackson Steinmetz. Below: Sustainability and Outdoor Education director Amy Husser leads a nature scavenger hunt at high school winter camp. Photo: Allan Blunt. Right: Snow tubing is always a highlight of winter camp. Photo: Allan Blunt.

Winter family camp is coming up in February, but is already full! We hope you can join us for winter camp next year, and a reminder that summer camp registration begins February 3. You can find more information at <https://friedenswald.org/summer-camps/>.



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winter version of a favorite camp game, Survival, where participants are assigned to be herbivores, omnivores, or carnivores and have to find their needed nutrients in caches hidden throughout camp.



CDC congregations represented in these two camps included: Assembly Mennonite Church of Goshen, Ind.; First Mennonite Church of Bluffton, Ohio; First Mennonite Church of Urbana, Ill.; Columbus Mennonite Church of Columbus, Ohio; Eighth Street Mennonite Church of Goshen, Ind.; Faith Mennonite Church of Goshen, Ind.; Jubilee Mennonite Church of Bellefontaine, Ohio; Keller Park Church of South Bend, Ind.; Milwaukee Mennonite Church of Milwaukee, Wisc.; Silverwood Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.; Southside Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind.; and First Mennonite Church of Sugarcreek, Ohio.

Update from Matt Pritchard

In November, my wife and I decided that I would accept an invitation to the MDiv Program at Canadian Mennonite University with a January 2025 start date. I am happy to share with each of you more details on all that has gone into this decision.

At the end of December, we moved to Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada so I could begin my studies. I am looking forward to the ways my studies will strengthen my work with CDC.

CDC is an incredible community and I'm so excited for the ways that we are supporting, equipping, and welcoming emerging communities of faith.

My work as Associate Conference Minister for Emerging Communities of Faith in Central District Conference feels almost like a miracle – a source of unparalleled joy and fulfillment in my life. I love every minute of this work. I love working with emerging communities and their leaders, the staff and leadership of CDC, and all the people of CDC. I feel like I was built for this role, and it is such a pleasure to serve in this way.

For now, this move will not affect my role with CDC and I will remain an active member of The Intention Church. In March, CDC leadership and I will evaluate further. We welcome your feedback which you can send to Doug Luginbill (doug@mcusacdc.org) or Jan Luginbihl (jan.luginbihl@gmail.com).

Doug's Mug: Movement or Organization

by Doug Luginbill



In multiple conversations with pastors and others, and after reading the Letters to the Editor in the last two issues of *Anabaptist World*, it is clear there is anxiety regarding the incoming Trump administration. How might new policies and actions affect marginalized peoples, immigrants, and others?

Also, how might hate groups be motivated and empowered to carry out acts of discrimination, bullying, and violence? Who will benefit and who will suffer under a new administration? How are we called to be the church in this season?

As Anabaptists, we have praised, ignored, criticized, rebuffed, challenged, loved, feared, and hated the leaders of the nations where we have lived. Some of these state leaders wanted us dead. (Read *Martyr's Mirror*.) Others welcomed us with open arms. (Read about Kathryn the Great and her invitation to Mennonites.) Most ignored us because we were mostly insignificant in their eyes. And, as far as I know, only one former president spoke at a Mennonite convention: Jimmy Carter, whose post-presidential legacy of humanitarian and democratic efforts have recently been celebrated.

Perhaps we could deduce that, as Anabaptists, it really doesn't matter who the president is. We know who we worship and follow! But, if you read the last couple issues of *Anabaptist World*, you will know that people have strong feelings about the most recent election. Likely you and I do as well.

Maybe how we feel about our president depends a bit on how we imagine the church. Is the Mennonite Church an organization/institution or is it a movement? Distinguishing between the two, Parker Palmer, states, "Organizations represent the principle of order and conservation: they are the vessels in which a society holds hard-won treasures from the past. Movements represent the principle of flux and change: they are the processes through which a society channels its energies

for renewal and transformation. A healthy society will encourage interplay between the two" (Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 1998: 162).

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations have recently focused on the "Jesus Movement." His Epiphany reflection (January 6) begins with a quote from Retired Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry. He states, "Jesus did not establish an institution, though institutions can serve his cause. He did not organize a political party, though his teachings have a profound impact on politics. Jesus did not even found a religion. No, Jesus began a movement, fueled by his Spirit, a movement whose purpose was and is to change the face of the earth from the nightmare it often is into the dream that God intends...."

What does a Jesus Movement mean in 2025? How will we respond to policies, laws, and other movements that are so antithetical to the Jesus Movement that we cannot keep silent? Our earliest Anabaptist forebears engaged in disputations with government leaders. They wrote letters to civil authorities demanding justice, economic reform, and religious freedom. They demanded moral lifestyles from their religious and civic leaders. The first Anabaptists were part of a movement that helped to transform society in important ways. Some see the incoming MAGA administration as a movement, a massive and powerful machine of chaos and reordering that will reshape society. It is poised to do just that. What will the consequences be? What counter-movements of "flux and change" will arise in response? What "hard-won treasures of the past" must be preserved?

The nonresistant, quiet-in-the-land, Mennonite church in the US that existed for much of our history is not the Mennonite church of today or of the future! We must be awake, alert, aware, and resistant to acts of inhumanity and injustice. We must provide communities of refuge and hope to those who are and/or will be targeted by hateful policies and acts of violence.

As a response to some of the fears, concerns, and opportunities that lie ahead for our congregations in the coming year, CDC leadership has created a list of resources entitled

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“Communities of Refuge and Hope” (see the article on page 3).

May Wisdom guide us into this new season, empowering us with a “movement” Spirit and a dogged grip on the treasures which Christ’s incarnation continues to gift our world.

Survey for Doug Luginbill

In his role as Central District Conference Minister, Doug Luginbill has many responsibilities. Every three years, the CDC Board of Directors and Leadership Council carry out an evaluation of Doug’s work so we can offer counsel and guidance to Doug.

You are invited to fill out a survey, which must be completed by February 3, 2025. The link to the evaluation form is [here](#) as well as in the weekly announcements.

If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Jan Lugibihl, CDC Board President, at jan.lugibihl@gmail.com or by phone at 312-307-1674.

Installation



Trey Ferguson was installed as the pastor of the Intention Church, an online congregation in provisional membership with CDC, on December 8, 2024. Associate Conference Minister Matt Pritchard joined Trey, his family, and local pastors in person in Homestead, Fla. with the congregation participating from around the world over zoom. Trey was ordained in the Refuge Church.

Financial report December 31, 2024

2024/2025 to-date income \$ 173,815
2024/2025 plan \$ 162,929
Income received above budget \$ 10,886

2024/2025 to-date expenses \$163,845
2024/2025 spending plan \$ 183,262
Under-expenditure against plan \$19,417

Difference between actual year-to-date income and expenses: \$9,970

Strong calendar year-end giving has significantly improved the CDC financial picture as we begin 2025. As is often the case, the initial months of a new fiscal year bring below-budget giving. With half of the fiscal year completed, about 55% of our projected income has been received and total expenses are at 45% of the annual plan. Congregational giving is strong, at 7% above the year-to-date plan.

The Tending Transformation campaign contributions stand at \$340,050, against the overall goal of \$350,000 by the end of the current fiscal year.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

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