



May 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



Participants at the 2024 annual meeting receive communion in small groups at College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

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### Attending to Wisdom: 2025 CDC Annual Meeting

This year's CDC Annual Meeting will be June 19-21 in person at Bluffton University in Bluffton, Ohio. We hope you can join us for three days of meaningful community-building activities including worship, seminars, and time to socialize. Children of all ages are welcome, from infants to high-schoolers! Childcare will be provided for infants and preschool age children at the Lion and Lamb Peace Center at no cost. This year programming for school age children and youth will also be provided thanks to volunteers from First Mennonite Church of Bluffton (Ohio) and Shalom Mennonite Congregation (Harrisonburg, Va.). Register [HERE](#) by June 5.

### Seminars

There will be four seminars at annual meeting this year, one on Thursday afternoon and three on Friday afternoon. The pre-conference seminar will focus

on listening for Wisdom in Juneteenth themes, presented by Elizabeth Kelly of the Missional Church Committee and Matt Pritchard, Associate Conference Minister of Emerging Communities of Faith.

Friday afternoon participants can choose from three experiential seminars at several locations around Bluffton. Conference Minister Doug Luginbill will offer a tour of the [Schumacher Homestead](#), which offers a glimpse into the lives of Swiss immigrants in the area of Allen and Putnam Counties known as the Settlement during the mid 19th century. Those immigrants were the ancestors of many current residents here. Visitors may tour the house, summer kitchen, workshop and barn, which are filled with original and period items, as well as the garden. Also onsite is the new Heritage Center, nearing completion. That building is a reconstruction of another local barn built in the 1850s.

Wild Church worship and discussion will be offered at the Bluffton University Nature Preserve, led by Janeen Bertsche Johnson, James Rissler, Brian Sauder, and Sarah Werner. Wild Church is a unique

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way to experience the presence of God in creation and in community with one another. During this time we will hear scripture, spend time reflecting in nature, and share our experiences with one another. All ages and abilities are welcome.

“Anabaptist Singing Through the Years” will be a hymn sing led by Katie Graber and Adam Tice with music used and written by Anabaptists around the world through their 500 years of existence. It will be held at Marbeck Center on the Bluffton campus.



Above: Children and youth are welcome at annual meeting, with child care for young children and programming for school age children in grades K-12. Picture here: Matt Pritchard with Miriam Pritchard Moraff. Above right: Adam Tice leads singing at annual meeting in 2023.

## **Worship**

There will be worship each day of annual conference and all worship services are open to everyone, whether you are registered for the conference or not.

On Thursday evening at 7:30 the opening worship will be held near Bluffton at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio, with a special offering taken for Lima Mennonite Church’s Haitian Ministry. Perry Bush, emeritus professor of history at Bluffton University and Central District Conference historian, will speak on the theme “Wisdom from our Anabaptist History.” Bush has published four books on Mennonite history and activism, and

is currently writing a book manuscript on the history of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee. Bush holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from University of California, Master of Arts and Ph.D. in history from Carnegie Mellon University.



Friday worship will be held at 1:40 pm in Marbeck Center and will focus on the theme “Wisdom from Our Churches Today.” This will be a time of storytelling where each congregation will bring a symbolic object that represents something the Spirit is doing among them right now. An offering will be taken for Central District Conference and we will celebrate communion.

On Saturday morning at 8:30, Melissa Florer-Bixler will lead us in reflecting on the theme “Wisdom for the Future Church.” Melissa Florer-Bixler is a writer and pastor with degrees from Duke University and Princeton Theological Seminary. Her ministry at Raleigh Mennonite Church has been featured in *The Atlantic* and *Sojourners*. She writes for *Geez Magazine*, *Christian Century*, and *Anabaptist World*, among others. She is the author of “Fire by Night: Finding God in the Pages of the Old Testament.” She lives with her husband and three children in Raleigh, North Carolina.

## **Delegate Sessions**

The Friday delegate sessions will include the state of the conference address, a congregational story from Assembly Mennonite Church (Goshen, Ind.), and presentation of the 2025-2026 leadership slate and spending plan. Knoxville Mennonite Church (Tenn.) and Peace Mennonite Fellowship (Archbold, Ohio) will be introduced for membership. We will also hear

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The ice cream social is a Thursday evening tradition at annual meeting. Participants enjoying ice cream at the 2023 meeting.

## Annual Meeting Schedule

### Thursday, June 19

10:00 am - 4 pm Healthy Boundaries Training at FMC Bluffton

2:00 pm Registration begins - Marbeck Center

3-4:30 pm Pre-conference seminar: Juneteenth led by Elizabeth Kelly and Matt Pritchard

5-6:45 pm Pastor Appreciation Dinner

7:30 pm WORSHIP I

**Location:** Grace Mennonite, Pandora

**Theme:** Wisdom from our Anabaptist History

**Speaker:** Perry Bush

**Offering:** Lima Menno Haitian Ministry

9:00 pm Ice Cream Social at Grace Mennonite

### Friday, June 20

8:30 am Delegate Session I

Welcome and State of the Conference, Congregational Story, 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes, Treasurer's Report, 2025-2026 Leadership Slate

9:45 am Break/Snacks

10:15 am Camp Friedenswald Report, introduction for membership of Knoxville MC and Peace MF, Update on First Mennonite Chicago, Release of Agora Ministries

11:45 am Lunch in Marbeck Center

1:30 pm Delegate Session II

Conference Minister Evaluation

1:40 pm WORSHIP II: in Marbeck Center

**Theme:** Wisdom from our Churches Today

**Speaker:** congregational storytelling

**Offering:** Central District Conference

**Communion**

3:15 pm Break

3:45 pm Seminars/Activities

- **Swiss Historical Society and Schumacher Homestead** led by Doug Luginbill
- **Wild Church Worship** in Nature Preserve led by Janeen Bertsche Johnson, James Rissler, Brian Sauder, and Sarah Werner
- **Hymnsing** in Yoder Recital Hall: Anabaptist singing through the years with Adam Tice and Katie Graber

6:00 pm Dinner in Marbeck Center or on your own (list of local restaurants in delegate packet)

7:00 pm Mennonite Women: 100 Years and Story and Song

Location: First Mennonite Bluffton

### Saturday, June 21

8:30 - 9:30 am WORSHIP III in Marbeck

**Theme:** Wisdom for the Future Church

**Speaker:** Melissa Florer-Bixler

9:30 am Break

10:15 am Delegate Session IV

Congregational Story, Missional Church Committee, Ministerial Committee, vote on spending plan, listening committee report, evaluations, benediction

12:00 pm Close of Annual Meeting



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a report from Camp Friedenswald and have a time for sharing around tables. In the afternoon we will hear feedback from the evaluation of the conference minister, Doug Luginbill.

The Saturday morning delegate session will include a congregational story from Columbus Mennonite Church (Ohio) as well as reports from the missional church and ministerial committees. We will vote on the 2025-2026 spending plan and close with a brief time of worship. If you'd like to attend the annual meeting, be sure to register before June 5 at: <https://mcusac-dc.org/2025-annual-meeting/>

### **Healthy Boundaries Training**

A Healthy Boundaries 201 training will be provided for clergy who need it on Thursday before the start of annual meeting, from 10-4 at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton. You can register [HERE](#).



### **A Letter to Fellow Peacemakers**

by Shauna Adair

We find ourselves in perilous, historic times—and no doubt, you feel it deeply. Older generations have endured great hardships: the Great Depression, World War II, Vietnam. Yet through it all, democracy endured. Today, however, we are witnessing a backslide, where democratic ideals and hard-won freedoms are being aggressively rolled back. And I cannot remain silent.

Until the end of March, I worked for Church World Service, a refugee resettle-

ment and aid organization that has served vulnerable communities for nearly 80 years. When the current administration abruptly halted all funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program on January 20, the consequences were immediate. A substantial portion of CWS's funding came from the federal government—including unpaid reimbursements for work already completed. As a result, the organization was forced to furlough a large number of staff beginning February 1. By mid-March, nearly half of the U.S.-based workforce had been laid off—alongside devastating impacts on the thousands of refugees and families we were committed to helping.

I've long dreamed of creating something of my own—rooted in purpose, aligned with my values, and birthed from creativity. In this moment of political and social upheaval, that dream became a calling. I felt compelled to take meaningful action to stand up for justice, amplify underrepresented voices, and contribute to the defense of democracy. Out of that conviction, Vox Collective was born.

Derived from the Latin word vox, meaning "voice," Vox Collective is a platform created to amplify diverse voices—voices of wisdom, strength, and courage—through wearable statements that spark conversation. Each shirt features designs I've created using my artistic gifts and technological savvy, paired with a quote or saying that champions social justice, equality, environmental stewardship, hope, and the inherent dignity of every person. These are voices that dared to imagine a better future—and invited others to do the same. By wearing these messages publicly, we turn everyday moments into opportunities to stand up, speak out, and build a more just and compassionate world.

But this is more than a t-shirt company. Each design is also paired with a nonprofit organization advancing the cause reflected in the artwork. Twenty percent of profits from every sale are donated to the featured nonprofit,

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including Church World Service, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite Action. Faith Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind. has been my spiritual home in recent years, and while I wasn't raised in the Mennonite tradition, I deeply respect and resonate with its pacifist roots and its commitment to justice in action.

Other partner nonprofits were selected either because of their direct connection to the individuals quoted in the designs or because of the powerful work they're doing locally, nationally, and globally. Organizations like the National Immigrant Justice Center were chosen for both their impact and their accountability, reflected in high ratings from Charity Navigator and Charity Watch. Most importantly, this is not a one-time promotion. Donations will continue for the life of the product because these causes are the heart of why this business exists.

Vox Collective is my answer to a deep call to stand up for democracy, for diversity and equity, for inclusion and dignity, and for the healing of our shared home, the Earth. My hope is that Vox Collective becomes a growing platform—one that continually uplifts both emerging and established voices that inspire action around the world.

The work ahead is vast. But together, we can rise—breaking through complacency, amplifying the call for justice, and building a future where equality, dignity, and hope flourish for all. Visit [vox-collective.org](http://vox-collective.org).

\*

### **Doug's Mug: Rhubarb** by Doug Luginbill

I have a mug full of fresh rhubarb and I'm mustering up the courage to take a bite! When my children were young, they had a group of friends who played together in our Bluffton neighborhood.



One of the tests of their courage was to pull a stalk of rhubarb from the neighbor's garden and chew on it. According to a Google search, rhubarb contains large amounts of oxalic acid which can cause a gritty "rhubarb teeth" effect and can temporarily alter taste.

I'd rather eat my rhubarb in a strawberry-rhubarb pie or as a compote cooked with other fruits and a suitable amount of sugar or honey. Experiencing "rhubarb teeth" is not something I enjoy!

Rhubarb is one of those odd garden plants. While it is botanically a vegetable, it is eaten like fruit. One doesn't see rhubarb on the menu as a side dish accompanying steak, fish, or pasta.

That reminds me of the 500-year conversation about Anabaptists. Are we Protestant or Catholic? Or are we something else completely? We have sometimes claimed to be a "third way," neither Protestant nor Catholic. I understand the desire to be an alternative "third way" and I sometimes resonate strongly with this way of distinguishing ourselves. Perhaps we might also think of ourselves as a third way between fundamentalism and liberalism. Maybe we are a third way between capitalism and communism. Or what about a third way apart from our country's two-party system?

However, I appreciate a comment I recently ran across by J. Lawrence Burkholder in the book, *The Limits of Perfection*. Burkholder served as a professor at Harvard Divinity School and later as president of Goshen College from 1971-1984. Some called him a practical Anabaptist theologian. Reflecting on his understanding of Anabaptists, he prophetically stated, "It is generally assumed that out there somewhere lies a 'third way' in which Mennonites can participate with impunity. Mennonites no longer want to be separated from the world. Rather they want to be in it without getting their hands dirty" (145).

Does that comment leave you with "rhubarb teeth?" *Continued on pg. 6*

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We live in a national climate that wants to force us to choose between two polarizing positions on so many fronts. More and more we are expected to shun our enemies and cozy up to our friends. Maybe a “third way” is exactly the path we are to forge during these chaotic times. Perhaps Burkholder’s words can also keep us from following a path of our own imagination that believes we can travel without dirty hands.

In our complex, deeply interwoven, and highly integrated world, every decision we make could become a moral dilemma. Does withholding war taxes decrease what is available for SNAP benefits? Does driving an EV justify Resolute Copper’s case that Oak Flat (Native sacred lands in Arizona) is necessary for the extraction of rare earth metals used in battery production? Do we support our favorite non-profit organizations when they disappoint us or do we challenge them to do better and become better? I’m sure you can name other

dilemmas.

So, what about rhubarb? Is it fruit or vegetable? In 1947 the USDA classified rhubarb as a fruit to lower import tariffs as fruit was taxed less than vegetables. That seems a bit disingenuous.

Who or what are we as 21st century Anabaptists? Are we a third way? Are we special? Do we fool ourselves into a false sense of uniqueness? C. Arnold Snyder once said, the church today needs “a ‘recovery of Anabaptist conversations,’ rather than a ‘recovery of the Anabaptist Vision’” (Anabaptist History and Theology, 97). In other words, we need to keep talking, keep worshipping, keep reading scripture, keep praying, keep learning, and keep gathering.

I look forward to keeping the conversation going at our CDC Annual Meeting on June 19-21 in my backyard at Bluffton University. I’m happy to share a mug of rhubarb with any courageous soul!

## Financial report April 30, 2025

2024/2025 to-date income . . . . . \$ 223,291  
2024/2025 plan . . . . . \$ 217,239  
Income received above budget . . . . . \$ 6,052

2024/2025 to-date expenses . . . . . \$212,946  
2024/2025 spending plan . . . . . \$ 244,349  
Under-expenditure against plan . . . . . \$31,403

Difference between actual year-to-date income and expenses: . . . . . \$10,942

Central District Conference finances are looking strong as we enter the final trimester of the financial year. Congregational support is very healthy as usual, while individual giving is higher than usual.

The Tending Transformation campaign has been fully pledged, with only about \$10,000 yet to be received to meet our three-year goal of \$350,000.

*Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer*

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