



Associate Conference Minister's Report 2026

Central District Conference continues to experience a vibrant season marked by the flourishing of both established congregations and dynamic new faith communities dedicated to peace, justice, and inclusion. It is a joy to share some of the ways the Spirit is moving through the conference and how we are joining the work of Jesus in the world. I am proud of our ongoing work with emerging communities and excited as we continue to resource their work.

Empowering a Network of Thriving Emerging Communities of Peace: As Associate Conference Minister (working 1/3 time or about 15 hours a week), I support emerging faith communities and aid established congregations in their renewal efforts. A continuing focus has been searching for church communities within our geographical footprint who are theologically aligned with us and who aren't connected with a denomination.

Growing the Network: We are cultivating relationships and resourcing several emerging communities, celebrating major milestones this past year:

- **Moveable Feast (Chicago, IL):** Celeste Kennel-Shank Groff was officially commissioned in November. She has maintained a faithful presence despite a strong federal presence on her block, which even included tear gas.
- **The Intention Church (Online):** Celebrated its one-year anniversary and hosted its first in-person gathering at Follow Jesus 2025.
- **Grand Rapids Mennonite Fellowship (MI):** Alaina Dobkowski has been approved for licensing toward ordination. Furthermore, the fellowship has done the beautiful work of launching "Christians for Peace & Liberation," a space for monthly potlucks and justice work for neighbors committed to peace and liberation who haven't always had a spiritual home.
- **New Life Fellowship (Wayne Co, OH):** Noah Raines started the Journey Program and was officially approved for a license for specific ministry for the purpose of Church Planting. He will start the MDiv program at AMBS this autumn.
- **Expanding the Boundaries:** We welcomed existing emerging communities and leaders from Portland, ME and Flourish (Henderson, NC). We are in early explorations with a church community in Peru; potential community in Senioa, GA; and two potential Latine communities in Florida.

Collaboration & Resourcing: We continue working closely with Mennonite Mission Network's Chris Scott to clarify a new vision for denominational support of emerging communities.

We are also finding new ways to be "found" by kindred spirits. We are connecting with the Parish Collective and Trey Ferguson spoke at the Post-Evangelical Collective gathering to introduce us to a new circle of people who share our dedication to Jesus's justice and inclusion.

Additionally, I participated in the Reimagining MC USA Structure Review Task Group.

Central District Conference is making significant progress in its mission to cultivate a vibrant network of emerging "communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world!"

Report submitted by Matthew Pritchard