



Journey: A Missional Leadership Development Program

This year's Journey program includes twenty-one participants and twenty mentors in our English-language program and thirteen participants and five mentors in our Journey Southeast Asia program. Four participants are from Central District Conference: **Peter Eash-Scott** of Milwaukee Mennonite (mentor **Valerie Showalter**, Madison Mennonite), **Ardean Friesen** of Silverwood Mennonite (mentor **Jeremy Shue**, Silverwood Mennonite), **Noah Raines**, a church planter (mentor **Jeremy Shue**), and Amy Stauffer-McNutt of First Mennonite Church of Sugar Creek (mentor Kay Bontrager-Singer, Faith Mennonite Church - retired). In addition, we are pleased to have two Journey instructors from Central District Conference: **James Rissler** (Atlanta Mennonite Church) teaching Unit 2: The Biblical Story; and **Karla Minter** (Open Table Mennonite Fellowship) teaching Unit 4: Leadership: The Ministry of Reconciliation.

All Journey students and mentors gathered at Amigo Centre in Sturgis, Michigan, for the fall Weekend Learning Event. The event opened with a well attended and much appreciated optional spiritual retreat. Worship sessions laid the foundation for our time together and took place four times throughout the weekend. Learning sessions were led by Conference Minister **Doug Luginbill**, and focused on our being created in the image and imagination of God; additional activities included exploring spiritual disciplines and character formation for ministry; developing personal timelines, including significant points of spiritual and vocational growth; personality inventories; and exploring spiritual direction. Mentors participated in a mentoring workshop and mentors and mentees met together to develop and update their learning covenants, which help to guide them through the program.

In mid-September, participants joined online missional leadership development classes. As part of these studies, they carried out a variety of ministry assignments in their congregations and communities. Throughout the session, they also met with their mentors, typically bi-weekly, to discuss their classes and ministry experiences. In February, participants joined new online classes and continue to meet bi-weekly in mentor-mentee pairs.

The winter Weekend Learning Event was held online (due to weather) from the AMBS campus January 23-25, 2026, with the theme, Anabaptism: A Way of Being Church, taught by **Jamie Pitts**, AMBS Professor of Anabaptist Studies (Hively Avenue Mennonite Church). The weekend also included worship sessions, mentor and mentee workshops, and work on learning covenants. During the Sunday morning worship time, mentees in their final year of the program, and their mentors, shared a reflection, and their conference minister or AMBS staff provided a blessing and prayer.

Twice a year, mentees submit short reflection papers describing their learnings from the previous online class, and mentors submit reflections describing their observations of their mentees' learning and growth. These reflection papers are shared with mentees' conference ministers to help conference ministers stay informed of mentees' growth and development in the program.

The Journey Board plays a vital role in shaping and guiding the program. Many thanks to **Lois Johns Kaufmann** (chair), **Gayle Gerber Koontz** (CDC Ministerial Committee representative), and **Doug Luginbill** for serving on the Journey Board.

Journey participants and alumni frequently tell us that Journey is a tremendous learning opportunity for pastors, lay leaders, church planters, and other emerging leaders! If you or someone you know wants to develop or deepen their ministry gifts or is exploring a call to ministry, please speak to Doug Luginbill about whether the Journey program might be the right next step.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jewel Gingerich Longenecker".

Jewel Gingerich Longenecker
Dean of Lifelong Learning