



May 2026

# 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 gather for opening worship at Grace Mennonite Church in Pandora, Ohio at the 2025 CDC annual meeting.

In this issue:

<b>Annual Meeting Preview</b>	pg. 1
<b>Companions Across the Border</b>	pg. 4
<b>CDC Leadership and Power</b>	pg. 4
<b>BMC Anniversary</b>	pg. 5
<b>Licensing and Ordinations</b>	pg. 6
<b>Financial Report</b>	pg. 6

## Rising Up and Taking Courage at Annual Meeting

by Sarah Werner

The 2026 CDC Annual Meeting will be held June 25-27 on the campus of Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. 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 no cost. Programming for school age children and youth will also be provided by volunteers from Shalom Mennonite Congregation. Be sure to register for annual meeting by June 1 for reduced pricing at: <https://mcusacdc.org/2026-annual-meeting/>

### Seminars

There will be ten seminars at annual meeting this year, one on Thursday afternoon and nine to choose from during two time slots on Friday afternoon. The pre-conference seminar will be led by Karla Minter, pastor of Open Table Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Ind. on the theme, "Body Wisdom—Rise Up! Take Courage!" During this 90-minute interactive workshop, participants will engage in Body Wisdom practices, biblical storytelling, small group interaction and community building to equip ourselves to Rise up! and Take courage! in these times.

Friday afternoon participants can choose from nine seminars during two time slots, including a tour of the Jubilee Climate Farm a short drive from Harrisonburg. Other seminars cover topics of interest to congregations including: A town's response to ICE, solidarity with Palestinian siblings, safe church policies, sex education, confessional Bible study, confronting shame, ecotheology for death and dying, and anti-racist solidarity.

*Continued on pg.2*

Continued from pg. 1



Youth participants share a mural they created at the 2025 Annual Meeting in Bluffton, Ohio.

### **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. Worship services will be held at Martin Chapel at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

The opening worship service will be held on Thursday evening at 7:30 pm. Rev. Dr. Shannon Dycus, interim president of EMU, will be the featured speaker, and an offering will be taken to support local community ministries in Harrisonburg. César Moya, pastor of Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Gainesville, Florida, will speak at the Friday afternoon worship service and an offering will be taken for CDC.

On Saturday morning J Daryl Byler will share a message about what it might be like today for Anabaptist Christians to courageously refuse to cooperate with oppressive political and economic systems. J. Daryl Byler is director of development at the DC Bar Foundation, which supports organizations that provide free legal help to people with low income. An offering will be taken for the Rise Up! Take Courage! Mutual Aid Fund and communion will be served.

### **Delegate Sessions**

The Friday delegate sessions will in-

clude the state of the conference address, a congregational story from St. Louis Mennonite Fellowship (Mo.), and presentation of the 2025-2026 leadership slate and spending plan. There will be a vote to approve Knoxville Mennonite Church (Tenn.) for membership in the conference.

There will also be a discussion of Article 19 of the Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective in small groups. CDC has decided to revisit our relationship to Article 19 in light of recent questions by congregations who are interested in joining the conference who have not previously been part of an Anabaptist denomination. They shared a concern that our confession of faith does not match our more recent denominational and conference statements on LGBTQ+ inclusion and marriage and family life. Engaging in discussion around this topic as a conference will help us refine our welcoming message for both our own benefit and to help in the discernment process of congregations who want to affiliate with our conference.

The Saturday morning delegate session will include reports from the missional church and ministerial committees. We will also make a decision about a resolution submitted by Lima Mennonite Church on a response to the ongoing suffering in Palestine. The resolution states:

*As followers of Jesus, our faith convicts us to speak the truth as to what is happening to the Palestinian people, both on the West Bank and in Gaza. We echo the findings from many scholars and human rights groups, including Palestinian and Israeli groups, that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. All reports from Gaza and the West Bank indicate that Israel has not upheld its obligations under the so-called "cease-fire" and continues to destroy Palestinian life and property. Recognizing this truth, and our complicity, we commit to divesting ourselves financially and*

*Continued on pg. 4*

## Annual Meeting Schedule

### Thursday, June 25

2:00 pm Registration begins

3-4:30 pm Pre-conference seminar: Body Wisdom – Rise Up! Take Courage! with Karla Minter and John Glick

5-6:45 pm Pastor Appreciation Dinner

7:30 pm WORSHIP I in Martin Chapel

**Speaker:** Shannon Dycus

**Offering:** Giving Back to the Community

9:00 pm Ice Cream Social

### Friday, June 26

8:30 am Delegate Session I

Welcome and State of the Conference, Congregational Story, 2025 Annual Meeting Minutes, Treasurer’s Report, 2026-2027 Leadership Slate

9:45 am Break/Snacks

10:15 am Camp Friedenswald Report, affirmation of Knoxville Mennonite Church for membership, Article 19 table discussion

11:45 am Lunch in Marbeck Center

1:30 pm Worship II in Martin Chapel

**Speaker:** César Moya

**Offering:** Central District Conference

2:45 pm Break

3:15 pm Delegate Session II

Announcement of membership vote, congregational story, associate conference minister evaluation

3:45 pm Seminars/Activities

3:45-5:30 pm Jubilee Climate Farm led by Krista Showalter Ehst

3:45 pm Seminar Session I

- One Town’s Response to ICE: Stories from

Harrisonburg

- Called to Solidarity with our Palestinian Siblings – Lydia Brenneman and Barry Johnson
- An Ounce of Prevention – Kristin Sancken
- Confessional Bible Study – Alaina Dobkowski
- Courage to Confront Shame – Janeen Bert-sche Johnson
- Our Whole Lives – Phil Yoder and Moriah Hurst

4:35 pm Break

4:45 pm Seminar Session II

- One Town’s Response to ICE: Stories from Harrisonburg
- Called to Solidarity with our Palestinian Siblings – Lydia Brenneman and Barry Johnson
- An Ounce of Prevention – Kristin Sancken
- Confessional Bible Study – Alaina Dobkowski
- Taking Courage in Breaking Down: A Job-inspired ecotheology for death & dying– Valerie Showalter
- Our Work to Do: Embodiment Practice in the Service of Anti-Racist Solidarity – Amanda Gross

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

### Saturday, June 27

8:30 am WORSHIP III in Martin Chapel

**Speaker:** Daryl Byler

**Offering:** Rise Up! Take Courage! Mutual Aid Fund Communion

9:45 am Break

10:15 am Delegate Session III

Resolution: Ongoing Suffering in Palestine, Missional Church Committee, Ministerial Committee, vote on spending plan, listening committee report, evaluations, benediction

12:00 pm Close of Annual Meeting

*Continued from pg. 2*

*theologically from Zionism.*

The full text of the resolution can be found in the delegate materials on the website.

If you'd like to attend the annual meeting, be sure to register before June 1 at: <https://mcusacdc.org/2025-annual-meeting/>



**Mennonite  
Church  
Manitoba**

### **Companions Across the Border**

In April 2025, Michael Pahl, Executive Minister of Mennonite Church Manitoba (MCM), contacted Doug Luginbill, Conference Minister for Central District Conference (CDC), about an idea to develop relationships across our national borders. Doug quickly embraced the idea and Companion Congregations were created. So far, two congregations each from CDC and MCM have started getting to know one another, sharing information about each other, having online meetings between leaders, and planning for future connections and collaborations.

Michael and Doug met via video conference on March 26 to get to know each other's regional church/area conference better. Here are some impressions from that conversation.

Mennonite Church Manitoba is made up of 40 congregations, just over a third in Winnipeg and the rest scattered around the province. Most have their roots in Russian Mennonite migrations from the 1870s to the 1940s, though these congregations are becoming more diverse and other congregations have joined in recent years,

adding to the diversity. Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg is an important institution of higher learning for MCM and beyond. Camps with Meaning (Camp Assiniboia and Camp Koinonia) are deeply valued for their faith formation, engagement with God's creation, and relationship building. Michael is grateful for pastors and congregations that are connected by a common vision and strive towards unity, collegiality, and faithfulness to Anabaptist values and mission.

Central District Conference includes nearly 50 full and provisional member congregations in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Maine, North Carolina, and Virginia. The conference was formed in 1957 with the merger of two previous conferences, Middle District and Central Conference. These two conferences were drawn together by their common support of Bluffton College (now Bluffton University), Camp Friedenswald, and overseas mission work. Doug is grateful for a community of congregations characterized by hospitality, generosity, collaboration, and a strong commitment to higher education. Knowing Christ's love... Answering God's call, summarizes their mission.

Fun fact: both Camps with Meaning and Camp Friedenswald recently celebrated their 75th anniversaries, having both begun in 1949!

We would love to see other congregations participate in this cross-border Companion Congregations program. To find out more, contact your regional church/area conference office. As relationships between our governments have deteriorated, we hope that relationships between our congregations can grow stronger. God's kingdom knows no earthly boundaries!

*This article is appearing in both the MCM Monthly and CDC Connector newsletters this May.*

## Rooting our Stories: Reveling in 50 years of Queer and Trans Anabaptist Resilience

Join the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests (BMC) for a gathering rooted in sacred story and joyful revelry, as we mark our 50th Anniversary on May 29-31 in Minneapolis! This festive weekend will include storytelling, singing, ritual/worship, workshops, artmaking, games, connecting over shared meals, and honoring this incredible 50-year legacy of LGBTQIA+ Anabaptist resistance and resilience. Find event details, safety/accessibility info, and registration on our 50th webpage. [www.bmclgbt.org/50th](http://www.bmclgbt.org/50th)



## CDC Leadership Council Power and Boundaries Training

by Sarah Werner

In late April the CDC leadership council met for their biannual meeting with the addition of a few special guests to attend a training on power and boundaries. The leadership council consists of the conference board, the ministerial committee, the missional church committee, representatives from Camp Friedenswald and Bluffton University, and conference staff. We were joined that weekend by the gifts discernment committee and the board of Camp Friedenswald. The training was led by justice educators Alicia T. Crosby and AnaYelsi Velasco-Sanchez to help the conference leadership become more attuned

to the complexities of power dynamics in our decision-making and structures.

Participants shared experiences of power imbalances, particularly in religious and community contexts, highlighting the importance of addressing invisible and unnamed power. The discussion emphasized the need for restorative practices, integrity, community alignment, convergence, and expansive justice. Key points included the impact of power on marginalized communities, the role of institutional knowledge, and the necessity of continuous, interconnected justice work.

During the workshops we had a chance to discuss within our committees how power and authority are wielded, and how we can take collective responsibility for addressing potential power imbalances in our work. We also had the opportunity to discuss scenarios of injustice in local congregations that involved immigrant families, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals, single people, and disabled and neurodivergent parishioners. Our groups assessed the situation and made a plan for how to address the problem and right the situation.

The training emphasized the interconnectedness of inner, relational, and structural work in promoting equity and justice and gave CDC leadership some important tools to continue working for equity and inclusion in the conference.

**Above left:** The CDC board creates a power map of their organizational structure. **Below:** The Camp Friedenswald board discusses power dynamics.



## Licensing and Ordinations



**Paul Brubaker** was ordained at Paoli Mennonite Fellowship in Paoli, Indiana on Sunday, April 12.



**Noah Raines** was licensed for specific ministry as a church planter at New Life Fellowship in Wooster, Ohio on Sunday, May 3. Photos: Paula Luginbill

### Financial report April 30, 2026

#### Income

2025/2026 income to date . . . . . \$ 295,389.05  
2025/2026 plan . . . . . \$ 300,845.83  
Difference between income and plan. . . . . \$ -5,456.78

#### Expenses

2025/2026 expenses to date . . . . . \$ 282,893.60  
2025/2026 spending plan . . . . . \$ 309,248.93  
Under-expenditure against plan . . . . . \$ 26,355.23  
Difference between income and expenses . . \$ 12,495.45

We are just a few months away from the end of the current fiscal year and are once again in a strong financial position. While income has been slightly lower than anticipated, expenses have been lower than the spending plan. Thank you for your contributions to the ministry of CDC.

*Report provided by Steve Jolley, conference treasurer*

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